

Copyright  
by  
Lisa Renee Foster  
2006

**The Dissertation Committee for Lisa Renee Foster Certifies that this is the approved  
version of the following dissertation:**

**Music, Publics, and Protest:  
The Cultivation of Democratic Nationalism in Post-9/11 America**

**Committee:**

---

Dana Cloud, Supervisor

---

Barry Brummett

---

Richard Cherwitz

---

Sharon Jarvis

---

Mary Celeste Kearney

**Music, Publics, and Protest: The Cultivation of Democratic  
Nationalism in Post-9/11 America**

**by**

**Lisa Renee Foster, B.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**August 2006**

## **Dedication**

To tolerant and loving workers everywhere...

## **Acknowledgements**

I owe the outcome of this process to the assistance of many people. My family, friends, mentors, and colleagues, have been invaluable assets to my personal and intellectual growth. I would like to thank first my advisor, Dana Cloud. Her questions have guided me, her commitments inspired me, and her love has kept me motivated to carry on my own curiosities. I am happy to forever call you my mentor and friend. I am also indebted to my committee: Barry Brummett, Rick Cherwitz, Sharon Jarvis, and Mary Celeste Kearney. All of these scholars have shown immense kindness to me, and in the process, spurred me to better and more interesting questions. In addition, I owe many thanks to Alan DeSantis, Rosa Eberly, Ron Greene, Susan Morgan and Tyler Harrison, for their mentoring advice and support.

My colleagues and friends are an inherent component of the thoughts within this dissertation. I do believe that my questions emerge from a blending of their insight with my curiosities. Angela Aguayo, Kristen Hoerl, and Caroline Rankin have been my intellectual and interpersonal family. They, along with Jessica Moore, Katie Feyh, Tim Stephensmier, Andrew Glikman, Kevin Johnson, Jen Asenas, Jamie Doyle, and Amy Young have been an incredible system of support throughout this educational process. Their fielding of questions and concerns, coupled with sharing in the cycles of laughter, love, and pain, have been instrumental to the completion of this degree and dissertation.

To my friends outside of the academy, your grounding in a reality that reminded me of my inspiration for this project has been priceless. I would like to thank Brandi Larkey, Andrea Mattingly-Williams, Nicole Sieber, Dana Gardner, and Rachel Wulbert

for their unfailing assistance in this endeavor. They continually contextualized my intellect in a context of love and friendship.

I offer my immense gratitude to my family for their pride and joy. I have never been in want of understanding from them. To Mom (Margie), Dad (Joe), Joey, and Eva, I am so happy to have been able to foster my questions about the world in your presence. To my partner these past two years, Philip Crabtree, I thank him most for electing to love my questions about popular music and our civic selves enough to battle the perils of this process with me.

Lastly, I would like to offer thanks to many helpful employers and workers that have made the completion of my degree possible. In Austin, TX, I am thankful to the Departments of Communication at the University of Texas and Austin Community College, A+ Student Staffing, Curras' Restaurant, Waterloo Video, Sandra Ritz, and the UT Department for Student Financial Assistance for having graciously employed me or offered me assistance in times of need. I am equally grateful to the support offered by Michael Pfau and the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma for having had enough faith in my questions to employ me prior to the completion of this dissertation. Finally, to Cody Ingram and the workers at Starbucks in Norman, Oklahoma, Abraxas in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Belushi's in London, England, my hearty thanks for keeping me happy, healthy, and fed while I wrote. I wish for all of you a lovely and insightful engagement with political popular music.

# **Music, Publics, and Protest: The Cultivation of Democratic Nationalism in Post-9/11 America**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Lisa Renee Foster, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2006

Supervisor: Dana Cloud

Since the events of September 11, 2001, national mourning has relegated the citizen's responsibility to memorializing silence. The events of September 11, 2001 inaugurated a culture of mourning, erasing dissent from citizenship and relegating civic duty to the memorialization of silence. This project will consider how popular music was able to challenge such notions of citizenship through its abilities to tap into vernacular public spaces for the formation of counterpublic deliberation, democratic citizenship, and a public culture. Theories of the public sphere, nationalism, popular culture, and the rhetorical function of music highlight how popular music, in spite of its ideological baggage, creates a political identification that allows for the emergence of anti-war counterpublics to occupy space within the dominant public sphere, exemplifies how the textual circulation of dissenting ideas both create counterpublic spaces and demand critical rationality within them, and ultimately realigns the democratic citizen as the questioning citizen. Music is a rich multi-textual phenomenon that influences democratic

deliberation. An investigation of this power is a significant contribution to critical rhetorical theory, as it offers insight as to how subordinated voices may access and shape dominant discourses via texts that are themselves the product of dominant-hegemonic systems.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Questioning the Role of Popular Music in Democratic Publics.....	1
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF MULTI-TEXTUAL ADDRESS.....	9
TEXTUAL SELECTION AND CHAPTER PREVIEW.....	10
Chapter One: Popular Culture and the National Public.....	15
RELATIONSHIP OF POPULAR CULTURE TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE.....	16
People and Popular Culture.....	17
Hegemony and Popular Agency.....	19
POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND THE MEDIATED PUBLIC SPHERE.....	23
Incorporating Multiple Publics and Vernacular Voices.....	24
Media’s Potential for Democratic Engagement.....	26
MEDIATING THE POPULAR AND THE PUBLIC VIA NATIONALISM.....	28
NAVIGATING PUBLICS AND POPULAR CULTURE.....	31
Chapter Two: Selling Politics to the Masses.....	33
POPULAR MUSIC AS COMMODITY.....	36
Artistic Authenticity.....	37
Innovation and Homogenization.....	40
Technologies.....	42
Consumption and Distribution.....	44
A TYPOLOGY OF POPULAR MUSIC AS RHETORIC.....	46
Public Address and Embodied Modality.....	47
Genre.....	51
Sound and Context.....	56
Political Persuasion and Social Change.....	63
PRODUCT AND PERSUASION OF POPULAR MUSIC.....	66

Chapter Three: Woody Guthrie and Commodified Folk.....	67
WOODY GUTHRIE, POPULAR AMERICAN FOLK, AND THE CULTIVATION OF CRITICAL RATIONALITY.....	70
Authenticity and Genre.....	71
Persuasion and Product.....	74
Multivocality and Innovation.....	77
Publics and Technology.....	80
EMERGING INSURGENCY IN POPULAR MUSIC.....	85
Chapter Four: Bruce Springsteen’s <i>The Rising</i> and the Power of National Unification Post-9/11.....	89
POST 9/11 AMERICAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE.....	91
NEGOTIATING THERAPEUTIC NATIONALISM IN U.S. COVERAGE OF <i>THE RISING</i> .....	93
Grief, Healing, Renewal.....	98
Unity and Community.....	101
Populist Appeals.....	103
POPULISM AND COUNTERPUBLICITY.....	109
GAUGING DOMINANCE IN THE CULTIVATION OF DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM.....	112
Chapter Five: The Image of Steve Earle as Dissident Rebel and the Reformulation of Patriotism in the Public Sphere.....	114
FROM MUSICAL NARRATIVE TO MEDIATED ARGUMENT.....	116
Lyrical Ballad as Enthymematic Argument.....	117
Generic Signification.....	118
Ideological Indictment.....	120
POPULAR NEWS AND THE BRANDING OF BALLAD AS ARGUMENT.....	124
Freedom of Speech.....	127

Faith.....	131
Patriotism Post 9/11.....	133
DELIBERATIVE CITIZEN-CONSUMERS.....	136
Positive Reviews.....	138
Negative Reviews.....	143
IMAGE AND ACTION.....	151
POPULAR INSURGENCY THROUGH POLITICAL CONTROVERSY.....	156
<b>Chapter Six: Dissident Dixie Chicks and the Emergence of a Deliberative Public Culture.....</b>	<b>157</b>
DEFINING PUBLIC CULTURE.....	158
On Deliberative Instrumentality.....	160
Distinguishing Public Culture from the Public Sphere.....	164
On the Nation.....	165
THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC CULTURE IN DIXIE CHICKS DISSENT.....	168
Political Deliberations on the Economy of Popular Music.....	169
Reflecting Counterpublicity of Dixie Chicks Dissent.....	173
Invocation of Democratic Nationalism.....	180
Contextualization and Musical Argumentation.....	190
THE CONTROVERSIAL POPULAR OF PUBLIC CULTURE.....	195
<b>Conclusion: Music, Publics, and Protest.....</b>	<b>196</b>
PUBLICS, POPULAR, AND PROTEST.....	197
RETURNING TO IDEOLOGY, ARGUMENT, AND THE CIRCULATION OF DISCOURSE.....	200
POSSIBILITIES FOR POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE.....	204
<b>References.....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Vita.....</b>	<b>218</b>

## **Introduction: Questioning the Role of Popular Music in Democratic Publics**

*Like many others, in the aftermath of 9/11, I felt the country's unity. I don't remember anything quite like it. I supported the decision to enter Afghanistan and I hoped that the seriousness of the times would bring forth strength, humility and wisdom in our leaders. Instead, we dived headlong into an unnecessary war in Iraq, offering up the lives of our young men and women under circumstances that are now discredited. We ran record deficits, while simultaneously cutting and squeezing services like afterschool programs. We granted tax cuts to the richest 1 percent (corporate bigwigs, well-to-do guitar players), increasing the division of wealth that threatens to destroy our social contract with one another and render mute the promise of "one nation indivisible."*

*--Bruce Springsteen, from "Chords for Change," Op-Ed for The New York Times, August 4, 2004*

Though ordinary people no longer congregate for presidential debates, they do for rock concerts. Popular music is arguably one of the few performative rhetorics that continues to draw audiences into the hundreds of thousands. In 1969 the infamous Woodstock performances drew over 400,000 people; the Isle of Wight in 1973 drew over 600,000 concert goers. Such record breaking moments of public gathering shed light on what may have led the National Project on Rhetoric to concur that better means of examining non-traditional rhetorical forms were needed in the study of contemporary rhetoric (Irvine and Kirkpatrick, p. 1972). Today, the numbers of sold-out concerts that occur from small independent venues to massive football stadiums are themselves enough to warrant musical performance as a necessary site for rhetorical criticism. In short, of the places to gather to hear public rhetoric, music performance is significant.

It became incredibly interesting to me then, that just five weeks before the three year anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, more than twenty popular musicians joined together to launch the Vote for Change concert tour. Their purpose was to spread

the word that a transformation was needed in America, and they hoped that this difference would come with the election of Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry. The list of musicians on the tour was impressive. Among them were such prominent artists as Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band, The Dixie Chicks, R.E.M., Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor, and the Dave Matthews Band—some of the most recognizable and best-selling artists of popular music history. As Springsteen himself notes, the tour signaled an ending to a unifying and hegemonic silence that had engulfed the country since the twin towers of the World Trade Center had tumbled, claiming tragic losses of American lives and American freedoms for civic dissent.

Of course, the legitimacy of popular music to act as a political forum has been skeptically viewed by citizens and scholars alike. This tour soon came under attack in right wing as well as more centrist circles. As part of the media campaign for the Vote for Change tour, ABC's Nightline featured a special interview with Bruce Springsteen, an evening devoted to this relationship between entertainment and politics. The show featured the following conversation:

Koppel: If in fact he [George Bush] has ended trust among a significant portion of the American people, why do we need a bunch of rock 'n roll and country and western singers to tell us about it?

Springsteen: Well, you know, this goes back to our first question, you know, that's it. *We're citizens, you know, we're citizens. And I think that as I said, lobbyists, labor unions, farmers, teachers—everybody has a way of putting their input.* (Nightline, "Culture Wars", 2004, emphasis added)

The impetus for this dissertation lies not in Springsteen's actions to raise money for the election of a particular political candidate, but in the motivation for those actions. When Ted Koppel inquires as to Springsteen's qualifications to voice social critique, Springsteen's answer articulates his credibility not as celebrity but as the locus for critique within us all. He is a common citizen. In doing so, Springsteen shifts political agency away from elite conceptions of democracy back to egalitarian citizenship. He momentarily normalizes the power structure and reiterates the responsibility and rights of regular people, "lobbyists, labor unions, farmers, teachers," to enact their citizenship through participatory deliberation and dissent. While it will take more than his discourse to permanently alter the manner in which deliberation happens in the dominant public sphere, Springsteen furthers the deliberative exchange that makes the galvanization of publics for social change possible. More importantly, his abilities to begin that process rest upon the power of popular music to serve as the focal point for civic inquiry and dissent.

Throughout this project, I will entertain questions on the role of the popular in a democratic public culture. Specifically, how might people in publics use popular music as a site to enact deliberation, democratic citizenship, and social change? What is the relationship between the popular, the political, the public, and protest? Furthermore, how does nationalism function within this new political popular landscape? Does it entreat people to public deliberation or does it silence them? Do debates surrounding popular musicians and their political ideas have the potential to establish a deliberative public culture and galvanize social action? And if so, is it possible for vernacular voices to be heard against a mass produced political aesthetic?

This project answers these questions through a rhetorical analysis of Woody Guthrie's place in the history of popular American folk music, Bruce Springsteen's release of *The Rising*, the media controversy of Steve Earle's "John Walker's Blues," and the Dixie Chicks' *Home* tour following their statements of dissent concerning the Bush administration's plans for war in Iraq. The artists, music, and texts that have been chosen are avowedly aligned with a political project left of center. Conservative country music from Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" (2002) or Alan Jackson's "Were You There (When the world stopped turning)" (2002) have been notably left out of the discussion of this dissertation. The reason for their exclusion lies in the lack of civic deliberation engendered around the release of their music. Keith's song has been branded controversial; however, music that is labeled controversial versus music that engenders deliberation is not the same. Spectacular appearance in the public is not the same as the enactment of argumentation in a public sphere. Conservative country artists resonate so loudly with the sentiment of silent, patriotic pay-back post 9/11 that the potential for controversy is silenced.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this dissertation will focus specifically on post 9/11 music of a tradition that is aligned with civic dissent and questions of social justice.

Understanding the cultivation of civic deliberation around the politics of popular music is the goal of this dissertation. Using these sites in popular music culture, from cable news programming to congressional hearings, I will purport the significance of

---

<sup>1</sup> In many ways, Springsteen's *The Rising* can be critiqued for similarly failing to act insurgently. However, Springsteen's history as a voice of the people, his place in the folk family of popular musicians, and his cultivation of therapeutic, if not democratic, deliberation make his work a necessary inclusion to the project. *The Rising* serves as a valuable counter-example of the necessary requirements for cultivating civic

*both* the instrumental and constitutive functions of popular texts in the public sphere. Furthermore, this project theorizes the link between popular music and localized public deliberation, examining people's emergent voices in online forums, consumer album reviews, talk radio, and civic protests. The multiplicity of popular public address illustrates the relationship between the rhetoric, deliberation, and potentials of social change.

From this analysis of multiple popular music texts, I assert that popular music can aid rather than destroy public deliberation. Popular music relies upon a shared identification with audiences through ideologies of U.S. nationalism to make an insurgent critique. However, populist vernacular appeals in music do not guarantee disruption of a dominant sphere. For popular music to be insurgent, it must move past an invocation of populist vernacular voice and toward and articulation of counterpublic argument. In this way, popular music works hegemonically to at once uphold ideology within the nation in order to then disrupt models of citizenship for debate.

This curiosity of popular music lies in its mundane or quotidian nature. Popular music is a taken for granted part of our mass culture, infusing our everyday lives. We rely upon popular music for enjoyment, to escape, and to entertain others. We consume popular music; and popular music inserts itself into our daily experience. More people will find themselves listening to popular music this next year than will enter a voting booth. In this light, it is not surprising that after September 11, 2001 it was often popular culture, not traditional politics, which pushed citizens to question their political agency.

---

deliberation via popular music beyond a populist voice. Conservative musics of this time period are a rich resource for rhetorical investigation, but are simply not necessary to the goals of this project.



Consequently, music's particular character as entertainment, public address, technological innovation, and product for consumption, leaves us with a particularly rich template to come to understand the facets of how it is that the popular may come to engage us politically.

Certainly this is a stance untaken by many who theorize the role of mass culture in the public sphere. Many decry the possibilities of commercial mass media to have a favorable effect in publics. In 1982 Goodnight lamented the role of the media as a destructive force within publics, stating "that the media could be employed to extend knowledgeable public argument but do not suggests the decline of deliberative practice" (1982, p. 26). More recently, Robert McChesney has argued that mediated communication is so inextricably linked to our economy, that the American profit-seeking cultural industry negates any real possibility for its participation in a truly democratic society (1999, p.1-17). And while both arguments are necessary to understanding the way popular media acts in publics, lamenting the loss of publicness to the market does not help us understand how to rejuvenate public deliberation amid our immensely mediated context for civic engagement. We can engage in social action to change the relations of power in the cultural industry, but we must also understand what spaces for dissent may exist within the system so as to theoretically extend and investigate new versions of public argument.

Subsequently, the significance of this project lies not only in the effect of popular texts on the public, but also in our understanding the actions spawned from popular texts in the process of civic engagement. Understanding what people in publics may actually do with their engagement with the popular is the central thesis to Rosa Eberly's *Citizen*

*Critics*. There she suggests that “it is what people *do* with their judgment about books and other cultural products, not the books or even the authors in and of themselves, that enables books to affect shared worlds” (2000, p.xii, emphasis added). Thus, this dissertation seeks to answer not only how people engage a popular text but more specifically how they engage one another about those texts, in order to better conceptualize rhetorical relationships between people, the popular, and public formations.

Much of what will be noted as central to that engagement with the popular is the significance of American nationalism in this process of audience identification and deliberation. Nationalism is a central constituent of civic identity, the basis for homeland ideology, and the articulation of state interests. In its everydayness, nationalism emerges within popular music as a unifying site for argumentation. Nationalism acts as a shared element of humanity that implores citizens to participate in what Burke calls a process of identification and consubstantiality, an “acting together” via our shared ideological humanity (1969, p.21). Burke’s conception of identification and consubstantiality centered on nationalist ideology echoes Benedict Anderson’s (1991) premise of nationalism as the locus for imagined communities of strangers. Central to this dissertation will be an emphasis on nationalism as “analysed from below...in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people” (Hobsbawn, 1992, p. 10).

There is perhaps no better way to understand the ideologies of nationalism from the interests of these bottom-up, vernacular voices than by tapping into popular culture. Identification with nationalism within popular music acts to critique the power of U.S. hegemony from an otherwise silenced public. Ultimately, the identification of audiences

with ideologies of national identity and civic responsibility create space for deliberation about membership in that nationhood and calls for change in government action.

In the following pages I will draw upon case studies of popular music's involvement in political controversies and bodies of literature in popular culture, publics, and nationalism to argue that popular music relies on a multi-textual character of ideological identifications to American nationalism in order to voice powerful social critique, guide citizens to deliberate in a democratic public sphere, and open potential pathways for civic social action. Through this process, notions of public citizenship are challenged, as the popular taps into vernacular spaces for the formation of counterpublic deliberation and the formation of a new "public culture." Thus, in spite of its ideological baggage, popular music creates a political identification that A) allows for the emergence of counterpublic voices to occupy space within the dominant public sphere, B) exemplifies how the textual circulation of dissenting ideas both create counterpublic spaces and demand critical rationality within them, and C) ultimately realigns the democratic citizen as the questioning citizen and an active agent for societal change.

Finally, this dissertation should not be confused with one about the role of music and musicians in political campaigns. I do hope there will be some contribution to that inquiry. However, this project is specifically about the galvanization of citizens to enact political participation in a public sphere through the task of civic deliberation. Engaging in civic deliberation and unifying with similar interests is the building block of democratic social change. In the following chapters, I will rely upon critical case studies to illustrate popular music as central to that democratic process; arguing for incorporating music as a *mode* of citizenship that is central to understanding the context of "how

citizenship proceeds” (Asen, 2004, 194-195) in publics. Integrating popular music as a mode of civic engagement will loosen conceptual restrictions of citizenship while opening up possibilities for popular participation in publics and protest.

### **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF MULTI TEXTUAL ADDRESS**

The methodological strategy of this dissertation seeks to transgress borders between ethnomusicologists, rhetorical theorists, and critical and cultural scholars to better understand music as a rhetorical force. I argue that music as rhetoric (thus the popular as rhetorical discourse) should always be considered a multi-textual address. It requires an understanding not only of the music itself, but the rhetoric of the artist, the textual circulation in print, media, and new media concerning music, and the rhetoric surrounding these exigencies. By shifting rhetorical investigations of music from singular text centered approaches to multi-layered, multi-textual, and multi-voiced phenomenon, we can begin to transcend its systemic boundaries and limitations to understand the complexities of music as a powerful cultural force and a part of our political selves.

This multi-textual methodology understands specifically how sound gets imbued with rhetorical meaning and how people take up that musical meaning via the production of their own argumentative texts and actions. Four distinct types of texts need to be viewed in concert; 1) the music itself (including lyrics, sound, genre, etc); 2) non-musical texts involving the musical artist as traditional rhetor (television interviews, public statements, documentary footage, concert address, etc); 3) the review of music in mass culture (periodical music reviews in print and mass media); and 4) the rhetorical acts taken up by actual people (consumer reviews, blogs, talk radio, collective protest, etc).

## **TEXTUAL SELECTION AND CHAPTER PREVIEW**

It is commonplace to lay claim to popular texts as political; in fact critical and cultural scholarship asserts popular culture as political simply as it navigates, maps, establishes, and reflects the social relations of our human condition (Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 1980; During, 1999; Denning, 1998). The texts I have chosen to examine for this analysis are political in this way; but their navigation happens with particular ends. Texts for analysis emerge from popular political controversy, located at places of inquiry concerning American values of citizenship. These exigencies are moments where often, elected officials and political pundits usually stand. The focus of this project proposes a variant study of “politics” as has been conceived from both critical and political communication scholars. The result is an analysis of *disruptive* political texts, where connection to counterpublic argumentation has made room for the incorporation of democratic dissent in a mass public sphere. When the argumentation already on the ground in counterpublic social movements is restated to a mass audience, popular music aids democratic deliberation on broader societal scale.

Recognizing these moments is of immense importance for galvanizing social movements and social critique from a mass audience. However, the texts for analysis in this project are not typical invocations of counterpublicity. They emerge from mass popular culture. Consequently, the nature of this insurgent political action is immensely complex. The music studied here has become part of culture because of its place within a popular culture industry. Accordingly, audiences are forced to negotiate the popular texts of this study within the ideological noise of capitalist production.

They are also asked to negotiate textual meaning amidst a barrage of incipient and intensely nationalist ideologies on American patriotism post 9/11. The situated-ness of these texts within a popular culture industry evokes a particularly banal, as opposed to spectacular, national identification. Michael Billig suggests that these invocations of nationalism are

habits not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated, 'flagged', in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition. (1995, p.6).

Popular music of this period challenges, relies upon, and invokes a banal nationalism aligned with the hegemonic backdrop of U.S. citizenship. In so doing, popular music relies upon dominant notions of American democracy to actually invoke criticism of those conceptions. The formation of critique is not a matter of high and low culture clashing, but of the ability of mass culture to articulate counter-hegemonic ideas in spite of corporate control. It is in this hegemonic tension, of both sharing in the dominant discourse and challenging its meaning, that popular music surfaces to critique. This phenomenon is central to the choice of popular items of analysis. They have been chosen because of their visible place within mass culture; that visibility becomes integral to understanding the rise of dissent and the cultivation of a democratic public culture in post-911 America.

The road I will take to explain this process will begin with a discussion of popular culture and the public sphere. Chapter One examines the place of popular culture as an aspect of our political publicness. Specifically, I rely upon critical and cultural theories

of the popular and rhetorical theories of the public, to suggest that popular culture works toward deliberative, democratic ends via a hegemonic conception of culture and contestation. Chapter Two then offers an examination of *how* that hegemonic contestation occurs. There I argue the ability for popular music to challenge the dominant culture relies upon its functions as commodity and as rhetoric. The intersections between music's place in the popular invoke a critical rationality en masse necessary for deliberative public formations.

The case studies that follow Chapters One and Two have been chosen for their remarkable mapping of popular music's potential insurgency. In each case, it is the music and musicians' relationships to the plight of ordinary people that qualm or create room for democratic deliberation. In Chapter Three, I rely upon the history of American roots music and the legacy of Woody Guthrie to paint the generic lineage of the musical texts in the remainder of the dissertation. The history of American roots and folk are foundational to the political signification of each case study that follows. Within the chapter, I point out Guthrie's criticism as rooted in his own personal placement within counterpublic struggle, and his active counterpublic protest. The popularization of his music informs the political legacy of American folk music and serves as an exemplary case for music that simultaneously inhabits mass and vernacular spheres.

The remaining chapters illustrate the growth of insurgency and potentials for deliberation in the period between September 11th and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Three popular artists—Bruce Springsteen, Steve Earle, and The Dixie Chicks—highlight how various relations to the vernacular yield particular deliberative demonstrations. These artists and their music have strong ties to a long history of American roots music. In each

case, lyrical remnants resounding in the style of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan and rhythms from the blues of the deep South, place these musicians in rich historical alignments with working class audiences and vernacular cultures.

An examination of the release of Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising* is the focal point of Chapter Four. It serves in contrast to the remaining cases, depicting the strength of American hegemony post 9/11. Bruce Springsteen's relationship to working class voices in *The Rising* warns us of the limitations of substituting populist appeals for counterpublic argumentation. This chapter relies upon literatures in nationalism, ideology, and vernacular publics and counterpublics to argue Springsteen's *The Rising* lacks the necessary insurgency for deliberation given its alignment with a dominant vernacular voice.

Chapters Five and Six trace the path of insurgent popular music to foster democratic engagement in the post 9/11 context. Steve Earle's controversial release of John Walker's Blues from the album *Jerusalem* is the location of analysis in Chapter Five. In contradiction to Springsteen, Earle forces counterpublic dissent into the silence of post 9/11 hegemony through his music, his interviews within the mainstream media, the conversations he evokes in public discourse, and his location and argumentation within counterpublics. This moment highlights the necessary voicing of counter-hegemonic thought to fissure the dominant sphere and cultivate civic deliberation.

The case of the Dixie Chicks' post 9/11 dissent is interesting because it opens a door for civic debate *directly* through popular culture. In so doing, it affords people a credibility of opinion and action in a way that traditional politics does not. Chapter Six showcases the extension of disruptive counterpublicity in the formation of a public



culture around the Dixie Chicks controversy. Here I argue for a clearer conception of public culture as deliberative democracy rooted in popular music debate. The mass dissonance emerging from the band's dissent against the U.S. president show the breadth of public culture formation. Media interviews, musical performances, radio talk shows, and senate testimonies concerning the trade of their work all illustrate various factions of public debate now located in the context of popular culture. The formation of a deliberative public culture becomes a productive context for asking critical questions of civic responsibility through the means of popular music.

Many of my friends and colleagues tell me, in response to my own political interests, that they are "not very political." Yet, not one person has ever disavowed some significant relationship to popular culture. This very routine bifurcation has been echoed by scholars and ordinary people alike. However in the post 9/11 moment, there may be no more interesting site of civic and political debate than within the context of popular music. This project does not separate music from politics, nor do I wish to conflate them; rather I hope to notice the moments in which a convergence of political claims and popular music makes way for political participation in a democratic public sphere. A more accessible and vested avenue for civic participation in a post 9/11 public, popular music extends the realm of civic debate.

## **Chapter One: Popular Culture and the National Public**

The historical relationship of the public sphere to popular mediated culture is troublesome. Public sphere scholarship maintains uncertainty toward the inclusion of popular media as a mode of deliberation. However, Jon Simons (2003) argues that this form of skepticism may lie more in an intellectual elitism than true damage to civic culture, noting:

Since the beginning of liberalism, the meaning of term 'public' has shifted from a narrower, more elitist sense of an educated and bourgeois public, to a broader, more populist one that refers to all citizens. The incremental equivilisation of 'public' and 'popular' has occurred on two fronts that have huge significance for democratic politics. First, the inclusion of the property-less, the working classes, women and younger people in the electorate with the expansion of universal suffrage means that the political public is now mostly the same as the adult population of liberal democracies. Popular sovereignty really became popular...The consequence of these roughly simultaneous developments is that democratic government is legitimized, is fought out not only on the terrain of ruling and perhaps alternating political elites and their intellectual legitimize, but also on the terrain of popular culture. (pp. 172-173)

Accordingly, political theories of publicness require an acceptance of popular culture. Popular culture is not a distraction from democracy; it is both a mode and context of democratic public engagement. Popular culture maintains and disrupts the public sphere hegemonically, invoking argumentation from counterpublics. Nationalism mitigates the

hegemony of popular culture, serving as the basis for identification between mass culture and ordinary people. The popular is thus central to the emergence of civic dissent.

This chapter will examine cultural theories regarding the relationship of people to their popular culture, of popular culture to public spheres, and of citizens to national ideologies. The first section will look specifically to theories of popular culture in relation to people and agency, suggesting that theories of cultural hegemony most aptly demonstrate the function of popular culture in the public sphere to challenge and sustain dominant ideologies in publics. The second section will argue for a necessary counterpublicity of popular culture to act deliberately within democratic publics, and will examine the contentious place of mass media in public spheres. Finally, I will argue that nationalism, as a primary constituent of everyday life (Edensor, 2002, p.25) is an inseparable element of popular music of the post 9/11 context. Although steeped in ideology, nationalism asks audiences to participate in a democratic public sphere. These theoretical histories will guide subsequent chapter analyses on the role of popular culture to encourage people's identification, and thus entrance, to critical deliberation in a mass public sphere.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP OF POPULAR CULTURE TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

Popular culture is the product of particular historical moments and social contexts. Raymond Williams tells us that central to the analyses of cultural studies should be what he terms the "cultural formation," the simultaneous combination of artistic form and social location (1989, p. 174-75). This simultaneity poses two distinct functions for rhetoric. First, instrumental rhetoric assumes an audience, attempts to persuade, and relies

upon social truths, “reflecting what we agree to believe, based on the evidence and our interpretation of it, at a particular point in time” (Dow, 1996, p.3). On the other hand, constitutive rhetorical theory sees rhetoric as “*not* a kind of act or object; it is not giving a speech, writing an essay, choosing a metaphor, or composing a poem. It is the function of managing meaning within social arrangements, and thus a dimension of the countless acts and objects comprising a cultural environment” (Brummett, 1991, p.38).

Furthermore, the study of popular culture as a mode and context of the public gained significance as technological innovations became accessible and workers found themselves with new economic wealth (During, 1999). Two tensions took hold of interrogations into mass culture: one, how to negotiate the value of “high” versus “low” culture, and two, how to negotiate the relationship between the dominance of the cultural industry and the people who consumed their products. In the following pages I will detail people’s relationship to popular culture, claiming hegemony as the most adept way to describe the simultaneity of popular culture’s struggle against and sustenance of patriotic silence post 9/11.

### **People and Popular Culture**

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer critiqued not only the essential pleasures of a mass culture but the industry that was responsible for blending the lines between lived experience and ideological fiction. The men argued that the pleasures of popular culture created uncritical consumers, “Capitalist production so confines them, body and soul, that they fall helpless victims to what is offered them” (1979, p. 359). The relations of production are maintained; the agency of working class people is constrained by the

structures of discourse. “The attitude of the public, which ostensibly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system and not an excuse for it” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979 (original 1945), p.350). One early definition of the relation of mass popular culture to a deliberative, democratic public is that *the popular denies the ability for public formation given the grave ideological constraints for intellectual deliberation.*

The Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies broke with the skepticism and elitism of Horkheimer and Adorno, but followed the questioning of Hoggart, Williams, and later E. P. Thompson on the crafting of the English working class (Hall, 1980, p. 16; During, 1999). The new center reworked Marxism along the lines of a culturalist materiality, or a “reworking of Cultural Studies on the ground of the ‘base/superstructures’ *metaphor*” (Hall, 1980, p.25, emphasis mine). This metaphorical reworking of Marxist thought relegated dialectical tension to discourse. Rhetorical questions here are still instrumental, but less so. People have power to act against the industry that the Frankfurt school had feared, but that power lies in their abilities to *read rather than react* oppositionally.

The base and superstructure metaphor makes way for later work in the Cultural Studies tradition following Louis Althusser (1971) and Stuart Hall (1980). Althusser presents “ideological state apparatus” that conflate culture and state, dismissing the dialectical tension between them, and Hall locates material within culture and opposition in our reading of it. The problem of both Althusser and Hall’s turn is that it rejects collective struggle as a way of interaction with popular culture in favor of recognizing the function of culture in constituting classes of people. Althusser “rejects the concept of

practice as human beings actively transforming the world through social production and in the process transforming both it and themselves” (Clegg, 1991, p.68). And Hall suggests “one of the most significant political moments is the point when events which are normally signified and decoded in negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading. Here the ‘politics of signification’—the struggle in discourse--is joined” (Hall, 1980, p.138). Thus, struggle now takes place on a discursive terrain, eliciting a false sense of agency. “Constitutive rhetorics are ideological... because they insert “narrativized” *subjects-as-agents* into the world” (Charland, 1987, p.223, emphasis added). How audiences are hailed in discourse trumps the significance of what they might do with that discourse, thus delimiting the potential of deliberative action via popular culture. The popular, in this case, constitutes the possibilities for the public.

### **Hegemony and Popular Agency**

Gramsci (1971) understood that however significant cultural discourses may be in winning mass consent, cultural discourses could not be separated from economics or coercive state power. Hegemony suggests a simultaneous dualism for cultural artifacts, at once upholding dominant power structures while retaining opportunities for opposition. Hegemony is often synonymously conflated with ideology, yet the function of hegemony is more complex. Gramsci articulates a need to recognize the power of discourse as rooted in the material and economic relationships at play in maintaining hegemonic forces; “though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 161).

Whether or not Gramsci's theories of hegemony privilege the realm of material or discourse in understanding the social power of popular texts continues to be a controversial theoretical debate. Grossberg (1992) follows both Gramsci and Hall in his vision of hegemony in relation to cultural struggle in the study of popular culture, arguing for hegemonic *rearticulation*, as opposed to *contestation*, as a response to challenging systemic dominance:

Hegemonic leadership has to operate *where people live their lives*. It has to take account of and even allow itself to be modified by its engagement with the fragmentary and contradictory terrain of common sense and popular culture. *This is where the special imaginary is defined and changed; where people construct personal identities, identifications, priorities and possibilities; where people form and formulate moral and political agendas for themselves and their societies*. It is here that people constantly reconstruct their future in the light of their sense of the present, that they decide what matters, what is worth investing in, what they are, can be or should be committed to...The popular here is not a fixed set of texts or practices, nor a coherent ideology, nor some necessarily celebratory or subversive structure. It is the complex and contradictory terrain, the multidimensional context, within which people live out their daily lives. Although it always has a political registration, that registration is never guaranteed in advance. *Hegemony always involves a struggle of to rearticulate the popular*. (p. 246-247, emphasis added)

Grossberg's conception of the role of hegemony to theorize the "complex and contradictory terrain" of popular culture is precisely the way I too contend that the

popular music of post 9/11 challenges and sustains dominant culture. However, Grossberg's emphasis on hegemony as a struggle of *rearticulation* in the popular is problematic. I argue rather that hegemonic struggle in the popular occurs through *deliberative contestation*.

To dismiss the material components of hegemony in favor of articulation limits the active contestability of hegemony by people in publics. Gramsci allows us to see popular music not only in its guise as a cultural industry but also in its power to form oppositional blocs against post 9/11 nationalist hegemony. Hegemony from this perspective allows for the nationalism within popular music to encourage active democratic deliberation while simultaneously upholding dominant conceptions of American values.

However, to offer articulation as the method of countering hegemony in popular culture suggests a focus on identity and cultural context that is removed from what people may accomplish and do in and with those articulations of hegemonic struggle. As Grossberg further notes:

Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices...Articulation is both the practice of history and its critical reconstruction, displacement and renewal (1992, p.54). This theory of articulation locates agency in hegemonic discourses rather than in the potential of people to contest with those discourses. Similarly, Chantal Mouffe argues for recognition of social antagonisms that are the product not centrally of class relations but rather of relations of subordination at the level of consumption, resistances to bureaucracy, mass culture, sexism, racism and homophobia, to



name a few...overall, *they see the social as the site of struggle because social relations, including those of class, are discursively constituted in a system of differences and equivalencies.* (Cloud, 1994, pp.226-227, emphasis added)

When the rhetorical power of popular culture is always constitutive; instrumentality is yet another constitutive moment. Whereas the earliest trajectories of cultural studies sought to recoup the centralized power of the state for the working classes to fuel proletarian resistance, Foucault says:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always “inside” power, there is no “escaping” it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned because one is subject to the law in any case...these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network, hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances. (1990, pp. 95-96)

Studies of popular culture that rely upon this move articulate fragmented discourses of identity formation as political action in a post-modern moment. Class becomes simply another discursively constituted identity of popular culture rather than a pre-existing social condition. This location of power inside discourse contradicts theories of popular culture as connected to a material existence outside of discourse. These theories disallow agent centered uses of the popular as vehicles for social change. For example, if I were to claim that popular music’s greatest political import is in its capacity to form and reform oppositional identities, rather than oppositional argument, post-structuralist

theories would be foundational. However, I argue constitution as an element rather than the sum total of agency.

The use of deliberative contestation in popular culture integrates, rather than conflates, the dualistic tension between materiality and discourse. Accordingly, Gramsci's ties to the economic forces that are culpable in sustaining power relations located within popular texts should not be obscured; *both* the material and the discursive constitute the social relations of our engagement with the popular. The function of popular culture Gramsci utilizes makes room for democratic engagement. Here, *the popular may both sustain and challenge hegemonic forces that constitute the public.*

#### **POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND THE MEDIATED PUBLIC SPHERE**

While cultural studies scholarship was entertaining questions about the relation of popular texts to people, Jürgen Habermas had departed from the Frankfurt School tradition to interrogate the possibilities of people to participate in democratically conceived publics. His project theorizes the simultaneous existence of rational-critical discourse and popular participation (Calhoun, 1997, p. 4). Alongside Adorno, Habermas reiterates potential downfalls of popular culture to passify the populace. On the other hand, his attempt to incorporate the spirit of the eighteenth-century enlightenment marks a decisive break with Adorno and Horkheimer's somber *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This very striking divergence can be accounted for by Habermas's own vision of history, "*which seeks to maintain the promise of 'liberalism' and the essentially utopian content of the first universalizing bourgeois ideology* (equality, civil rights, humanitarianism, free

speech, and open media) despite the failure of those ideals to be realized in the development of capitalism itself” (Jameson, 1998, p.25, emphasis added).

Early theorizations of an all-encompassing public, however, lumped together requirements for entrance as egalitarian and failed to recognize the burden of dominant knowledge needed for entrance. In this section, I seek to point out how it is that popular culture may actually help to break the democratic action of the public sphere away from its elite ideological history. In turning to a discussion of counterpublic visions of democratic publicness and the uses of media to entertain deliberation, I will offer visions of a democratically conceived public that is not hindered by popular culture but reliant upon it.

### **Incorporating Multiple Publics and Vernacular Voices**

For common citizens to have “experience within this [Habermasian] public sphere,” meant that they must articulate a “dominant knowledge—*a specialized knowledge of how to exploit the public sphere properly*. This knowledge includes the capacity in the form of an imagined sovereignty, a feigned collective will” (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p. 11, emphasis mine). Thus, the possibilities for entrance and participation by people unaccustomed to maneuvering within an elite sphere (for Negt and Kluge this is the proletariat) are severely limited.

The elite character of bourgeois publics is the most powerful shortcoming of Habermas’ theory of the public sphere. Nancy Fraser speaks against the homogenous portrait of Habermas’ public by articulating the notion of “subaltern counterpublics” in which members of subordinated social groups form oppositional publics via deliberation

(1997, p.122). Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer, argue that “the homogenous class standing of the bourgeoisie [that Habermas claimed] engendered a shared vision of the good that blocked potential topics of deliberation, the arrangements that sustained actual exclusions from the public sphere” (2001, p.5). This ideological confinement made it difficult for the emergence of counterpublic voices to inform mass culture and for theories of the public to recognize common peoples’ deliberations.

This is the place where popular culture most usefully emerges as a mode of citizenship in the public sphere. It is popular culture’s relationship to ordinary people that becomes a defining element of the potentials for deliberation in mass culture. When popular culture exercises a counterpublicity, a sounding of argumentation from counterpublic voices, a reflection of those arguments resonates with the “lively and *disruptive* forces of political and social discourse” (Asen and Brouwer, 2001, p.3, emphasis added). This necessary disruption is an insurgent popular critique.

We must continually be in the process of negotiating the boundaries of publicness. The public sphere should not be viewed “(as) a singular, stable entity but dispersed, ephemeral phenomenon that produces public opinions that are complex, textured, and often competing”(Asen, 2001, p.138). Integrating room for various voices to infiltrate the once homogenous conception of publicness ensures that a public culture is informed by the production of discourses that emanate from the bottom up rather than being contained in mass discourses that may or may not be connected to the deliberations of actual people. Popular culture may help us accomplish this task.

## **Media's Potential for Democratic Engagement**

In spite of the room made for ordinary people to enter into public deliberations via the popular, Habermas and many others have argued that commercial mass media, is an impediment to an actually existing democracy. He levels a dire critique of mass media in the public, stating that “the sounding board of an educated stratum tutored in the public use of reason has been shattered; the public is split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublically and *the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical*. Consequently, it completely lacks the form of communication specific to a public” (1989, p. 175, emphasis added). In his earliest work on publics, Habermas loathes the shift from “culture-debating to a culture consuming” because it shifts the locus of action in the public sphere from discussion to reception (1989, p. 159-175).

However, I suggest that the more significant matter of concern is how the arguments of popular culture may guide deliberation in the public sphere. It is true that we live in a consumerist culture, but untrue that our consumption can in no way aid our democratic engagement. Consumerism yields a great public stage for political argument. Furthermore, Paolo Carpiagnano claims that the medium of film and television in particular may significantly reshape the public sphere to include more places for debate; “this experience of space and time embodied in the medium of television is the most important form of new sociability, as new experience of commonality that has important consequences for the notion of public and for the conceptualization of the public sphere” (1999, p. 186).

Arguably a reliance on the media as a means for public deliberation is a worrisome vision; profit seekers setting the public agenda often leave audiences enthralled by spectacle. But when mass culture converges with the argumentation of vernacular counterpublicity, popular texts engage in the practice of democracy. Furthermore, much of the fear of a mediated entrance into the public sphere seems closely related to arguments that try to forge a false divide between cultural studies and political economy. In the long term, such an effort seems to harm the way in which we may critically deliberate. “The effort to disassociate cultural studies from political economy, or vice versa, may help to secure an academic identity in confusing times, it encourages writers to be disdainful of sources that already constitute a part of their thinking” (Maxwell, 2001, p. 135).

The study of mass cultural products must recognize that they are forever tied to the capitalist system that produces them. In this way, hegemonic conceptions of popular culture help navigate the democratic potential of mediated texts. As Golding and Murdock (1991) note, “Everyone, from politicians to academics, now agree that public communication systems are now cultural industries” and while those industries certainly share the frame of production that shapes other machinations of capitalism, “the goods they manufacture play a pivotal role in the organizing the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world,” (p. 15). Thus, as we try to understand the deliberative potential of mediated texts, simply discounting them as mired in consumerism delimits the way in which we may come to entertain critical arguments.

In *Culture and the Public Sphere*, Jim McGuigan argues that to accept closure from a public debate because of economic framing “unquestioningly is too fatalistic and,

from the point of view of critical reason, irresponsible. The surest means of destroying what there is of a public sphere is not to engage in critical debate, not to ask awkward questions or not to dream ‘unrealistic’ solution to life and art” (1996, p. 4). Although cultural media’s potential for deliberation must always be analyzed in relation to its ideology (McGuigan, 1996), theory is better served by noticing what ideologies are at play and what potential lay in the ideologies themselves to act as sites for democratic engagement.

Even Habermas shifts to accept the possibilities of media to foster public dialogue in his later work; “the research on effect and reception has at least done away with the image of passive consumers as “cultural dopes” who are manipulated by the programs offered to them. It directs our attention to *the strategies of interpretation employed by the viewers, who communicate with one another, and who in fact can be provoked to criticize or reject what programs offer or to synthesize it with judgments of their own,*” (Habermas, 1996, p.377, emphasis added). It is in shifting the question away from how ideologies in cultural texts construct publics, and toward understanding what civic action people take based upon their identification to those cultural texts (Eberly, 2000), that allow for a richer understanding of public formations in the midst of a popular, mediated culture.

### **MEDIATING THE POPULAR AND THE PUBLIC VIA NATIONALISM**

Insofar as nationalism provides a basis for identification between people, it holds the potential to aid argument and deliberation rather than hinder it. It is only through recognizing “a way of life is *an acting together*; and in acting together, [people] have

common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Burke, 1969, p.21 emphasis added), that nationalism takes on a positive value for public formations. Later chapters will highlight the benefit of national ideologies to deliberative publics. Those case studies will demonstrate the potential of a *democratic nationalism*, where nationhood unifies people in a public so that they may identify with one another and enter into a dialectical exchange about what it means to belong to the nation-state. Without this democratic component of nationalism, the function of national ideology may continue to quail dissent in the public sphere.

Nationalism permeates our human experience and organizes people based upon identification with a shared history and culture. That process of “organization” is akin to what Benedict Anderson conceptualizes as “imagination.” In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson concludes that the basis of nationalism is not necessarily the ideological constructions of elites, but a product of regular people’s imagined consciousness: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, p.6).

Although this process of imagination seems not to account for the inherent ideological aspects of shared sites for imagined communities, it does re-orient the scope of scholarship on nationalism away from its heritage as a product purely of the ruling class.<sup>2</sup> Imagination takes place in the minds of the nation’s common people. This

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a debate-able claim. Steven Engel argues that Anderson’s project can still be critiqued for focusing to squarely on elite constructions of the nation. However, it is Anderson’s theoretical emphasis on the agency of people to invoke and create the nation that I believe opens the door for theories of nationalism that focus on the agency of people, rather than institutional power, in constructing national communities.



populist vision of communal identities may be better understood through the work of Eric Hobsbawm, who reminds his readers that although the nation state is essentially a construct “from above,” it:

cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is, in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people... That view from below, ie. the nation as seen not by governments and the spokesmen and activists of nationalist (or non-nationalist) movements, but by the ordinary persons who are the objects of their action and propaganda, is exceedingly difficult to discover. (1992, p.10-12)

The quest to discover the nation as seen in the imaginations of ordinary people is a critical aspect to this project as it focuses on popular culture. As popular culture can be tied to the experiences of lower classes of society, it lies squarely at the center of cultivating a *democratic nationalism*. *Democratic nationalism is the civic maneuvering of deliberation and dissent on the basis of shared ideologies of the nation state*. As Michael Billig contends, any discussion of the nation is ideological:

When talking about ‘our’ beliefs, one might prefer [over the word nationalism] other different words such as ‘patriotism’, ‘loyalty’, or ‘societal identification’. Such terms banish the word ‘nation’ and with it the specter of nationalism...The problem is that such terms overlook the object to which the ‘loyalty’ or ‘identification’ is being shown: the nation-state. (1995, p.16)

Understanding the ideological character of nationalism is central to grasping both its possibilities and its limitations as a site of identification and deliberation in public spheres. Identification with national ideologies not coupled with the critical dialectic of

deliberation functions hegemonically to bolster dominance. This is of great importance in recognizing the role of *The Rising*, the focus of Chapter Four, to aid rather than challenge U.S. hegemony of the post-911 period.

However as will be seen in the remaining case studies of this dissertation, when citizens connect via ideologies of the nation to then engage in a dialogue about them, nationalism becomes the basis for identification that U.S. citizens rely upon to ultimately debate appropriate models of patriotism in the public sphere. This project echoes the sentiments of Steven Engel who attest that he is “less concerned with the ways in which elites historically have created nations, but rather with what goes on within nations once they have been invented” (Engel, p.517).

#### **NAVIGATING PUBLICS AND POPULAR CULTURE**

Popular music that disrupts a dominant public sphere has been termed *insurgent popular music*. The relative insurgency of popular music results in a text’s ability to summon up arguments from counterpublic vernacular. Where popular music is able to articulate counterpublicity, music acts hegemonically to challenge and sustain the dominant sphere. Each of the case studies presented in this dissertation details the relationship between mass popular music and ordinary people’s voices. The ability of mass popular culture to make claims resonate with counterpublicity determines the abilities of popular texts to act insurgently in the public sphere.

This insurgent argumentation of popular culture is best understood through the use of enthymemes. Aristotle argues the enthymeme as the most powerful form of persuasion (*Rhetoric*, Book One) because it requires the audience to participate in the

reasoning alongside the rhetor for adherence to claims to occur. For an enthymeme to work with an audience, that audience must supply the missing pieces of information that connect argumentative premises one to the other. In the musical rhetorics of this project, the enthymematic functioning of insurgent popular music relies upon ideologies of nationalism in the current moment, historical knowledge contained within the genre, and a relationship to the plight of ordinary people, to supply the needed information for argumentation.

In closing, if we can understand how the relationships among popular culture, publics, and nationalism converge in the fluidity of textual address and circulation, then we may be better able to harness the potentialities for democratic engagement and social action that lay within them. Popular music becomes a fruitful site to understand relationships between popular controversies and public dissent. I now turn to the final section of theory which will examine economic and rhetorical components of popular music in the public sphere.

## Chapter Two: Selling Politics to the Masses

As I noted in the introduction to this project, though ordinary people no longer congregate for presidential debates, they do for rock concerts. In fact, political pundits have been onto this trend for while, cultivating rockers to aid in electoral campaigns and national conventions. In 1976, Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign turned to the Allman Brothers Band, managed by a close friend of Carter's, to accompany the candidate on his campaign tour. Thus, I now turn now toward popular music's particular qualities as a powerful and continual location for public address. In Chapter One I argued for the merits of hegemony theory as a way to understand popular culture's simultaneous existence as an artifact of a dominant system and a force for change within it. It is both its character as a commodity and as a rhetoric that allow it to serve in this way. This chapter is devoted to understanding popular music's character as both a product for consumption and a rhetorical discourse. As hegemony theory offers us the ability to see cultural forces in their simultaneous dominance and opposition, popular music's presence as both product and persuasion are central to understanding how it negotiates dominance and opposition within the public sphere.

Rhetorical scholars have devoted significantly less scholarly attention to music than other rhetorics of popular culture. The *Quarterly Journal of Speech* has not published anything writ large on the rhetorical power of popular music since the 1970s (Irvine and Kirkpatrick, 1972; LeCoat, 1976; Mormhan and Scott, 1976). Even then, these articles did not study the popular music born in the mid 1950s; rather, it focused on music generally or popular music prior to the mass commercialization that took place

with the birth of artists like Elvis Presley and the Beatles. The most recent work of late on the power of music as rhetoric is Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) call for an integrated approach to music-communication scholarship, where they note the necessary investigation of popular music's complexity, arguing:

The rhetorical power of music can only be ascertained by considering both lyrical content and musical score. Music does impact meaning. Hence, any method designed to analyze music as a rhetorical form must consider the dynamic interaction between lyrics and score to capture a full meaning of the message. (p.396).

The criticism is well noted, but perhaps not very innovative. This suggestion is one that has haunted what little rhetorical scholarship exists on music and/or popular music. In fact, fifteen years earlier the same journal published Rein and Springer's, "Where's the Music? The Problems of Lyric Analysis," where the authors criticize the field similarly for "locking itself into a narrow mode of analysis":

The communication researcher needs to account for musical arrangements, new recordings and instrument technology, and aesthetic conventions of different styles in addition to lyrical content. (1986, p.253)

Scrutinizing the music-lyric binary is important to rhetorical scholarship on popular music. Many scholars have argued eloquently the value of integrating the binary, as will be reviewed later in this chapter. However, I would like to suggest something beyond the scope of the music-lyric binary. Namely, in order to best recognize the rhetorical power of popular music, we must go beyond an analysis of lyrics and sound toward an

integration of the rhetorical aspects of its commoditized creation and its prospects as a site of deliberation and action.

As suggested earlier in the beginning of Chapter One, popular culture is a combination of artistic form and social location with both instrumental and constitutive functions as rhetorical discourse. While television reruns consume cable channels and late night time slots, and classic cinema has a secure yet small spot at your local video store, classic popular music does not re-enter the public sphere, it continues to circulate indefinitely. For example, while you may not have rented *Platoon* in the past year, chances are that at a concert, in a record store, or as you scanned the radio dials, you may have run across Edwin Star's popular protest chart topper "War (What is it good for?)."<sup>3</sup> Once music enters the "popular," it continues to cycle within the "public" as soundtracks for everything from political campaigns and historically contextualized film to your daily commute to work. It is this character of popular music, to invoke and re-invoke social location and historical context on a daily basis, which makes it a rich resource for rhetorical investigation in the public sphere. This character also complicates previous scholarship that locates music's content in its lyrics and its emotional appeal in its sound (Cheseboro et al, 1985; Rein and Springer, 1986; Sellnow and Sellnow, 2001). Now, the entire social location invoked in music, a location informed by lyrics, sound, commodification, and deliberation, become central to understanding the rhetorical power of music.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Platoon*, (Oliver Stone, 1986) was nominated for 18 academy awards and won 4, including best picture, in 1987 ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)). "War" spent thirteen weeks on the Billboard charts in 1970, three of those at number one. In 1985 Bruce Springsteen recorded his own version of the song and made it part of his ten year anniversary box set ([www.wholenote.com](http://www.wholenote.com)).

This chapter will scrutinize the complex and often paradoxical or contradictory relationship between the commodification of popular music and its rhetorical functions in a public. First, I will trace the character of popular music as a commodity, noting a) its struggles with artistic authenticity and alienation, b) innovation and homogenization c) technology, and d) the consumption and distribution of music as cultural artifact. Following, I will offer a typology of the rhetorical functions of popular music, both linguistic and non-linguistic, engaging in discussions of a) its character as a public address and modality, b) its intricate signification of meaning via genre, c) its dialogic and dialectic invocation via sound and context, and d) its ends of political persuasion and social change.

#### **POPULAR MUSIC AS COMMODITY**

The character of popular music as cultural product is complex. Waldman (2003) may have stated it best when he writes, “The myth that rock and roll runs counter to good old American values—and therefore is anathema to any politician to the right of center—should have ended when Elvis Presley signed a contract with RCA records in late 1955” (vii). His point is that even the most socially controversial moments and artists within our popular music history get there through a Western system of capitalist cultural production and dissemination. The system of capitalism is central to understanding dominance within American and global culture. While local and vernacular cultures often participate in building a fan base that makes music marketable to corporations, for music to become “popular music” it requires the mass audience consideration corporate music labels

provide. Thus, popular music has an often duplicitous character, acting as both mass industrial product and vernacular artistic creation.

Deena Weinstein argues, however, that the art/commerce binary is a mythic, if not useful, romantic illusion (1999). Being part of the industry does not inherently strip away the artistic merit of popular music, nor does trying to stand outside of it music a necessarily better art form. Categories of art and commerce should not stand in opposition to one another but rather should be seen as mutually informing of popular music as a cultural product. This carries with it positive and negative meaning and internal tensions between artist, industry, audience, and sound. In becoming popular, music enters populations that may have otherwise ignored its sound and message but it also relinquishes (even if only symbolically) its “authenticity” as art form as it becomes a product for consumption.

### **Artistic Authenticity**

There are many examples of this struggle for authenticity between corporate profits and artistic desire. Eddie Vetter and Pearl Jam waged a war against Ticketmaster in 2002 for overcharging their fan base; Wilco’s troubles with the release of the critically acclaimed *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* resulted in a feature length documentary devoted to the relationship between the creative process of the band; and Time-Warner Music Studio’s control, and countless artists offer public condemnations on the industry’s influence in the creative process and its effect on new music in general. Consider the following comment from Cult member Ian Astbury: “The fact is that we write to please ourselves, not the fans. We don’t wage an inner war about being commercial or artistic. The artistry



is what matters to us... We'd rather fail with music we believe in than succeed commercially with music we don't like" (In E. McDonnell, p.11).

It is not that music inherently becomes poor in quality as it reaches a mass audience, but rather the value placed upon authenticity in music (and the fear that cultural production erases that authenticity) pervade our notions of musical quality. For example, when Grunge peaked in the early 1990s as popular music, it did not erase the fact that it was "good" music. Its popularity could not erase its roots in a small, vernacular sect of artists and fans wishing to articulate an alternative to the dominant form of popular music at the time. Nor did its popular appeal cause it to fail critically as an innovative and timely response to a deluge of industry productions in the vein of Rick Astley and Richard Marx. This is overtly similar to the rise of folk that will be discussed at the end of this chapter. Yet, musicians are often viewed as surrendering an authentic credibility as they sign with major record labels. Bands either become "sell-outs" or are forced to continually articulate their stance against the industry and the corporate control of their music. Kurt Cobain's most famous response was the April 16, 1992 cover of Rolling Stone where he fronted a t-shirt reading, "Corporate Magazines Still Suck."

But in this struggle for "authenticity," it seems that what we actually mourn, besides the lack of creative control, may be an alienation from one's work. Popular music may be the product of a "cultural" industries but it is first and foremost the product of the musician's creative labor. Both Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes dispel notions of authentic authorship that can be useful to popular music studies, especially when we begin to understand the variant aspects of popular music's technological production. This tension between commercial success and artistic authenticity, however, may also be

explained via Marxist theories of labor and alienation. The constraints levied within the political economy of musical production often divorce artists from their work. The artists themselves often come to represent economic commodities into themselves, “a unique commodity form which is both labour process and product” (Maxwell, 2001, p.137). This can have some benefit for the artist. For example, though CD sales have declined (an avenue which benefits record labels much more than artists themselves) touring revenue (where artists receive a higher percentage of sales) has remained stable. But even then, these concert sales are plagued by elements of the market. Similarly to the overall distribution of wealth, “economist Alan Krueger has estimated that the top one per cent of performers claim more than half of all concert revenues” (Surowiecki, 5/16/2005).

Very few musicians entering the realm of the popular actually see a return for their labor and therefore become alienated from the process of their work. “There are still artists who make huge sums of money selling records,” says *The New Yorker’s* James Surowiecki, “but they are the lucky few. A longtime recording-industry rule of thumb holds that just one in ten artists makes money from royalties. Today, it’s probably less than that” (5/16/2005). Weinstein argues that “less than 15 percent of the artists signed to major record labels ever break even” (1999, p.58). This trend of alienation seems particularly poignant for popular musicians. Whereas popular actors and directors securely command multimillion dollar salaries, popular musicians can leave a record label virtually broke.

Artists need to be viewed as laborers whose “work” often gets exploited for capital gain instead of inauthentic selves. Authenticity actually serves the industry,

becoming a mythological selling point and ushering in an “authentic” conformity. For any artist who has ever sold a CD, the burden of commerce has become part of the process. This does not make it less authentic, it simply makes music, as it has always been in some way, a product for consumption. While the commercial constraints upon artists should be a site for further investigation and theorization, we cannot divorce the industry from notions of popular music. To do so would be to take away an essential element of its character.

### **Innovation and Homogenization**

Popular music may be tainted by the market but it does not exist without it. It does become imperative to understand how particular industry standards affect what music enters into “the popular” and how that shift influences the trajectory of popular music. As Shuker notes, for continued economic success within the music industry there has to be at least the appearance of innovation and change (2001, p.49). Unlike other cultural products, the longevity of musical repetition is short lived. The music industry’s drive for innovation often adheres to dominant norms but also challenges the face of popular music to incorporate change. Consequently, popular music characteristically follows Gramsci’s conception of hegemony as both a product of the dominant culture and a force for change within it. While part of industrial norms is to be in search for the next transcendent sound offering mass market appeal, we often seek out those sounds within vernacular communities and emergent subcultures.

The entrance of innovation into popular music, however, often carries with it a homogenizing effect on the challenging art form. Island record’s distribution of The

Wailers serves as an excellent example of this effect.<sup>4</sup> In 1962 Island began as an independent label marketing Jamaican music to the West Indies; in the early 1970s it took up the marketing of British counterculture; and in 1972 the label signed The Wailers with band member Bob Marley. Island's owner Chris Blackwell did not spare expense on the cost of the recording, investing in the best technology of the time and committing time, money, and space to musicians involved. To further its marketability, both the music (the tempo of the music was sped up, hoping to appeal to a booming rock culture) and the message (the band's image as rebels was used as a selling point but "watered down" for white consumption) were altered so as to have the broadest appeal without diminishing the form as an innovative cultural commodity. In 1974 and 75, the band became "Bob Marley and the Wailers" after a multi-media (predominantly television and radio) tour had illustrated the potential selling power of Marley's star status. Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer left the band and the characteristically reggae back-up vocals were replaced with a more traditional gospel sound.

From this example, and countless untold others, it is evident that the popular music industry often homogenizes innovative music. It changes the actual sonic patterns produced, incorporating elements of other musics already popular and appealing to mass audiences. Record labels change the image of artists to a more palatable form. And sometime they change music's meaning, holding onto the freshness of the socio-political context while making it alluring to multiple-audiences. If you've heard it on the radio, bought it on a CD, or downloaded it into your iPod, then you have experienced a product

---

<sup>4</sup> For a more in depth account see "packaging reggae" in Roy Shuker's (2001) *Understanding Popular Music*.

that has most likely been constrained by the industry. On the other hand, the introduction of that innovation changes the landscape of the popular. In the case of the Wailers, it put Reggae on the map as a popular art form, it punctuated—even if by accident-- the context of social rebellion and upheaval, and its circulation influenced future artistic production. While the meaning and the music may shift as it enters the popular, it is not stripped of its significance as it circulates. Innovation requires the popular to continually contest itself.

### **Technologies**

In addition to questions of authenticity and innovation within musical texts, the political economy of musical production also characteristically marks its product via the uses of technology. Because popular music is the product of an industry, technology becomes a central component of its character. The technological aspects of popular music are most significant in the new forms it provides for sound creation, in the patterns of audience reception, and its dissemination and circulation through culture.

However, technology has been a part of audience reception and dissemination for various forms of music that would not be considered popular. The advent of the Victrola allowed Vivaldi to be played within parlors across elite spheres at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it did not alter the original form of classical music. Unlike classical music, which has both sound and score, popular music often only has sound. That sound is often created without written musical notation. Consider Timothy Warner's comment that;

In Western European art music plays a central role –the score is usually the fundamental creative product and is the focus for the most subsequent analysis – whereas in pop music it is the audio recording which is more often the primary

artifact and the basic term of reference. The absence of notation reflects this difference in emphasis, with traditional musicology. (2003, xiv)

This difference is highlighted by how music scholars understand the proliferation of folk music in the United States. Folk artists did not score their music, they invented it. Noting the significance of vernacular musics emerging in the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt commissioned Alan Lomax to capture the sounds of America's roots. Those recordings are how we know folk music and how we know the beginnings of popular music as a whole.

Thus, the use of technology resists traditional musicology's means for studying popular music given that there is no score upon which to offer notation. But as technology records the initial musical creation, it also allows for mass reproduction. Benjamin (1937) critiques popular texts based upon this possibility for technological reproduction. He argues that it encourages audiences to adhere to empty popular entertainment that reproduces itself without character and value; "The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated." Both Warner and Benjamin are correct in that "the means used to realize music ideas and give them substance can have a major impact on the resulting artifact" (Warner, 2003, xii), but incorrect in that the effect on that artifact *diminishes* its value. Certainly the risk of diminishing value rises once technology begins to alter the music itself, something regularly done in the production of all popular recordings today, but we would be better to understand how technology becomes one of the many voices of popular music. These arguments refuse to understand the particular characteristics of popular texts. It favors

castigating the influence of popular music rather than understanding the technological reproduction of sound as central to the art form. A moment of musical invention caught on tape does not diminish the moment of creation but should highlight the possibilities for technology to become one of the collaborative voices within popular music's production.

### **Consumption and Distribution**

In order to understand the character of popular music as a "valid" site of study and a predominant discourse within our public culture, we must not only reconcile the technology of its production but also its consumption and distribution. Its study requires scholars to articulate a more diverse approach to understanding music that uses technology (whether in capturing sound, reproducing it, or as an added voice of musical creation), but also how technological innovation shapes the method in which we access music in the public sphere. According to a 2003 report by the New Jersey Institute of Technology, about 10% of Americans admit to using some form of peer to peer file sharing network. Although these numbers may not seem huge, the Entertainment Industry reports having lost an estimated 700 million in sales to illegal downloading.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps more significant is that the majority of growth in those ages downloading falls within the industries most profitable market, ages 18-35. Furthermore, fear of government prosecution seems to have a limited effect on those numbers. The NPD consumer research group found that while peer-to-peer usage did have six months of declines, as

---

<sup>5</sup> 1/13/2005 EO2 Washington Post

media coverage of legal suits dissipated in November 2003, individual file sharing rose almost 14 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Technological innovation aids people's abilities to access music by bypassing both corporate radio and traditional record sales, in theory making music more easily accessed and more fairly distributed product for consumption. Though the ability to instantly download music is at current used more as a mechanism for corporate profit than music democratization, the capacity for the latter is significant. Current data on file sharing trends is yet to point in an absolute direction for the future of file sharing technology, but its power to shift the manner we consume cultural products must be considered as an evolutionary aspect of the industrial character of popular music. In the wake of a post 9/11 moratorium by most major labels to publish and record insurgent works within the music industry, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore bypassed the system by launching, "Protest Records website," a free MP3 record label that allowed internet users to download of a conglomerate of protest music from anti-war artists (McNair, 2003). Though access does complicate the notion of the internet's influence to aid democratic engagement, there is burgeoning potential for complicating the usual process of music distribution and production.

Beyond this, technology is drastically changing people's potential to further specialize what music they are confronted by on a daily basis. The innovation of mobile listening sources has fundamentally changed the way people encounter music. The Walkman and Discman have subsided to the iPod, whose memory is large enough and technology advanced enough that one can continually listen only to what he or she

---

<sup>6</sup>CNET news.com, March 2004, accessed June 2005



chooses. Accidental exposure to music that often happens in the circulation of texts through the airwaves of your local grocery store or on the Clear Channel pop station in your car is limited by these advances. The ability to streamline your listening choices, as well as access your iPod via regular radio waves, may have both negative and positive effects when considering the role of the popular in the public. In the negative, it limits exposure to music that breaks with the listener's usual framework, and thus may limit his or her abilities to tap into circulating ideas that accompany artistic work they would choose to screen out. For example, when the Whitehouse released the play list of President George W. Bush's iPod, Toby Keith was in queue but the Dixie Chicks were not. In the positive, many people report that they rely on downloading (often into mobile systems like the iPod) in order to diversify listening choices. In the case of the latter, the ability to easily switch between variant forms of music may open up even more possibilities for people to be exposed to divergent music and thus the divergent ideas that accompany it. For the purposes of this project, technological innovation becomes important in theorizing how it may affect the trajectory of popular music production. It is, however, a very small moment in this analysis as technological innovation in access remains, for the most part, an idiosyncrasy of the upper class.

### **A TYPOLOGY OF POPULAR MUSIC AS RHETORIC**

As previously noted in the in the introduction of this chapter, the last significant research published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* that tackled the theoretical overlap between music and rhetoric was published 30 years ago. Since then, most scholarship on the rhetoric of music within disciplinary journals has appeared in journals devoted

specifically to the inquiry of media and/or popular culture. However, given the scope of inquiry for media as opposed to rhetorical scholars, this body of literature fails to build a coherent theory of popular music as *rhetoric*. Specifically, rhetorical inquiry has a long lineage in navigating the civic nature of public speech. Although cultural studies scholarship on popular music eloquently speaks to the problematic of discourse and power, itself a necessary site for investigation to answer rhetorical questions, it is not necessarily rhetoric. It is rhetorical theory—not media, cultural, or even social theory—that squarely attempts to investigate public speech as a civic act.

This section highlights the ways in which popular music acts rhetorically by attempting to recognize the rhetorical effect of music beyond simple lyric-sound binaries. In the following pages, I will evaluate popular music’s character as public address and modality, its meaning-making via the generic signification of sound, its process as a dialogic and dialectic, and finally, through its capacity to act as both political persuasion and a rhetorical force of social change. I will rely upon both literatures in rhetorical theory as well as critical and cultural scholarship about popular music, to begin sketching a framework of popular music as rhetoric that will guide subsequent analysis in this dissertation and may serve as a theoretical structure that can be used for future rhetorical critique.

### **Public Address and Embodied Modality**

Popular music is arguably one of the few performative rhetorics that continues to draw audiences into the hundreds of thousands. So important is the public performance of music to its meaning that “performance has remained the ideal locus of rock authenticity

long after it has ceased to be the real origin of rock music” (Shumway, 2000, p.188). In 1969 the infamous Woodstock performances drew over 400,000 people; the Isle of Wight in 1973 drew over 600,000 concert goers. Such record breaking moments of public gathering shed light on what may have led the National Project on Rhetoric to concur that better means of examining non-traditional rhetorical forms were a needed incorporation to the study of contemporary rhetoric (Irvine and Kirkpatrick, p. 1972). Today, the numbers of sold-out concerts that occur from small independent venues to massive football stadiums are themselves enough to warrant musical performance as a necessary site for rhetorical criticism and public address. In short, of the places to gather to hear public rhetoric, music performance is significant.

Popular music must be recognized as a powerful form of public discourse. Though foundational literatures in public sphere theory have been hesitant to embrace mediated rhetorics as a legitimate civic discourse (Habermas, 1989), recent rhetorical theorizations of civic engagement in publics and counterpublics make room for unconventional discourses to enter into the realm of legitimate civic discourse. Following Robert Asen’s theories of modalities of rhetorical civic engagement in the public sphere:

*Creative aesthetic uses of communication promise to reconnect people to public affairs and to each other. Unlike Lipmann, Dewey did not fault publics for exhibiting a lack of interest in democratic practices. Instead, he placed the burden on advocates to engage others through innovative practices. Such practices also carry the potential for powerful social critique...new perceptions require new communicative practices, (2004, p.197, emphasis added).*

In addition to this recent publication, 2005 NCA convention scholars convened to discuss further the multiple ways in which modalities may appear in the everyday rhetorical practices of a public. Phaedra Pezzullo suggested that the “rehearsed banality” of environmental protest as a modality of the public. Eric King Watts suggested the agitation of social movements as modality. Cara Finnegan further suggested the distinction of media, modality, and multi-modalities in the analysis of visual rhetorics. John Sloop extended modalities to the advent of portable modalities via the civic and ideological meaning of cars in American society (NCA 2005). In each case, all claimed the prevalence of an innovative rhetorical practice as central to civic engagement of the modern age. I argue that popular music should be among them. Of all innovative rhetorical practices of civic engagement, music is perhaps the most traditional in its manner of address, and most innovative in its invention. Liesbet van Zoonen rejects the oversight of the popular, stating that “popular music is routinely approached as an object for politics, to be used and controlled at will, rather than a subject, an actor to be taken seriously” (2005, p.144). As popular music holds the capacity for rhetorical agency, it is an exemplar mode of negotiating the public. Music acts rhetorically in its abilities to address publics, but also to be an innovative modality of address among them.

The manner in which music acts within publics, however, is a precarious task of theorization within the realm of traditional rhetoric. In addition to its potential for deliberation in a traditional verbal sense, music makes community and meaning by the unconventional ways in which people are called to act within it. Elements of rhythm, cadence, dance, call and response, are all non-verbal aspects of engagement that facilitate deliberation and community building. “Whereas the traditional discursive form

emphasizes intellectual participation on the part of the receiver, the musical form necessarily involves and stimulates the human body in its capacity for sensation” (Irvine and Kirkpatrick, 1972, p.273).

Though music and dance have not been central to rhetorical theories of publicness,<sup>7</sup> performative elements of audience response were an integral aspect to early civic forms of life and continue to be a part of many non-Western forms of civic engagement (Cyphert, 2001). The physicality of musical participation in publics makes for the entrance of a physical action, arguably more than any other form of popular discourse (film, television, radio) or any other form of public discourse. Both Western musicology and the Western rhetorical tradition have disregarded the significance of rhythm in large part because of its corporeal response; “music theorists who are concerned with addressing rhythm have either ignored the body completely or argued that physical involvement is perverse or primitive...denial of the body, related to the common fear of music’s “feminizing” effects, is a recurrent anxiety of Western music criticism (and Western culture more generally)” (Walser, 1993, p.48).

Music asks us to dance, to sing, and to respond in cooperation with others. “When popular music exerts its influence, the human body itself must be immediately and directly affected” (Cheseboro et al; 1985, p.117). Although the mind/body split of Western society largely isolates the possibilities of physical response affecting or integrating into the process of reason, the physical impact of music has much to do with its rhetorical response. Rather than make cadence/rhythm aspects of collective public

participation incommensurate with reasonableness, it seems better to view physical body movement as part of the participatory call and response exchange between musicians and audiences. This is similar to how one might argue the significance of Black Baptist Churches to civil rights campaigns across the South was in some part based on the manner of cooperation between speaker and audience via call and response. Musical performance has this same power. When rooted in counter-hegemonic meaning, music holds the potential to invoke our collective reason through the union of its verbal message and physical call and response. The musical performance evokes bodily movement. Our physical reaction to popular music cultivates a form of engagement, that when coupled with political or protest song, carries with it the additional significance of argumentative adherence. The dance becomes a signal of affirmation, if not action. Though I would never suggest that a group of dancing concert-goers would inherently fuel a revolution if no other rhetorical message were present, and no other action past that moment pursued, it carries the potential for the cultivating community and granting symbolic adherence to musical messages.

### **Genre**

Genre within rhetorical criticism has been used as a way to critically evaluate rhetorical acts that share a unique set of interrelated elements. We rely upon these shared topoi of genre to infer meaning across context while preserving the meaning of the universal context that texts within a genre share:

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that rhetorical scholarship on music has been blind to the physicality of musical response but rather that such responses have lead scholars to label music as an essentially epideictic form of rhetoric (see further, Cheseboro et al, 1985).

A generic perspective is intensely historical, but in a sense somewhat different from most prior rhetorical efforts. It does not seek detailed recreation of the original encounter between author and audience; *rather it seeks to recreate the symbolic context* in which the act emerged so that criticism can teach us about the nature of the human communicative response and about *the ways in which rhetoric is shaped by prior rhetoric, by verbal conventions in a culture, and by past formulation of ideas and issues.* (Campbell and Jamieson, p. 423, 2000/1978, emphasis added)

Understanding generic criticism within the rhetorical tradition yields valuable insight into the process of music as rhetoric. It is valuable because the way we conceive genre study within popular music is directly opposite to how we conceive the rhetorical genre. While generic criticism within rhetorical scholarship isolates similar rhetorical elements in order to categorize meaning, popular music scholarship has been working diligently to break apart the practice of inferring meaning by genre, challenging generic categories and recognizing genre's inherent fluidity (Shuker, 149). The inductive claim that music scholarship argues for, "genre is inherently fluid," is the presupposition to rhetorical scholarship concerning genre. This would indicate that rhetorical inquiry could be a helpful tool to the practice of understanding musical genre. For the purpose of this dissertation, retaining the fluidity of popular folk while simultaneously strengthening its connection with more mainstream artists allows us to understand the similar purpose between musicians who themselves may differ within the genre of popular music.

Musical scholarship's argument for the fluidity of genre mirrors the rhetorical scholarship's contention of genre's ability to unify rhetorical texts. Both locate the

historical conversation and convention within the establishment of generic form.

Consider the following excerpts:

The generic perspective recognizes that while there may be few clearly distinguishable genres, *all rhetoric is influenced by prior rhetoric, all rhetorical acts resemble other rhetorical acts.* (Campbell and Jamieson, 2000/1978, p.422, emphasis added)

No style is totally independent of those who have preceded it, and musicians borrow elements from existing styles and incorporate them into new forms.

(Shuker, 2001, p.150)

Although it is true that music and verbal, political rhetoric are different human endeavors, they overlap in the historically informed quality of their composition. Both popular music studies and rhetorical studies locate genre in the conglomeration of prior musical and rhetorical voices. They rest upon what Bakhtin (1986) might call *napravlenost*, or a multi-voiced texture of meaning within the language of the everyday. No utterance can ever be the “pure” response of a rhetor/artist given that every utterance is inherently influenced by the sounds of those that preceded it. Recent film biographies of Ray Charles (Hackford, 2004) and Johnny Cash (Mangold, 2005) illustrate this precedent beautifully, showing Charles’ reliance upon country music to create new blues rhythms and Cash listening intently to “new” Bob Dylan records during a break between tours. The multivocality of popular music marks it as having much in common with rhetorical theory.

It is perhaps the sound of music that most complicates the process of understanding popular music as rhetoric, and yet sound is an inherently rich aspect of the



role of musical genre in creating rhetorical meaning. While we may categorize certain speech acts as “apology” by generic statements of self-defense, we categorize music not in generic statements but in generic sound. Sound will be further theorized in the following section, but it is noted here for the additional layer of meaning it conveys to the musical genre. When we think of folk music, especially in our rhetorical scholarship, we often summon its rhetorical elements. Folk music as a genre is largely conceived as what it is for its populist commentaries on social justice and the working poor. But when audiences listen to folk music, listeners summon up that rhetorical meaning by the presence of particular sounds. “Music enacts through patterns and gestures of sound a dramatic, episodic, dynamic experience, at once concrete and ephemeral. *It is a social practice, rhetorically powerful and dialectically active*” (Walker, 1993, p.40, emphasis added). The marriage of sound with meaning allows for the sound of music to take on a rhetorical function. When we hear a harmonica, a “lazy” rhythm, a three-finger played banjo, or a Travis-picked guitar,<sup>8</sup> we understand that we are listening to a particular musical paradigm and summon meaning accordingly.

In fact, the birth of popular music as we know it was made in the marriage of musical genres cornerstone to American roots music. Elvis’ first studio release was a version of southern blues artist Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup’s “That’s All Right” backed by a blues version of bluegrass artist Bill Monroe’s “Blue Moon of Kentucky.” On the part of studio executive Sam Cook, the move was a calculated attempt to appeal to multiple

---

<sup>8</sup> These are all technical elements developed by American folk artists in the 1930s and 1940s (American Roots, Vol. 1-4, 1999). Their significance, however, is that while listeners may not know the technical knowledge of the musical production, the sound that those technical maneuvers create does invoke a rhetorical meaning of the genre.

audiences; “Blue Moon” targeted white audiences and signified Elvis’ whiteness and the style of “That’s All Right” targeted blues influenced black audiences. But in its appeal to multiple audiences, it married the meanings of those genres as well. Though the release was not a rhetorical act per se, it was a meaningful one as the industry of rock and roll took on the populist paradigm of roots music.

Accordingly, blues, bluegrass, folk, and rock and roll share generic elements of a history of sound imbedded in music produced by the vernacular voices of localized American communities. Unleashing that sound in the mass popular music of the contemporary moment holds the potential to release the meaning of its creation as well. *This generic signification of meaning allows for popular music to act as rhetoric in a particularly deliberative way.* If a sound implies a meaning to the audience, then it calls upon them to adhere to or reject that meaning. This is not a passive act. Though corporations may control the advent of new popular music, complicating tremendously the abilities to activate our political agency, there is still some imprint of invention from a vernacular space imbedded in the genre of popular music.

Multiple layers of signification do complicate the meaning of musical texts. Because meaning is both negotiated and fluid, the possibility remains for dominant layers of meaning to trump the vernacular voices from which popular music originally emerged. Some meanings will necessarily dominate over others, and that’s where the rhetorical elements of the music itself and the musician as rhetor become incredibly important. We will see this happen with the case study of the Dixie Chicks. It is not until the rhetoric of artist changes the meaning of previous country songs that an insurgent popular music emerges over a dominant country music. Both the musical sound and the rhetorical

message cooperate to encourage a deliberative moment in the public sphere. When conceptualizing the rhetorical nature of musical genre, and the meaning incumbent within it, one must accept the simultaneous existence of ideological and musical noise.

### **Sound and Context**

As sound is integral to understanding the rhetorical meaning of genre within popular music, it is also an essential element of the dialogic and dialectic process that popular music uses in its action as rhetoric. Popular music is rhetorical in that it is both *dialogic*, invoking a history in each contemporary moment laden with messages from an earlier era, and *dialectic*, in the process of invocation and deliberation that happens between the artist, a vernacular, and the mass public and in the dialectical invention of future musical forms. Dialogic and dialectic take form via the intersection of sound of and context. Lipstiz (1990) explains this phenomenon of popular music as:

...the *product of an ongoing historical conversation* in which no one has the first or the last word. The traces of the past that pervade popular music of the present amount to more than mere chance; they are not simply juxtapositions of incompatible realities. They reflect a dialogic process, one embedded in a collective history and nurtured by the ingenuity of artists interested in fashioning icons of opposition. (99, emphasis added)

Thus, when we hear a familiar sound, listeners wrestle with where to place the meaning of that sound. Musicians fashion “icons of opposition” as they not only engage in a dialogic of historical conversation, but as they extend that dialogue into unconventional arenas, generating new forms of cultural resistance. An interesting innovation of sound

in terms of auditory dialogue lies in the first release, “Not ready to make nice,” from the Dixie Chicks post-controversy album. This song retains the folk-rooted sound of the musicians’ earlier work, but leans more heavily on classical string arrangements than contemporary country picking. The song invokes a new unapologetic resistance to their critics. This struggle is noted in the lyrics, of course, but given meaning in large part in aural generic cues and vocal climax and crescendo.

Scholars have recognized the rhetorical power of sound as a supra linguistic variable within the study of popular music. In truth, to continually critique rhetorical scholarship for not having acknowledged or theorized the rhetoric of sound is unfair. Many have spoken to the curious exigence of musical sound to “rouse the passions” of an audience (LeCoat, 1976). Cheseboro, following Irvine and Kirkpatrick, suggests that repetition in musical sound has a powerful rhetorical function: “Where this repetitive musical feature is viewed as a form of amplification, music functions persuasively” (1985, p. 117). The problem, however, is that scholarship often leaves us with oversimplified or contradictory categorizations of sound’s rhetorical effect. Rhetorical scholarship of music often falls into a limiting binary of lyric as content and sound as emotion. Such simple bifurcations limit our understanding of musical sound’s rhetorical meaning. Furthermore, studies of popular music have readily assigned popular music to the category of epideictic rhetoric:

The form and content of pop music are conceived here as epideictic in nature. As *such, popular music is not to be understood or evaluated as a mode of policy or reason-giving communication*. In contrast to the political and future orientation of deliberative communication, and in contrast to the legal and past orientation of

forensic communication, epideictic communication is the rhetoric of the present, rhetoric of praise and dispraise. *The emotional immediacy and hyping of a live rock concert thus constitutes a vivid example of the epideictic quality of popular music.* (Cheseboro et al, 1985, p.117, emphasis added)

To note the epideictic quality of popular music is warranted. I would never concur that music is not an epideictic discourse, nor claim the absence of emotional appeals and invocations to and from its audience. What I will suggest, however, is that epideictic and the deliberative rhetoric are not so easily distinguishable within the realm of popular music. Emotional immediacy does not necessarily negate the potential for popular music to act as deliberative discourse; in fact, it may be the emotional connectedness listeners have to their music that releases popular music's deliberative potential.

Sellnow and Sellnow have recently argued that the emotional immediacy of musical "intensity and release patterns" make it possible to "articulate, reason, understand, and meaningfully perceive the world in a logical manner with feelings and emotions" (Durig, 1994, p.256; Sellnow and Sellnow, 2001, p. 398). However, they simultaneously argue that:

this perspective is intended for analyzing music that I essentially *didactic*. That is, songs *with no meaningful intent beyond entertainment might evoke a mood and nothing more.* (p. 116, emphasis added)

While the nod to musical intensity as connected to reasonable argument is significant, there are oversimplified and contradictory problems with this theorization. First is the "didactic" labeling of the music. For a text to be didactic, it is meant to teach, inform, train, but not necessarily argue. A deliberative text invokes argumentation. So

while this may be a vital move for understanding music as persuasion, it limits its capacity for other manners of rhetorical invention. The second problem is Sellnow's suggestion that "songs with no meaningful intent beyond entertainment might evoke a mood and nothing more," leaving them beyond the scope of their theory and project. However, the focus on intent and the disregard for the political potential of mood again limit the rhetorical power of popular music.

Perhaps the best example of this has been the strategic insertion of popular music often found in gay dance clubs, into moments of popular culture. In this scenario, the music itself does not necessarily hold political intent. Often the music is pure, lyric-less, sound. It is in purpose, entertainment. However the strategic placing of such sounds into moments of mass culture may invoke deliberation, depending upon context, of the plight of homosexuality in a dominant public sphere. The lyrics of a particular text may be the least of its rhetorical effect. In his work arguing for the dialectic contradictions, rather than varying degrees of marginality between African and Western dance, Richard Rogers argues that:

To work toward such understandings involves an examination of, for example, an African American dance or musical form within its heteroglossic context, not for its imagined purity or its idealized resistance but for its contradictions, tensions, fragmentations, and specific struggles. (Rogers, 1997, p. 8)

Following this formulation, the resistance and rhetorical impact of music may be less about intent and more about the contradictions and tension that musical form imposes when inserted into social context.

In fact, Walser (1993) argues that it has been undervalued in the study of musicology as well:

I would argue that musical codes are the primary bearers of meaning; lyrics, like costumes and performer's physical motions, help direct and inflect the interpretation of the meanings that are most powerfully delivered, thus suggested by the music. *The most pressing task for the study of popular music is to begin to analyze the musical production of meaning within a discursive framework that is sensitive to the many kinds of social experience even as it focuses on specifically musical practices.* (pp. 40- 41, emphasis added)

Walser's answer is to begin to analyze sound via a "discursive framework" that would allow us to understand the associative function of musical meaning and context of musical production. This answer sets well with the rhetorical theorist, but others have aptly argued that mapping sound's meaning onto a discursive frame is similarly limited. Ethnomusicologists critique the field of critical media studies for being unable to conceptualize the meaning of sound outside a strictly a discursive frame. Shepherd (1991) criticizes scholarship that boils down sound to a quasi-verbal signifier and signified; "the sound of music is heavily implicated in processes of meaning construction" (p.26) beyond a linguistic framework for interpreting that meaning. He also characterizes music as "expressing iconically, from within itself" meanings which will likely resonate powerfully in other areas of non-musical social process (1991, p. 10). Thus, the study of meaning in the sound of popular music should recognize sound's meaning as acting in the same way as discourse without rigidly framing the meaning within a purely discursive way.

How then should scholars come to understand the rhetorical power located in sound without myopically translating it into discourse? That answer may lay in context. Musical sound acts rhetorically as a supra-linguistic method to embed us in social context, thus employing the meanings tied to that moment of contextualization. Music carries meaning beyond the manner in which it accompanies a particular lyrical text. Ted Matula succinctly argues for the value of contextualizing music in his work on the Pixies, stating that:

Context is vital to the study of popular music because much of music's rhetorical impact originates in *sources located outside the delineated text*, and the response to music is heavily influenced and framed by these contextual elements (2000, emphasis added).

The sources located outside a musical text are imperative cues to the civic nature of a musical text. Context is invoked because we associate certain *sounds* with particular political ideologies, particular historical moments, and particular artistic freedoms. It takes many words, but seconds of sound, to take the listener to a similar socio-political moment. Grossberg has “argued for more than twenty years...that rock music cannot be studied in isolation, either from other forms and practices of popular culture or from the structures and practices of everyday life” (1999, p.100). Popular music scholarship's valuing of context is itself a nod toward its rhetorical function.

Contextualization becomes important not only because it gives us vital information about the creation of the music, as many have argued, but also because it attaches to sound in a way that bolsters music's rhetorical message. “Music as cultural



politics returns us to the significance of the socio-economic context in shaping cultural meaning in the music” (Shuker, xiv).

In the discussion of genre earlier, I suggested that the contestation of ideological meaning born in context, and the familiarity of musical sound delivered in a different context, allowed for a generic signification which draws meaning from previous historical moments. Consider this in light of Walser’s argument concerning the significance of sound to meaning in studies of popular music:

Musical meanings are always grounded socially and historically, and they operate on an ideological field of conflicting interests, institutions, and memories. If this makes them extremely difficult to analyze, it does so by forcing analysis to confront the complexity and *antagonism of culture*. This is a poststructuralist view of music that it sees all signification as provisional, and it seeks for no essential truths inherent in structures, *regarding all meanings as produced through the interaction of texts and readers*. It goes further suggesting that subjectivity is constituted not only through language as Lacan and others have argued, but through musical discourses as well. Musical details and structures are intelligible only as traces, provocations, and enactments of power relationships. *They articulate meaning in their dialogues with other discourses past and present in their engagement with the hopes, fears, values, and memories of social groups and individuals*. Musical analysis is itself the representation of the one discourse in terms of another, the point being to illuminate the social contexts in which both circulate. (Walser, 1993, pp. 29-30, emphasis added)

Generic signification allows room for musical argument only if we can agree theoretically that meaningful sound is the product of cultural contexts continually in contestation. While I would not locate all musical meanings as polysemous as Walser suggests, I do agree upon their continued contestability in the “complexity and antagonism of a culture.” The antagonism of culture makes way for music to enter into the realm of argument. As sound signifies particular meanings from the context of creation, it acts enthymematically. Claim-like urgings circulate in the chord progressions of particular genres of music.

This is in part why the methodological aspects of looking at multiple rhetorical/musical texts in concert is so important; studying musicians’ music as rhetoric is the best way to understand the contestation of those enthymematic meanings lurking in the induced context and actual context of sound. Indeed, music’s rhetorical potential is necessarily linked to unleashing the ideological and enthymematic noise within the contextualized sound of music.

### **Political Persuasion and Social Change**

One of the first things we learn or teach in any rhetorical criticism class is the Aristotelian idea that rhetoric is all the available means of persuasion. If this is the case, then music too is inherently rhetorical. In fact, much of the social value of popular music may lie in its power to act persuasively as argument, political discourse, and rhetorics of social change. Traditional argument theory has tended not to articulate how variant forms of argument, here through a musical address, may enter into a political dialogue in the public sphere. But Rowland (1987) aptly argues that *all* non-linguistic features of

rhetoric can serve as argumentation in the interpretation of multiple discourses as symbolic persuasion.

Popular music scholar Roy Shuker (1994) further contends “popular music as a vehicle for political views” (xiv) looking specifically toward the rise of popular music in movements concerning gender and sexual politics. Waldman, who reiterates Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, asserts a rhetorical function to music, stating; “Now that rock is being accorded a modicum of respect by the establishment, *it’s in a better position to do mischief, if only by accident*” (2003, p. xviii). The mischief Waldman playfully refers to is actually the instrumental function of music as rhetoric.

Though the two are related and often simultaneously existent, music as public argument does not necessitate the disruption with the dominant needed to produce active social change. Being political within popular music is often linked more to the potential of an artist to be a catalyst for social change than to make a traditional political argument. Even still, music can be rhetorical and uphold dominant institutions:

“Politics” in popular music is commonly understood to mean “political songs”—songs which either *serve or struggle* against dominant institutions like the state and the economic system. For example, the national anthem or songs in many advertisements use music to *reinforce nationalism and normative consumption*, while political songs that “rage against the machine” suggest *forms of resistance*.” (Balliger, 1999, p.57)

While music can be political through serving or struggling against the system, most often we view “political” music as the latter, making political music one of the most progressively defined pieces of popular culture. “In the USA, Latin America, East

Europe and Africa, there are politicians who still fear the power of that curious group, pop musicians, and the effect they can have even when the music's over" (Denselow, 1989, p. xviii).

Moreover, some have argued that the best popular music is not the afterthought product of a time in which social change was happening, but rather itself the creation and the kindling for the social struggle at hand. Ian McDonald (2003) rejects the ideas that popular music must first be a product of its society and secondly a rebel festivity, stressing the contextual factors that contribute to the opportunity for critical consciousness in popular music. He argues:

The best popular music done in the period under consideration was made during the sixties, when rock was at its peak both as a new, half-invented art form and as a receptacle for rebellious social impulses. The energy level of popular music was then-novelty driven and pitched against a conservative social background. (p. viii)

Music becomes a vehicle for social change not only in its agitational public arguments, but also in the cultural history of its form and the dissonant clash it makes against hegemonic context. Studying these functions in concert becomes incredibly important in understanding the potential of popular music as rhetorical argumentation. Perhaps they are even more important to the particular arguments of this project, which rely upon the conservative/therapeutic social background of post 9/11 America to understand how certain musical discourses act deliberately when pitched against that landscape. It is incredibly difficult to begin to ascertain the function of music as rhetoric in the context of social change because of this multi-variant nature of meaning production; however, we

must study each aspect of music's potential for social change in order to understand the complexity of rhetorical meaning in music.

### **PRODUCT AND PERSUASION OF POPULAR MUSIC**

The goal of this chapter has been to illustrate that the political economy of popular music is intrinsic to its rhetorical impact in the public sphere. Popular music's abilities to act insurgently and to cultivate critical rationality in the public sphere hinge upon its character as a commodity within the culture industry. Its economic and rhetorical nature cannot be bifurcated; rather, we must understand how those two elements overlap to create room for a critical rationality particular to the field of mass popular culture.

While the culture industry becomes an indelible aspect of how popular music may become a critical voice in the public sphere, it is necessary to reiterate that the rhetorical character of popular music as connected to the voices of ordinary people is necessarily central to any theory of how it may work insurgently, to evoke critical rationality in publics. Again, hegemonic contestation occurs in the dominant public sphere in relation to a text's abilities to invoke argumentation from counterpublics. The reason why popular music becomes a powerful deliberative force lies in its abilities to make social commentary, once sounding only in voices of local struggle, resound loudly on a mass scale. To illustrate how this occurs in a mass public sphere, I will now turn to the legacy of American Roots music as the foundation of the democratic uses of popular music.

### **Chapter Three: Woody Guthrie and the Commodified Folk**

The discussion of Chapter Two examines the commodification of popular music in the way that authenticity, technology, and mass distribution shape its effects in the public sphere. The discussion outlines the many ways we can conceptualize music as rhetoric, citing its character as a public address and modality, its meaningful overlap within rhetorical genres via sound and context, and in its ends as political persuasion and social change. Yet, the goal of this project is not merely to describe how these individual elements add up to give us a cultural product or rhetorical artifact; rather, it is to see how those various elements come together at potential sites for civic deliberation.

To articulate how deliberative sites may emerge in popular music, I will examine how elements of the marketable product and rhetorical power of music converge in relationship to the vernacular components of popular American folk. This popularization of folk is perhaps nowhere better viewed than in the life and music of Woody Guthrie. His work is significant not only for its political statement, but in the way his popularity aids his political impact and the rhetorical struggle. Guthrie's case illustrates how commercial viability is not always an abdication of political intervention.

Using contemporary histories of Woody Guthrie's music and his role within the American folk movement, I highlight critical rationality as it is invoked in moments of intersection between authenticity and genre, persuasion and product, dialogic multivocality and musical innovation, and public address/modalities and technology. Each of these sites of intersection is the product of popular music's commodity and rhetorical functions. I will argue that critical rationality relies upon both elements of

popular music in order to invite audiences to identify with the plight of vernacular voices, and engage in deliberations on social justice.

To illustrate how popular music may act as argument, I will highlight the ground shared between popular music as commodity and popular music as rhetoric within the history and subsequent popularization of Woody Guthrie and American folk music. In linking the deliberative aspects found within Guthrie's musical history to elements within the case studies surrounding Springsteen, Earle, and the Dixie Chicks, I will show that insurgent popular music utilizes mass popular appeal in its rhetorical performance in order to invoke a critical rationality of music. That insurgency relies upon its state as part of mass culture in order to splinter dominant discourses and engender deliberation and social change.

Before turning directly to Guthrie, however, it's important to pause and clarify what is meant by "civic deliberation" and "critical rationality." In discussing the methodology of this project I suggested that deliberation was the cultivation of continual argumentative exchange, enacted as a social practice. When that social practice concerns items of community identity and social justice, that deliberation is civic and serves as the foundation of democratic engagement. Central to civic deliberation is argument, which Gutmann and Thompson suggest invokes principles into the process of deliberation as well as guiding its practice. Those principles are located within the presence of the reasoning used to develop civic policies, but also in the inherent question of the reasoning process leading to those policies. The practice of deliberation is reliant upon a rationality that reasons with questions (1999, 244).

Thus, I advocate argument born via critical rationality as central to the process of civic deliberation for its requirement of both rhetoric and dialectic. All rationality is not the same. Democracy in the form of dominant governance (i.e. American Democracy) often relies upon *formal or procedural rationality*,<sup>9</sup> the rules and norms presiding over the interaction of a governing discourse. This form of rationality is more rule-governed reason than critical inquiry. *Substantive rationality*, or the rationality born in the marriage of action and inquiry, is the more essential aspect of democratic decision because it requires both political participation and social questioning. Procedural rationality often gives guise of democratic decision making through political action but may not involve engaging in a conversation of questions (i.e. dialectic). The critical process of inquiry does not discard the procedural norms of formal rationality, but rather is open to the renovation of means concerning the deliberative exchange. Thus, critical rationality may be seen as a form of substantive rationality whose reasons and questions are reflexively focused on elements of social justice.

In attempting to understand how it is that music may invoke “critical rationality,” I am attempting to renovate the means of the deliberative process to include musical thought on social justice. Instead of deeming popular music as a derogatory presence for the invocation of civic action, we should turn instead to a conceptualization of music as a variant mean of argument.<sup>10</sup> I do not discard traditional concepts of reason; rather, I advocate a concept of public reason necessary to the public sphere that is critical,

---

<sup>9</sup> Habermas (1964, 1998) describes via Rawls and Weber the distinctions between formal and substantive rationalities described here.



concerned with the end goal of social criticism via the egalitarian cooperation of people. Understanding the way popular music allows for this invocation of questions on social justice is perhaps no where better illustrated than in the life and music of Woody Guthrie.<sup>11</sup>

### **WOODY GUTHRIE, POPULAR AMERICAN FOLK, AND THE CULTIVATION OF CRITICAL RATIONALITY**

Woody Guthrie was born in the middle of the summer, July 14, 1912, Okemah, Oklahoma. After suffering a series of personal losses during his childhood, and in the midst of the ensuing Great Depression which was turning Oklahoma into a dustbowl of deprivation, Woody moved west. After landing briefly in Texas in 1931, he moved toward California, like many others after him, to make a living. In 1937 he earned a spot on Los Angeles radio station KFVD and on Mexican station XELO. He soon garnered wide public attention “singing the old country songs that reminded him of home” (PBS, Volume 2).

Guthrie took the sounds of songs from his native roots and adapted them with new words that highlighted the oppression experienced within those vernacular communities. He sets the standard for how popular music may break dominant discourse by engaging in social criticism through an art form that resonated on a mass scale, but concerned itself

---

<sup>10</sup> This should not be confused with stating that music should only be seen as a mode of argumentation and civic discourse, but rather that its role as such is of extreme significance to its function within publics. Music has many, many guises.

<sup>11</sup> The historical narrative of Woody Guthrie used in this analysis is itself composed of a variety of popular sources (Woody Guthrie: A Life by Joe Klien, America Roots Music Volume 2 by PBS, Woody Guthrie’s Bound for Glory, and the Woody Guthrie biography from Guthrie archives, etc) and could/should be critiqued for the role of cultural memory in the construction of truth claims. However this is not the goal of this project, and I would simply assert that the texts here give a vision of Guthrie’s generic significance, regardless of the “truth, via the contestation of different texts which tell the story of his presence within our popular music culture.

primarily with the problems of vernacular voices. The marriage here of Guthrie's public action and social inquiry invites a critical engagement from the audience.

This critical engagement, however, relies upon both commodity elements of music and rhetorical elements of music in order to enact critical rationality on a mass scale. As such, its character as "popular" music becomes crucial to the way in which it engenders a democratic engagement. In this section I will highlight how commodity elements of music integrate with rhetorical elements of music for the cultivation of critical thought. There are many critical moments within Guthrie's popular music presence, but the following examples have been chosen specifically for their showcasing of an intersection between 1) artistic authenticity and the popular folk genre, 2) political persuasion as part of commercial product, 3) dialogic multivocality and musical/industrial innovation, and 4) characteristics of music as public discourse enabled in technology.

### **Authenticity and Genre**

One of the first aspects of the commodity described in this chapter was the issue of artistic authenticity and alienation from the artist's work. Guthrie's authenticity as an artist becomes central to his figure as a popular music icon. In fact his ability to tap into vernacular communities is a strong part of the marketing of Guthrie to a contemporary musical audience. Guthrie's biography at his online archives suggests that Woody becomes a recognized voice in American popular music through his "identification with outsider status" just prior to his move to New York in 1939:

Never one to become comfortable in a place for too long, in 1939 Woody headed east for New York City, where he was embraced for his Steinbeckian homespun wisdom and musical “authenticity” by leftist organizations, artists, writers, musicians, and other intellectuals. “I sang at a hundred IWO [international Workers’ Order] lodges and met every color and kind of human being you can imagine.” (woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm)

It is his practice as a social advocate, and his experiences talking with “every color and kind of human being you can imagine” that allows him to retain an “authentic” relationship to his music. Similar artistic relationships to authenticity evolve within the music of Bruce Springsteen. Bruce Springsteen’s career has been made in large part by his abilities to identify to the stories of ordinary people. And though the examination of *The Rising* will note the significance of identifying with “outsider voices” for the cultivation of critical rationality, his abilities to tell the story of ordinary voices does link him to similar conceptions of authenticity.

But for Guthrie, as with independent artists of today, that authenticity is simultaneously invoked to brand him in a particular manner to a mass popular audience. Even as an authentic relationship to his music remained central to Guthrie’s role within the popular, he experienced an alienation from his work because of the confines of operating within the industrial realm of mass popular music:

Becoming increasingly restless and disillusioned with New York’s radio and entertainment industry, Woody writes: “I got disgusted with the whole sissified and nervous rules of censorship on all my songs and ballads, and drove off down the road across the southern states again.”(woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm)

He writes of this alienation in his songs as well, relying upon the convention of the genre to voice radical political arguments. Consider the following lyrics from “I don’t like the way:”

I don't like the way this FBI's a treatin' me

I don't like the way the spies are treatin' me

I just don't like the way these guys are treatin' me,

Poor me, it's the lockup if I speak my mind about it.

Attempting to engage in a critical commentary in a mass public sphere often means questioning the dominant system that produces mass culture. Consequently, musical form becomes a more palatable way to disseminate otherwise “radical” messages. As authenticity is negotiated in the medium of mass popular culture, popular music actually becomes a more digestible form for insurgent critique, authenticating rather than alienating the artist from his or her messages. In this case, popular music locates critical insight and challenge to the status quo in an entertainment medium, and thus somewhat escapes the political crackdown and censorship that constrains that work. Notions of authenticity are continually negotiated alongside questions of alienation from one’s artistic work in the limitations from the dominant of the entertainment industry. Yet, the form retains some space for musical production of arguments against that constraining force.

The precarious combination of authenticity, alienation, and counterpublicity of musical dissent actually mimic the role of critical rationality, and can be seen in view of the artists and music up for discussion in the remainder of this project. The Dixie Chicks experience alienation from mass culture similarly to Guthrie as Clear Channel and local

radio stations engaged in bans of their music for speaking against President George W. Bush. Steve Earle chose distribution within more limited musical circles to retain his political authenticity. He quotes his music as best suited for independent and public radio as opposed to mass corporate radio play long before to his controversial release of “John Walker’s Blues.” In fact, the struggle for musical authenticity within the genre of insurgent popular music may be as much about preserving one’s political self as one’s musical self. Nonetheless, the convention of mass musical genre aids the dissemination of otherwise radical messages, in much the same way that some vernacular cultures relied upon musical creation to speak of oppression amidst stifling conditions.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the form makes possible authenticity. *This struggle for an authentic voice illustrates the presence of critical thought within the popular, bringing together the commodity elements of authenticity and alienation with the rhetorical elements of conventional music genre.*

### **Persuasion and Product**

Woody Guthrie was instrumental to the creation of the genre of popular folk music, taking music with a conscience to a mass audience and solidifying the political nature of popular folk music.<sup>13</sup> At the moment of its invention, popular American folk became an entity within the entertainment industry that was as much about its vernacular

---

<sup>12</sup> This is similar to the use of hymns and the Negro spiritual as vernacular argumentation about the social conditions of slaves in 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

<sup>13</sup> Folk music is not necessarily popular. Folk music is unheard by a mass audience in the some of the most impoverished and culturally rich places in the world. What unites unpopular folk music with its popular sibling is the connection to social criticism. Therefore, when I suggest a genre of “popular folk music” or “popular American folk music” this is to differentiate it in form and function from the folk music that has not been processed by the popular music industry and as such has not reached a mass audience. Those musics may have similar political functions but operate squarely within the realm of the vernacular.

ties and political import as its distinct musical style. John Steinbeck wrote of Guthrie's influence:

Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he has any other name. He is just a voice and guitar. *He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people.* Harsh voiced and nasal, his guitar hanging like tire iron on a rusty rim, there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more important for those who will listen. *There is the will of the people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit.* (Klein, p.166, emphasis added)

The union of people, oppression, and the American spirit reverberates not only through the musical legacy of Woody Guthrie, but in the packaging of American popular folk music itself. As such, the commodity of popular folk music takes on an implicit nationalism is used to differentiate it as a commercial product. Nationalism itself has a duplicitous and complex role in the consumption and production of our popular culture; however, the significance of its embedded-ness here, within Guthrie's music, places ideologies of nationalism as specific attributes of popular folk that attempt to relocate the interests of a nation state in the interests of its people. Human perseverance and goals of social criticism become ideological components of the kind of nationalism packaged in the genre of popular folk music as a whole. Consider Guthrie's legacy in the field of popular music:

Woody Guthrie continued to write songs and perform with the Almanac Singers, the politically radical singing group of the late 1940's, some of whose members would later reform as the Weavers, the most commercially successful and

influential folk music group of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Managed by Harold Leventhal, a trusted friend and confidante, and supported by music publisher Howie Richmond, the Almanacs helped establish folk music as a viable commercial entity within the popular music industry.

([www.woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm](http://www.woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm))

This passage is significant in that it locates the foundation of popular folk music in the hands of some of the most politically radical musical groups of popular music history, whom follow the path set out by Guthrie. The selling point of folk music to this day is very much connected to its political ends. Similarly to how authenticity is negotiated via political authenticity within the genre of folk music, *its commodity function as product for distribution is mitigated via its rhetorical ends of political persuasion and social change*. Folk becomes “a viable commercial entity” in large part because it is a political product. Perhaps even more significantly, folk becomes a viable political product in part because of its character as a commercial entity. This changes previous notions of both popular music and folk music:

*The songs that Guthrie was creating were infused with a quality absent from most of the slick pop songs of the day--a sense of social conscious. He'd go on to write many songs, well over a 1000, but the ones he'd be remembered for were the ones that reflected his conviction that songs could actually bring about social change. It was the start of an attitude about roots music and what it could do.* (PBS American Roots Music Volume 2, emphasis added)

Thus, the establishment of popular American folk music as rhetorically instrumental and concerned with social action marks it as a particular kind of musical product. Its

persuasive power and goals of social change are literally part of its function as a commodity. When coupling its character as political argument with its character as a commercial product, we notice open the path for entertaining critical rationality through music on a mass scale. The musical artifacts of this dissertation rely upon their place within the industry and their signification of the American folk genre to act insurgently.

### **Multivocality and Innovation**

Though Guthrie does become the “role model for protest singers who emerged decades later” (American Roots Music, V2), he was certainly not alone in creating what popular folk music is today. In fact Guthrie’s significance is arguably reliant on the cacophony of musical voices who allowed him the space to flourish both musically and politically:

Lead Belly, Cisco Houston, Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, Will Geer, Sony Terry, Brownie McGhee, Josh White, Millard Lampell, Bess Hawes, Sis Cunningham, among others, became Woody’s friends and collaborators, taking up such social causes as Union organizing, anti-Fascism, strengthening the Communist party, and generally fighting for the things they believed in the only way they knew how: through political songs of protest. ([www.woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm](http://www.woodyguthrie.org/biography.htm))

Woody Guthrie’s place in the genre of popular folk music must be understood as a strong, but single, voice among many. If we follow Lipsitz on popular music as “the product of an ongoing historical conversation” (p. xx), then Guthrie becomes an indelible part of the dialogic nature of American popular music, but best understood via his musical conversations and collaborations in the context of others. In fact when Woody



left New York, disenchanted with the big city scene of capitalist profit, he enters into tough times in part because he left behind those voices who had informed some of his best work:

He'd [Guthrie] run away from filth and capitalist temptations of the big city all right, but he'd also left behind Lead Belly, Aunt Molly, Pete Seeger, Cisco, Nick ray, and Alan [Lomax]---the very people who had finally shown him what he was all about. (Klien, p. 184)

This collaboration and multivocality becomes an integral aspect of understanding its innovative character within the field of popular music as a whole. Artistic collaboration allowed too for innovation in sound, producing a richness that was soon found to be a viable commercial product. The characteristics of music that keep us communicating with our past (dialogic) are also the evidence of the innovation that makes popular folk a distinguishable commodity and a continual part of popular music future.

This blending of multiple voices within the popularization of folk was instrumental to its economic success and the bourgeoning of popular music genres. Popular folk music requires multiple voices from multiple peoples and a mixture of sounds. Though I have chosen to focus on the abilities of critical rationality to surface in spheres rooted more strongly in white, roots music tradition, southern black culture greatly influenced American folk music. That innovation was especially crucial in terms of the proliferation of new sounds. Lead Belly and Cisco, native African-American southern blues musicians, were foremost in the innovation and popularization of folk music far before Woody Guthrie. They developed a sound of American blues music that

can be heard today in almost every popular music genre, and particularly in the prevalence of hip hop as a successful popular music genre.

The insurgency of contemporary genres of hip hop and rap music yields a greater understanding of the tension between product and persuasion in the multivocality of mass popular music. As Craig Watkins argues in *Hip Hop Matters*,

Hip hop never asked to change the world. But in its own noisy and stylish way it has done just that...In addition to being a pop culture force, hip hop's widening sphere of influence has shouldered it with the burden of being a genuine political force...the struggle for hip hop is real, and is being played out in a remarkably rich and varied terrain—in pop culture, old and new media, colleges and universities, in prisons, through the conduit of community activism, in suburbia, among youth, and throughout the political minefields of race and gender. (2005, p.6)

It is important to recognize the political importance of hip hop and rap as fields of music with historical lineages to the same vernacular resistance, and a similar (if not greater) force within mass culture, as American folk music.<sup>14</sup> Although hip hop as a genre does not emerge until the mid 1970s, with the changing urban landscape, its roots to the

---

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the similar invocation of political argumentation from oppressed communities, there are literal analogies between American roots music and hip hop and rap music. Namely, spoken word collaborations between Woody and Lead belly have been referenced as a location to trace the same kind of political interventionist lyricizing that is emblematic of rap music. Furthermore, the social positioning of Lead belly as a former prison inmate paved his place within popular culture. His prison release was the result of his musical abilities, and the story of his incarceration became an irrefutable aspect of his public performances (PBS). Although he owed his career in large part to the Lomaxes, the men required Lead belly to perform in prison attire. Finally, Lead belly left the Lomaxes so he could perform in regular clothing, but his storied past had already spectacularized his presence within the popular. The use of race and class to further marginalize and de-legitimate musical artists and forms, while those in power may profit from them, is the same dominant act that haunts rap and hip hop artists today.

historical oppression of vernacular voices is tantamount to its form. Hip hop and rap are essentially mass voicings of “the everyday struggles of working class blacks and the urban poor” (Decker, 1994, p. 101 taken from McLaren).

Similarly, the manner in which the commodification of folk music does not delimit Guthrie’s counterpublic argumentation, the political intervention of rap and hip hop are not automatically erased by the demands of the entertainment industry. McLaren argues that gangsta rap in particular functions as an “oppositional political practice” within the public sphere, that “despite the always present threat of commodification...still poses a serious challenge to the formation of new identities of resistance and social transformation” (1999, p.23 and p.55). In fact Watkins further argues that “whatever social or political impact hip hop has had on young people has come primarily in the world of popular culture” (2005, p.148). *In the multivocality of collaborative common voices and innovative sound, variant forms of insurgent popular music are able to simultaneously act as a product and persuasion, tracing their heritage to the American roots music tradition while occupying a place within the popular music industry that serves as a platform for talking to people on a mass scale.*

### **Publics and Technology**

From Chapter One and subsequent discussions of publics we have already established the particularities of public spheres in relation to popular culture and popular music. Woody Guthrie is perhaps the preeminent archetype of how popular culture can work as a vital component of the public sphere. Though I have already argued political persuasion through commodification as an aspect of Guthrie’s potential to cultivate

critical rationality, understanding those political messages as a part of a public sphere is a slightly different task. It requires scholars to ask not just what the music does, or even how a kind of music is viewed by the audience, but what popular music makes room for citizens to do. In this section, I will highlight how Guthrie's presence in the popularization of American folk music acts as public address and public discourse shaping the look of the sphere and setting the stage for musical community building and the emergence of music as public modality.

Guthrie's legacy appears as a public address, public discourse, and a public modality. The foundational elements of Guthrie's place within the popular evolve from his music, with those lyrics and songs serving as the traditional site of public address or rhetorical inquiry. His most famous anthem, "This Land Is Your Land," acts very much as any political speech might. The song relies upon repetition of phrases, "This Land is your land, this land is my land....this land was made for you and me", similar to the way in which Martin Luther King's repetition of "I have a dream..." marks the thesis of the message within the minds of audiences. Furthermore, he relies upon the sound of songs already familiar to those who might listen. The sound of "This Land" was borrowed from the sound of the Carter Family's<sup>15</sup> "Little Darlin', Pal of Mine," (which they had actually borrowed from the old Baptist hymn "Oh My Lovin' Brother"). As an element of public address, the music works to conjure familiar locations within the minds of listeners.

---

<sup>15</sup> The Carter Family was instrumental in their own right to popularizing southern white vernacular, and have been labeled the founding voices of popular country music if not popular music as a whole. Discovered in the famous Bristol Recording sessions in 1927, The Carter Family became the most popular country music trio of the 1930's. They took indigenous folk musics from native Virginia and sang them for a mass audience. Today the Carter Family is most widely recognized for Maybelle's daughter June Carter and her musical marriage to Johnny Cash. Thus Woody's use of their sound in "Little Darlin', Pal of

As a public discourse, however, we have to look beyond the lyrics and sound to the entirety of how we see Woody Guthrie functioning within a mass public. If public address functions are the particular and purposeful speech acts that happen within the public sphere, public discourse looks at those speech acts in concert with the assembly of signifiers that impact those messages. In Guthrie's case, the subsequent performance of his public persona does much to impact his functioning in the public sphere. On March 17, 1956, the folk community gathered to host a benefit concert for Guthrie, who now had little way to pay for his medical care or his children's education. Though he literally spoke not once at that 1956 concert, his songs and writings were displayed for a sold out audience. It was the beginning of a "Guthrian" discourse in the public sphere:

Years later, Seeger and others would look back on the evening as an important moment in the rebirth of the folk music revival. It was more than that though: it was the beginning of Woody's canonization. (Klein, 1999, p.432)

As Shumway notes, "performance thus carries the sense of being for an audience" (2000, p.189). Though Guthrie's own performance of his work acts as public address and sets the stage for emergent discourses, others "performance" of him, through literal reproduction of song or invocation in their own songs, allows for a Guthrian public discourse to continually circulate in the public sphere. All of the artists and music up for critique in this dissertation have occupied a space not only within the discourse of popular American folk, but also in the discourse of Guthrie himself. Bruce Springsteen has been relentlessly tied to Guthrie through the spirit of Americana invoked in his work,

---

Mine," would have resonated loudly within the minds of his listeners and tied it to their folk tradition as well.

Steve Earle has written directly about Guthrie's relevance to politics in the song "Goodbye Woody Guthrie," and all of the artists have made Guthrie's work part of their public performances.

Country singer Marty Stuart suggested of Guthrie in the PBS documentary *American Roots Music* that:

Woody was a bit of a teacher in my opinion. *He showed me that you could take a guitar into the middle of injustice and do something about it...*The guitar ain't just for entertaining on Saturday night to a bunch of mom and pop folks, sometimes it's a weapon. (PBS American Roots Music Volume 2, emphasis added)

Guthrie's musical legacy serves as a powerful mode of public argument because of his activity in vernacular counterpublics. In invoking a counterpublic critique, he taught generations of others to see music in its possibilities to question, critique, and act as a weapon for fighting injustice.

In his use of music as modality, Guthrie galvanizes others with shared interests in folk music as civic discourse. Today many of these people congregate yearly in Okemah, Oklahoma for the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival. The festival, like many other folk festivals that spring up within small communities across the country, bring thousands of people yearly to listen to new and emerging artists in the tradition of Guthrie. These festivals form communities, if only for a short while, that sing together, dance together, eat together, camp together, and come together centered on the power of music to act as a force for social change.

The functions of music as public address, discourse, and modality, are intrinsically tied to the technologies of mass popular culture. Because music as public

address requires more than the recording of language on page, because it requires sound to go with that language, the advent of technological innovations are essential to understanding the reverberation of Guthrie in the public sphere.

Part of Woody's eminent place in the public sphere is that he began creating music at the same time that the technology of being able to capture roots music on record became a viable option.<sup>16</sup> In the summer of 1933, John Lomax received funds from the Library of Congress, Macmillan and Companies, and charitable foundations to travel across the south recording the music of black inmates and indigenous "American roots" music. His son was Alan Lomax, who in finding these songs "not only beautiful and compelling but *political*" (Klein, 1999, p.147), began searching out and recording various forms of "popular folk" music. In 1940 he recorded Woody Guthrie in a series of conversations and songs for the Library of Congress which, alongside Guthrie's recordings for Moses Asch for Folkways Records, allows us to now access Guthrie as a voice of the public sphere. Remember, the major difference between popular music and classical music in our abilities to study and "know" it epistemologically lie in the absence of score within the popular. Therefore, the recording becomes instrumental to our understanding of Guthrie's music as critical voice in the popular.

Perhaps the best counterexample of this is the work of Joe Hill, a revolutionary protest singer from just two decades earlier whose work is hardly recognized within our popular culture. Though he can be heard in Guthrie's voice, who read and learned much

---

<sup>16</sup> Viable is perhaps an overstatement. Raising the funds for the project was a daunting task and the equipment needed to save the sounds of roots music was a 350-pound Presto recording machine. Traveling and employing its use was itself quite daunting. The recordings are immensely significant.

of Hill's "Little Red Songbook," and the voice of the Almanac Singers, who received much of Hill's private papers from Hill's former intimate partner Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Hill's own musical voice is mostly left to our imagination. Guthrie's recordings of this time period continue to be touchstones for rising singer-songwriters in a way that Hill's music cannot. *Technological innovation is imperative to understanding in the epistemological function of popular music as a public voice.*

### **EMERGING INSURGENCY IN POPULAR MUSIC**

The role of Woody Guthrie in the emergence of American popular culture illustrates how those vernacular voices emerge in the intersection of commodity and rhetorical functions of the popular music landscape; "Woody Guthrie's music—more his spirit—remain as powerful as ever, and *his musical descendents have taken a permanent place on the vital periphery of American popular culture*" (Klein, 1999, p.470, emphasis mine). Modern musical texts have brought Guthrie back into the mainstream at various times in history. Bob Dylan's first album, which marked his own presence as folk artist within our popular culture, showcases his "Song to Woody", singing:

Hey, Woody Guthrie, but I know that you know  
All the things that I'm a-sayin' and a-many times more.  
I'm a singin' you the song, but I can't sing enough,  
'Cause there's not many men that done the things you've done.

As early as 1962, just 6 years past the benefit concert that began Woody's circulation as musical icon, Dylan begins the process to solidify Woody as a powerful and active voice of the people. Because Guthrie used popular music as an instrument of social change, he



locates a political power in the popularization of music that speaks from the location of counterpublics but resounds in the mass sphere, in order to make his social critique.

Most recently Irish folk singer Billy Bragg and American country-folk band Wilco teamed together to not merely sing songs of Guthrie, but to give life to some of the most promising unsung ballads left in Guthrie's final estate:

In her original letter to me, Nora talked of breaking the mould, of working *with* her father to give his words a new song and a new context. The result is not a tribute album but collaboration between Woody Guthrie and a new generation of singer songwriters who until now had only glimpsed him fleetingly, over the shoulder of Bob Dylan or somewhere in the distance of a Bruce Springsteen song.

(Billy Bragg, in the cover of *Mermaid Avenue*, 1998)

The album, titled *Mermaid Avenue*<sup>17</sup> for the place where Guthrie last lived and wrote, showcases Guthrie's own songs about gender equality ("She came along to me"), the humanitarian and socialist principles of Jesus Christ ("Christ for president"), and the fight for labor and union rights ("I guess I planted"). The significance of this album is that Woody Guthrie's political voice not only attaches itself to the multivocality of popular music, but is actually recontextualized to ask political questions in a new time. This

---

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the songs of this album, like the rest of Guthrie's career, are not entirely political. Jeff Tweedy of Wilco may have noted this best, stating, "The political side of Woody to me is more obvious and him writing about Ingrid Bergmann isn't." Though the political side is what allows those rooted in his musical tradition to make social criticism an argument of the public, it is important to note that our political selves are always rooted in our social selves, and that our social selves love many things beyond the realm of politics. Love songs, sad songs, frivolous songs dot Guthrie's career in the same way that they dot the careers of popular musicians today. Both the social and political natures of music are important and neither should be seen as exclusive of the other. Rather, understanding the more social nature of political persuasion and action may lead us to better ways to cultivate democratic concern and deliberation on a mass scale.

coupling of multivocality with recontextualization will be seen in the following chapters as we watch insurgent popular musicians invoke new meaning over the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Thus, it is the simultaneity within a mass popular culture and the genre of American folk that allows the musicians and musics of this dissertation to interrupt hegemonic ideas, breaking the silence of a dominant sphere. In signifying the sound and message of the history of American folk, musical cues now carry with them ideological cues of social critique that allow music to act as argument. Asking questions of social justice becomes imbedded in the form of the music itself. It is against this backdrop of dominant mass culture that the political work of insurgent artists holds power. As Woody himself suggests:

The world is filled with people who are no longer needed- and who try to make slaves of all of us- and they have their music and we have ours- theirs, the wasted songs of a superstitious nightmare- and *without their musical and ideological miscarriages to compare our song of freedom to, we'd not have any opposite to compare our music with-*and like the drifting wind, hitting against no obstacle, we'd never know its speed, it's power. (Private papers published in the notes to *Mermaid Avenue*, 1998, emphasis added)

Like the back and forth of an argumentative exchange, insurgent popular music carries its sounds of freedom in large part by countering the weight of those who infringe on freedom.

American nationalist ideologies often mediate the way in which music is able to entreat public audiences to deliberation. Coming to a better understanding ideologies of

nationalism as both a hegemonic discourse of the public sphere and a place for identification and democratic engagement within public culture, will become the next task of this dissertation. I will now turn to the 2002 release of Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*, to illustrate how the very ideologies of nationalism imbedded in American folk now illustrate the density of therapeutic silence to be overcome by insurgent artists in post 9/11 America.

## Chapter Four: Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising* and the Power of National Unification Post-9/11

Bruce Springsteen has long been considered a prophetic voice of American popular culture. His folk-like lyrics have been compared to those of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Dylan Thomas, and John Steinbeck. He has served an evolutionary function of the rock 'n roll narrative in connecting to real, working people. And like his folk tradition, he has often voiced concern for causes he supported, for Vietnam veterans, Amnesty International, and the rejuvenation of New Jersey's Asbury Park. But until the 2004 presidential election, Bruce Springsteen had never publicly voiced concrete dissent against any U.S. administration.<sup>18</sup>

It follows then, that when Springsteen's *The Rising*, a tribute to those lost in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, was released nine months after 9/11, his voice was that of an American poet, not American dissident. Kurt Loder's review of the album characterizes the work as wading

into the wreckage and pain of that horrendous event and emerges bearing fifteen songs that genuflect with enormous grace before the sorrows that drift in its wake. The small miracle of his accomplishment is that at no point does he give vent to the anger felt by so many Americans: the hunger for revenge. The music is often fierce in its execution, but in essence it is a requiem for those who perished in that sudden inferno, and those who died trying to save them. Springsteen grandly salutes their innocence and their courage, and holds out a hand to those who

---

<sup>18</sup> Information taken from various sources, including *Rolling Stone*, *Racing in the Street: The Bruce Springsteen Reader*, and Laborlawtalk.com encyclopedic entry for Bruce Springsteen.

mourn them, who seek the comfort of an explanation for the inexplicable. (Loder, *Rolling Stone*, 8/22/2002)

The album refuses revenge. However, the absence of anger and revenge is not same as the voicing of social critique. As the album does not question the events, it acts to comfort and console. In Springsteen's *The Rising*, dissent and democratic engagement give way to catharsis and therapeutic concern.

The questions then become: a) Where are ideologies of nationalism fruitful sites of identification for the purpose of critical deliberation; and b) Where do they function as hegemonic, unifying barriers, shielding out critical questions? With respect to the music of American folk and Woody Guthrie, nationalism unified a disparate mixture of impoverished perils for working class Americans. It named that struggle as a chiefly American struggle to be incorporated into the responsibilities of American politics. However, the ordinary voices represented in Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*, are a populist vernacular rather than a counterpublic vernacular. The invocation works ideologically to reinforce rather than challenge a dominant public sphere.

This chapter will investigate how ideologies of nationalism have the capacity to act as both a hegemonic discourse and a place for civic identification and democratic engagement within publics. After examining the context of U.S. nationalism post 9/11, I will turn to a textual analysis of major American papers coverage of *The Rising* tour and release. Within that coverage, I will illustrate that Bruce's Springsteen's *The Rising* relies upon therapeutic grief and renewal, ideological unity, and populist appeals, in order to invoke nationalism supportive of the administration and its policies. Where populist

ideology masks as vernacular dissent, the emergence of democratic nationalism is unlikely. Ironically, it may be Springsteen's legacy as the voice of ordinary Americans that ultimately allows *The Rising* to serve the interests of a dominant U.S. public.

Given these perceived effects of Springsteen's *The Rising*, I will argue for a necessary distinction between the populist representation of vernacular voices, and the counterpublicity of vernacular dissent. This distinction is crucial, as the representation of working class people in this instance may serve to bolster a nationalism that is in opposition to their interests. As the case study of Springsteen's *The Rising* will attest, popular music's deliberative potential requires a democratic nationalism based in the voicing of counterpublicity, not steeped in the guise of representational populism.

#### **POST 9/11 AMERICAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE**

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on U.S. soil gave way to the rise of an all-consuming expression of U.S. allegiances to the nation. Consider Neil Smelser's portrait of post-9/11 America in his analysis of cultural trauma:

*Strong patriotic sentiments were a part of the picture of community solidarity.*

The American flag was displayed universally—a baffling and alarming scene to some foreign witnesses who imagined the negative side of what such displays might mean in their own countries. More than one observer remarked that Halloween in October, Thanksgiving in November, and Christmas in December of 2001 resembled the Fourth of July in their symbolism and national spirit.

(2004, p. 269, emphasis added)

These images upheld a conciliatory patriotism, discarding the exercise of critical questioning in favor of a supportive and silent consensus. Similar to previous instances of societal trauma, displays of nationhood and alignment with national identity were so strong that disassociating from those sentiments left one labeled traitorous and unpatriotic. The space for dissent was so constrained that elected U.S. officials, not just ordinary citizens, felt obliged to quiet critical questions:

By the end of October 2001, a panic-stricken congress had acceded to the executive branch's demands for broad new powers in a major piece of legislation titled the USA PATRIOT act. The act's new crime of "domestic terrorism" threatens to criminalize protest activities and stifle dissent. (Chang, 2002, p. 13)

The nationalism enacted post 9/11 became stifling, building solidarity through fear of otherness and silent support for "American" values. A year later, the national public is still silenced. Rather than shattering the silence with critical questions about American foreign policy, leaders harnessed the grief of a mourning country as consent for international conflict. Consequently, the silence leaves more than an individualized and stupefied citizenry, it actually gives way to an irrational, but collective, consent for American action. The newly "*Affected Public*," is

*an irrational artificial social construct that enforces emotional identification over heterogeneity and dissent. An affected public – a public artificially constructed in terms of shared affect rather than shared interests or shared reasoning – is potentially a distorted and imperiled one.* (Cloud, 2003)

The same American values that journalists celebrate as they radiate from Springsteen's *The Rising* are thus the opiate of an affected public. Shelah Burney remarks through the

work of Edward Said that, “cultural artifacts and cultural capital—as constructed through narrative, memory, story, and history—generate an iconic sense of overt nationalism, differentiating the heroic *us* from the unwashed *them*—the hordes, the *other*—who inhabit the rest of the world. Culture as conceived in this manner becomes a “protective enclosure,” divorced from politics and “antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations,” (2002). As chronic nationalism enters to aid a wounded country, it factors out civic elements of critical thought and deliberation in favor of protection from the other; “the attacks of September 11, 2001 also deeply influenced how Americans understand themselves and perceive their relationships to the rest of the world...at the core was a call to intensely nationalistic patriotism” (Coy, Maney, Woehrle, 2003, p. 464-465).

#### **NEGOTIATING THERAPEUTIC NATIONALISM IN U.S. COVERAGE OF *THE RISING***

Although there was controversy surrounding Springsteen’s post 9/11 album, those moments did not concern the role of citizens in publics. Rather, the most controversial questions raised about *The Rising* were a) whether or not it had capitalized too much on the terror attacks to promote a musical work; and b) whether or not in that focus, the album had too badly dated its contribution to popular music. Popular music critics instantly praised the album, being the first of the year to receive a full five star rating from *Rolling Stone*. Critics who did challenge this appraisal grounded their arguments aesthetically, questioning whether the sentimentality of the score undercut Springsteen’s musical contribution.



The voices of citizens echo critics' reactions to Springsteen's *The Rising*. Reviews posted on Amazon.com in the week following the album's release herald the album on the basis of its therapeutic sentimentality or note the compilation's weaknesses on musical rather than political grounds. Positive reviewers note the album's "brilliance" in its inspiration and healing quality. Consider the reasoning these examples use to praise *The Rising*:

★★★★★ **bruce at his best** I've been a Springsteen fan for 25 years but haven't been thrilled with any of his albums since "Born to Run". It's always been about his live shows. But this cd changes that...*it's brilliant*. I'm only on my 4th listen, but this is, in my opinion, the best studio release he's ever done. *Sure, it's a tribute to 9/11 victims, but it's inspiring - not depressing*. ALL the songs are great, and if you read along with the lyrics you'll probably shed a tear or two, but overall it's exciting and uplifting. Bruce's best...and the best cd of the year so far. (A music fan, emphasis added, July 30, 2002)

★★★★★ **Caution: This cd will make you cry** Stunning, as good as anything he has ever done. *He brilliantly captures the raw searing pain and insurmountable grief of that horrific day in September*. To get background for some of these songs he contacted widows of firefighters whose dead husbands were big Springsteen fans. Hence a lot of the lyrics are based on the lives and histories of real people and real families trying to cope with their loss. *Bruce Springsteen has always preached the healing powers of Rock and Roll. In "The Rising" he succeeds in sharing our loss of 9/11, and giving us the hope that things will get better set to gorgeous lyrics and music*. I can't think of another artist who could have taken on

such a huge project and succeeded with such dignity and grace. An 11 on a scale of 1-10 (David, emphasis added, July 30, 2002)

While I will note the context of album reviews as a place for deliberation in the next chapter concerning Steve Earle, here the reviews offer only parallel monologues. The following negative reviews do not speak to the positive, but rather critique purely within the realm of aesthetics:

☆☆☆☆☆ **Less than expected** After hearing all the hype and media push I was expecting a ton more from this album. Being a Bruce fan from the early days, *I was hoping for a return to the bigger, "movie-like" songs of the past. This album has Bruce again in "simple" mode...simple nursery-rhyme type melodies, a few boring standard chords. It all sounds so obvious. Why can't Bruce say the same message with some more interesting chord changes or a little musical flare?* I'm sure the band could handle it. In some cases less is really less, Bruce. Don't believe the media...listen to your friends copy before buying this one. (Bruce Fan Kevin, emphasis added, July 30, 2002)

☆☆☆☆☆ **Nothing here for people under 40** I bought this album based on reviews over the weekend pre-release. *Honestly, I find it very boring and simple. The melodies repeat over and over and have nothing interesting about them.* Maybe if you were a Bruce Springsteen fan from the "glory days", you can find some nostalgic connection with this stuff, but if you are into modern music you will find it *very tedious to listen to.* (Fonzie, emphasis added, July 30, 2002)

Controversial deliberation does not take place here. Rather, arguments about the simple mindedness and lack of musical innovation on the album stand alongside praise for the album based not in its musical prowess but in its poetic-therapeutic function.

This general lack of political controversy in these comments from consumers, coupled with its quick and immense popularity,<sup>19</sup> suggests that Springsteen's album was received in corollary ideological alignment with the audience and its perceived interests. *The Rising* was determined to be a healing tonic for a grieving nation, recognizing the pain of national bereavement, yet offering hope in the shadow of crisis. In short, it did not call us to question, but it made us feel better. Consider this columnist's account of the tour's stop in Houston:

This second reunion tour, which stopped at Compaq Center on Monday night, was about much more. *In the wake of this country's most horrid tragedy in the last 50 years, this tour was about a renewal of spirit.* This tour, in support of the new album *The Rising*, is much more of a return to the thematic blue-collar revivals that made the group international stars on the *Born in the USA* tour. The difference is the message. Where Bruce Springsteen spent the mid-1980s telling the American story in songs about misguided patriotism and a nostalgia for a bygone era, *The Rising* is inspired by the new types of heroes that have risen in this country. *The characters in these songs are damaged. They grieve, rebuild and are stronger for it.* Not once during the 2 1/2-hour set was the tragedy of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks mentioned by name. *The survival instinct that spread across*

---

<sup>19</sup> "[The Rising](http://www.rockonthenet.com/artists-s/brucepringsteen_main.htm) topped the Billboard Top 200 LP chart selling over 525, 000 copies in its first week of release in the US." ([http://www.rockonthenet.com/artists-s/brucepringsteen\\_main.htm](http://www.rockonthenet.com/artists-s/brucepringsteen_main.htm))

*this country, however, is captured in the songs from The Rising.* (Michael Clark, Houston Chronicle, 11/05/2002, emphasis added)

This emphasis on both “horrid tragedy” and “renewal of spirit” relegates Springsteen’s *The Rising* to a therapeutic discourse. In this instance, a therapeutic nationalism emerges over a democratic nationalism as the album comes to echo (silently) the “survival instinct that spread across this country” over a civic responsibility to ask critical questions. Such exigencies of therapeutic nationalism are complex negotiations in relation to dominant American values:

The therapeutic discourse of healing, emotional support, identity constitution and maintenance, spiritual growth, and personal identification has been a natural ally of liberalism and capitalism. The therapeutic is rooted in liberalism’s assumptions about how change happens and how problems are solved. (Cloud, 1998, p. 160)

The release of *The Rising* serves as a valuable counter example of how popular music can serve as a rhetoric of therapy over a rhetoric of dissent, even with Springsteen’s strong and historical alliance with the voice of vernacular, working-class cultures. Ironically, Springsteen’s legacy as the voice of ordinary people now serves to bolster his credibility within the realm of post 9/11 therapeutic citizenship. American citizenship is practiced in the celebration and memorializing of a vernacular now integrated into the dominant vision of post 9/11 America. Consider Clark’s review further, that while the album is “a return to the thematic blue-collar revivals that made the group international stars,” it is also “inspired by the new types of heroes that have risen in this country” (Houston Chronicle, 11/05/2002). The voices now present in *The Rising* do not resonate with the counterpublic struggle of Springsteen’s previous work, but the

victimized ideological status of firefighters, police, airline attendants, and office workers of the post 9/11 period. They are not undervalued workers, but new American heroes. This is extremely significant; it makes room for ideological populism to serve as the guise of vernacular dissent.

In the next few pages, I will briefly sketch the density of therapeutic nationalism found in the U.S. coverage of *The Rising*'s release and performance, by highlighting the texts' identification to ideologies of a) grief, healing, and renewal, b) unity and community, and c) the substitution of populist appeals over counterpublic argument.

### **Grief, Healing, Renewal**

The emotional impact of music does not have to silence its deliberative potential; in fact, the power of music to invoke democratic dissent relies upon an emotional valence which will be further theorized in later chapters, and will need still further theorization beyond the scope of this project. However, few emotions lend themselves to critical civic inquiry. Grief, mourning, and the quest for healing leave little room to engage a text beyond its therapeutic function. Take into account these reviews of *The Rising*, in their desire for comfort and catharsis in the wake of 9/11:

Impressionistic rather than literal, Springsteen's commentary sidesteps specifics and instead seeps into "universal tales of love and community, evoking haunting images of that dreadful day even in the pre 9/11 My City of Ruins' rumination on New Jersey's Asbury Park. *The result is an emotionally vivid portrait of grief and renewal that encapsulates a nation's struggle for recovery and understanding.*

(Edna Gunderson, USA Today, 7/30/2002, emphasis added).

Locating the national struggle in an emotional grief and mourning relegates the agency of citizenship to the realm of consolation. Members of the nation are granted renewal only through reconciliation of a national portrait of grief. Consider the following review from the Arizona Republic:

Bruce Springsteen demonstrated Sunday night in Phoenix that world-class songwriting and seasoned performing *can help listeners deal with the grief* surrounding the impending anniversary of the Sept. 11th attacks on America, *honor the heroes that emerged and continue the healing process that will take years.* (Larry Rodgers, Arizona Republic, 8/26/2002)

According to this passage, Springsteen exercises a civic task of honoring heroes through the semblance of therapy. The honoring is inseparable from the healing process. The civic and therapeutic acts are inherently fused with Springsteen's savior like quality. Consider the veiled religious rhetoric depicting Springsteen as spiritual leader in The Washington Post:

We needed Bruce Springsteen even more than we thought, and we thought we needed him a lot. On Saturday night at MCI Center, the Boss and the merry posse of musicians called the E Street Band came *not merely to rock, but to heal.* And heal they did, in a 2 1/2-hour show that roused emotions spanning the full scope of human experience -- from *grief, despair and resignation to rapture, affirmation and hope...* There's always been ample emotional bandwidth to Springsteen's shows, but not to these extremes. It was as if he had decided *he wouldn't merely assert that the country will recover* from the wounds of Sept. 11 -- one theme of

his latest CD, *The Rising* -- but that *he would enact that recovery before our eyes.*

(David Segal, *The Washington Post*, 8/12/2002)

These reviews represent Springsteen as a powerful force for cultural catharsis, but not civic critique. In fact, *The Rising* performances do not merely provide an outlet for healing and recovery; they serve as a mode of recovery. The agency of citizens within the nation-state is relegated to therapy, not protest. A.O. Scott's review in *Slate* magazine outwardly attests to the therapeutic quality, suggesting:

Repetition, psychologists say, is part of the work of grief, and over the course of the 15 songs on *The Rising*, the reiteration of key words and phrases—now sung in agony, now in resignation, now in hope—has a cathartic effect. In the weeks and months after 9/11, people told and retold their stories almost compulsively and plunged again and again in to their terror and confusion in a paradoxical effort to move beyond the experience and to keep it close. *The Rising*, listened to repeatedly—the only way true Springsteen fans know how—has a similar effect. It neither assuages the horror with false hope nor allows it to slip into nihilistic despair. (Scott, p.365)

While a cathartic nationalism could offer a space for deliberative engagement, coupling critical questions with the basis for grief, Springsteen's *The Rising* fails to offer these deliberative moments. The nationalism invoked here allows the citizens of the American nation state to skip the critical stage of inquiry, and move directly to hope through grief and healing.

## **Unity and Community**

Traditionally, therapeutic discourses limit democratic engagement by relegating discussion of public, social matters to the private sphere. “When private sphere virtues and spaces are constructed as models for public discussion...therapy forecloses on the perceived desirability of public debate, conflict, and change” (Cloud, 1998, p.100).

Springsteen’s explorations of grief, loss, and healing all work to unify audiences on the basis of an “imagined interpersonal harmony and emotional unity.” The tragedy of 9/11 gets reinvoked here in the unifying private sphere of unrequited love and loss. Consider some lyrics from “Countin’ on a Miracle” and “Empty Sky”:

### **Countin’ on a Miracle**

There ain't no storybook story  
There's no never-ending song  
Our happily ever after Darlin'  
Forever come and gone  
I'm movin' on  
If I'm gonna believe  
I'll put my faith  
Darlin' in you

I'm countin' on a miracle  
Baby I'm countin' on a miracle  
Darlin' I'm countin' on miracle  
To come through

Sleeping beauty awakes from her dream  
With her lover's kiss on her lips  
Your kiss was taken from me  
Now all I have is this...

### **Empty Sky**

I woke up this morning  
I could barely breathe  
Just an empty impression  
In the bed there you used to be  
I want a kiss from your lips



I want an eye for an eye  
I woke up this morning to an empty sky

Empty sky, empty sky  
I woke up this morning to an empty sky  
Empty sky, empty sky  
I woke up this morning to an empty sky

Blood on the streets  
Blood flowin' down  
I hear the blood of my blood  
Cryin' from the ground

Although that unity is reworked along a metaphor of lost love instead of family values, it similarly negates room for audiences to speak out against that perceived national consensus. In fact, it celebrates closing the door on dissent in favor of unity in private loss. The following appraisal from the release of *The Rising* illustrates this yearning for agreement and unity:

Perhaps the most ambitious aspect of Bruce Springsteen's new CD, "The Rising," which contemplates the aftermath of Sept. 11, is that he's still *looking to bring us together...He's looking for ground where we can stand in agreement, if only on a sense of loss and a vow of determination.* (David Hinckley, Daily News, 8/1/2002, emphasis added)

Thus, not only does *The Rising* invoke rhetorics of therapeutic consolation, it is celebrated for doing so. Standing "in *agreement, if only on a sense of loss and a vow of determination*" is preferable to initiating democratic deliberation over the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Furthermore, an agreement based in grief is sought over the process of civic argumentation about those lost in the 9 11 attacks. The latter would have enabled the discourse to function democratically rather than therapeutically while acknowledging

the suffering within private spheres. Notice the all-embracing call to civic unity over civic deliberation in this account from the Chicago stop of *The Rising* tour:

For that's [transforming a song of youthful desire into a plea for community] ultimately what Springsteen's music tries to achieve. Though *The Rising* is being chastised in some quarters for not being indignant enough, for its lack of anger, *Springsteen's musical politics have always been tempered by a fundamental compassion, an inclusiveness that throws its arms wide around an audience*, with the house lights illuminating their joint efforts. When Pearl Jam singer and Evanston native Eddie Vedder joined Springsteen to take the lead vocal on "My Hometown," it was only fitting. *At its best, Springsteen's music expands to meet the moment. It's big enough for everyone to climb into its embrace.* (Greg Kot, 9/26/2002, Chicago Tribune, emphasis added)

The welcoming embrace of Springsteen's music reduces the function of American citizenship to a community-building exercise. Certainly, this is an integral aspect of citizenship, but again, prospects for civic deliberation are here discarded in favor of a "fundamental compassion" that "expands to meet the moment." Unfortunately, the post 9/11 America moment needed questioning in addition to compassion in order to cultivate democratic nationalism.

### **Populist Appeals**

Springsteen is by definition a populist musician, seeking to narrate the lives of those working Americans that he sees as outside the realm of bourgeois society. In his refusal to allow Columbia records to shift his image from that of the working class New

Jersey shore to New York City,<sup>20</sup> Springsteen entered the American popular music scene with an un-erasable populism. Springsteen's direct connection to the ordinary Americans of his roots, the displaced steel workers and working class vernaculars of the Jersey shore, resonated with people across the country and the globe.

However, populism employed in the “wrong” context can be an extremely dangerous appeal.<sup>21</sup> As John Street has argued in his work *Politics and Popular Culture*, Populism is itself as much the product of political judgments and interests as are imposed choices...in understanding the relationship of politics and popular culture, we need to be on guard against the easy opposition that ‘populism’ represents. It oversimplifies the ways in which popular culture takes on political significance, or the ways in which politics engage with popular culture, the relationship is itself dependent on political ideologies and institutions. (1997, p.17)

When Springsteen's *The Rising* was released, appeals to an American populism were themselves an appeal to an ideological silence rather than a dissenting civic argument. Consider A.O. Scott's examination of *The Rising* in relationship to Springsteen's populist history:

After Born in the U.S.A., he preferred to bear witness—to his own romantic wounds (on Tunnel of Love) and to the travails of the forgotten and the dispossessed (on The Ghost of Tom Joad). He refashioned himself as the heir to

---

<sup>20</sup> This in regards to his album “greetings from Asbury Park, N.J. (p.386)

<sup>21</sup> Insert footnote on the perils of populism from ww2.

Woody Guthrie and John Steinbeck, lonely avatar of a faded tradition of social conscience and left-wing populism.

And then there was September 11, the overt or implicit subject of the most of the songs on The Rising and one of the reasons its arrival has stirred up so much *emotion*. If any American artist could summon up an adequate, inclusive response to the events of that day, it would have to be Springsteen. This is not only because *he has his roots in the same Northeastern Catholic working-class soil from which so many of the local heroes of 9/11 sprouted*, but because *his songwriting idiom is almost uncannily attuned to the tangle of feelings—horror, grief, and rage but also resolve, resilience, and solidarity---that that day left in its wake and is perhaps uniquely capable of clarifying them*. (Scott, p. 363-364, emphasis added)

Again, appeals to populism are problematic in that they require only representation (*his roots in the same Northeastern Catholic working-class soil*) and emotion<sup>22</sup> (*uncannily attuned to the tangle of feelings*). The coupling of these elements, without a critical interrogation of how that representation serves the dominant U.S. ideology or the basis for civic emotions, results in a foregrounding of an ideological populism over vernacular voices of civic dissent.

Ernesto Laclau (2005) speaks of this problem of shifting and ambiguous populist representations in his recent work *On Populist Reason*. Though cultural scholars have found the attributions of populism significant, “we are far from clear, however, about the

---

<sup>22</sup> The music itself, not merely the lyrics, further the emotional valence of the Rising. As Scott further notes, “The dialectic of despair and triumph is built into the musical structure and aural texture of the songs themselves, which enact, and induce in their listeners, the very emotions their words describe” (Scott, p.363).

content of that attribution. A persistent feature of the literature on populism is its reluctance—or difficulty—in giving the concept any precise meaning” (Laclau, 2005, p.3). Laclau’s noticing of the contextually bound and shifting nature of populism is significant, but he goes on to recommend discarding the ideological weight of contextualized populist appeals in favor of a populism that is relegated to a field of “empty signifiers” and diasporic democracy.

Springsteen’s populist representations of 9/11 victims in *The Rising* is not diasporic but rather points to a grounded historical struggle. It is significant that the populist appeals mirror the ideological heroism of American citizens employed by the Bush Administration as evidence for invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Though conceptions of populism shift, they are not empty or ungrounded. Here, “heroes” replace “people,” and their mythic status bolsters the hegemonic context of remembrance and silence. Although Springsteen does make room for workers voices to be heard in the legacy of his music and songwriting, the voices of this album continue the iconography of the “ordinary hero” that fuels silent consensus for the Bush administration’s War on Terror. The following interview with Springsteen in anticipation of *The Rising* release chronicles this phenomenon:

His job, he decided a quarter-century ago, *was not to embody some rock- star fantasy but to recognize the dignity of ordinary work.* “I felt that I saw nobility in people,” he said in a rare interview at his farmhouse home. “Not the kind you read in the story books, but the kind where people go in to work every day, they come home every day and dinner’s on the table every day. There’s people doing this in little ways every day all the time. These are the people that I want to write about.

This is what I think is important. That's what moves me. That's what makes me want to sing my song"...*The office workers, firefighters, police and air travelers who died on Sept. 11 were the stuff of Springsteen songs: people who became heroes by just doing their jobs.* He sings about them, and their survivors, on "The Rising," a song cycle about duty, love, death, mourning and resurrection. (Pareles, New York Times, 7/14/2002, emphasis added)

This review suggests that working class voices are honored, remembered, and represented, but not heard. The voices represented are passive and transcendent. These qualities erase the once rooted nature of the vernacular characters of *The Rising*; the firefighters, air travelers, and office workers become populist ideographs instead of dissident voices. This is significant in that populist representations of 9/11 heroism replace the social locations those workers once occupied. Biesecker (2002) notes a similar de-politicizing of the vernacular in the replacement of social location with collective memories of ideological citizenship in films and monuments memorializing the Second World War. Invoking this kind of populist vernacular does not examine arguments of ordinary citizens. Instead, populism perpetuates an ideology of transcendent common humanity, which in the context of post 9/11 America, is divorced from the counterpublic activity of a rooted vernacular struggle.

This is how Guthrie's popularization of American folk starkly contrasts with the release of Springsteen's *The Rising*. Guthrie's music and rhetoric sound the *struggle* of vernacular voices within his populist statements. For Guthrie, the plight of ordinary people was a social problem, not an ideological value. Consider how differently the

social value of work surfaces in this context as an ideological component of 9/11 heroism in the review of *The Rising* that began our discussion:

This tour, in support of the new album *The Rising*, *is much more of a return to the thematic blue-collar revivals that made the group international stars on the Born in the USA tour. The difference is the message.* Where Bruce Springsteen spent the mid-1980s telling the American story in songs about misguided patriotism and a nostalgia for a bygone era, *The Rising is inspired by the new types of heroes that have risen in this country.* (Michael Clark, Houston Chronicle, 11/05/2002, emphasis added)

Audience identification to representations of iconic heroism rather than vernacular deliberations furthers the post 9/11 hegemony of silent citizenship. Ordinary work and dutiful servitude are not interrogated, but become the foundation for civic rejuvenation.

Simon Frith has argued that Springsteen's authenticity does not rely upon whether or not he is a "real" member of the blue collar working class, but rather that he "represents" the realness of those voices. Speaking of Springsteen's place in music history as chronicled by American rock critics, Frith states:

They've placed him, that is, in a particular reading of rock history, not as the 'new Dylan' (his original label) but as the "voice of the people." His task is to carry the baton passed on from Woody Guthrie, and the purpose of his carefully placed oldies (Guthrie's "This land is your land," Presley and Berry hits, British beat classics, Edwin Starr's "War") isn't just to situate him as a fellow fan but also to identify him with a particular musical project. Springsteen himself claims on stage to represent an authentic popular tradition.

While representation and emotion may allow Springsteen to traverse within an “authentic popular tradition,” it does not allow *The Rising* to move from populist ideology to deliberative democratic engagement. Representation, based only on un-interrogated emotion, leads only to ideological heroism. Thus, the problem here lies in the difference between “representing” a vernacular via populist appeals and the “reflecting” of counterpublicity via argumentative claims.

### **POPULISM AND COUNTERPUBLICITY**

As vernacular voices are the fabric of ordinary society and popular culture, they are central to every musical exigency under investigation in this dissertation. They are also central to the cultivation of democratic nationalism. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, “democratic nationalism might be conceived as the civic maneuvering of deliberation and dissent on the basis of shared ideologies of the nation state.” However, democratic nationalism is both ideology and engagement. Without incorporating the arguments of vernacular dissent, we are left only with ideological populist appeals.

The key to cultivating democratic nationalism lies in the relationship of the musicians and their music to invoke the arguments of counterpublics. In the case of Springsteen’s *The Rising*, the album invokes only a populist appeal. Invoking populism can aid the formation of democratic nationalism, as can be seen in the case of Woody Guthrie. Yet Guthrie’s case also exercised a counterpublic vernacular from the social location of the people of which he sang. Furthermore, the context of Roosevelt’s New Deal and the context of George W. Bush’s post 9/11 America contrast greatly in their referent power to populist appeals. In the latter, invoking populism does not cause the



necessary disruption accorded to insurgent popular music. What is missing is a connection to counterpublic argumentation.

For vernacular rhetorics to cultivate deliberation in the public sphere, they cannot be located *only* in representational populist appeals. They must be emergent from counterpublics. Democratic deliberation emerges in popular music's ability to articulate the dissent and civil judgments of vernacular counterpublicity. When this occurs, we see popular music take on relationships to the vernacular that involves counterpublics. Consider Gerard Hauser's explanation of the centrality of civil judgment to vernacular publics:

Civil judgment is an outcome of the vernacular exchanges dispersed across media, public meetings, face-to-face interaction, ballots, and even representative deliberation. It occurs when opinions emanating from a variety of perspectives and held for a variety of reasons nevertheless converge to form a prevailing view of preference and possible of value. *It is unlike a conviction that is handed to us by a shared set of foundational and transcendent beliefs, such as theism or hegemonic ideology. Civil judgment expresses a common understanding among diverse social actors primarily based on formal and vernacular exchanges enacted in and across public spheres.* (Hauser, 1999, p.74, emphasis added).

Although I would critique Hauser's formulation of civil judgment as lacking an adequate complexity of contextual constraints and limitations, this formulation helps distinguish between a representative populist "conviction" and the reflective "civil judgment" of ordinary peoples argumentation. It is civil judgment that becomes the precursor to dissident counterpublicity.

I offer this distinction between representational populism and reflective counterpublicity to suggest more is needed than populist appeal for popular music to act deliberatively in the public sphere. In fact, I have included Springsteen's *The Rising* as a case study because I find it imperative to inquire as to why, in the midst of such a seemingly strong relationship to bottom-up communities, this moment fails to cultivate a deliberative public culture. Springsteen's *The Rising* never accomplishes the disruption of counterpublicity. Instead, it acts out unification via representational populism.

This is not to suggest that populism is inherently a negative attribute to popular music. As Van Zoonen suggests, although populism exists in both democratic and antidemocratic forms, it "always involves a protest of politic on account of "the people" who fall outside the reach of the political system" (2005, p.147). In this way it is a central component of the ideological topoi of democratic nationalism. However, populist representation is not the same as civic deliberation. Representing ordinary peoples' identities rather than reflecting their dissent limits the possibilities of political participation. Consider Nancy Fraser's (1997) discussion of negotiating identities within public spheres in relation to political participation

Public spheres are not only for the formation of discursive opinion; in addition, they are *arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities*. This means that participation is not simply a matter of being able to state propositional contents that are neutral with respect to form of expression. *Rather participation means being able to speak "in one's own voice," thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style.*

(p.83)

The greater capacity popular music makes for people to speak in their own voices, or at least mirror and echo those voices (as will be seen in the following case studies), the greater potential that exists for deliberative political participation. The failing of *The Rising* to deliberative engagement is not its populist representation but rather its lack of counterpublicity. For popular music to engender deliberation, it needs to move past populism to orient itself toward reflective dissent of vernacular rhetorics.

Reflective counterpublicity, in cooperation or in place of representational populism, is necessary to the project of democracy. Although the difference is subtle, the place of vernacular agency shifts dramatically depending upon whether an artist represents or reflects those voices. To represent the people is a necessarily transformative act; it places an authoritative agency in the hands of the artist over the arguments of common people. To reflect, however, is a necessarily replicative act; the artist relinquishes agency and voice to vernacular claims. To stand in relation to the vernacular via reflective counterpublicity means mass discourse acts as conduit of vernacular dissent rather than a transcendent ideological construction.

#### **GAUGING DOMINANCE IN THE CULTIVATION OF DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM**

Bruce Springsteen's release of *The Rising* was heralded for its abilities to heal a grieving and wounded nation, but in its abilities to invoke democratic deliberation of American citizenship, *The Rising* falls short. The album leads audiences to conflate representations of working class heroes as true reflections on the plight of ordinary Americans. Springsteen's relationship to the vernacular is thus relegated to populist appeals. Consequently, *The Rising* actually complicates the danger of invoking populism,

as it gives the appearance of speaking in the voice of a vernacular to merely *speak for* an ideological commonality of the American citizen. As *The Rising* does not articulate arguments from counterpublics, it lacks the necessary disruptive character necessary to become insurgent popular music and engender deliberations around democratic nationalism. It serves as useful counterexample to what I will argue in the following chapters as well as painting the dense context of national silence almost a year after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

This case should not negate, however, the power of nationalism within popular music to foster ideological identifications for the enactment of democratic engagement. Furthermore, understanding national identifications as part of the deliberative process forces a recognition of the duality of these ideologies to act hegemonically, at once upholding silence in the public sphere and cultivate critical rationality in slowly forming counterpublics. Steve Earle's "John Walker's Blues" takes on a different relationship to ordinary voices, articulating and reflecting counterpublicity over ideological populism. Earle's location within vernacular counterpublics and his argumentation from that location aids rather than hinders the process of democratic dissent. The following chapter builds upon the discussion of democratic nationalism began in this chapter, to offer an analysis of how the popular initiates the unraveling of post 9/11 silence in a dominant public sphere.

## Chapter Five: Steve Earle: Dissident Rebel

*“Well it’s been a long weird year and there’s an even weirder one comin’...trust me. But just remember no matter what you hear that it’s never ever unpatriotic or un-American to question any fucking thing in a democracy...no matter what time anyone on CNN says it is.”*                    *--Steve Earle (in 2003 concert footage from Just an American Boy)*

During the summer of 2002, at the exact same time Bruce Springsteen released his much-anticipated 9/11 tribute “The Rising,” country-rock musician Steve Earle found himself in the midst of a serious battery of right-wing criticism on FOX cable news, CNN’s Crossfire, and in broad array of corporate media outlets. The criticism from these news outlets was in response to the release of his song “John Walker’s Blues,” the first track off the album *Jerusalem* (2002). In the ballad, Earle surmises how it was that 21-year-old American John Walker-Lind had joined forces with the Taliban army months before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Earle lands in the midst of a popular culture controversy for asserting the American-ness of the now branded traitor:

I’m just an American boy, raised on MTV, and I’ve seen all the kids in the soda pop bands, but none of them look like me. So I started lookin’ around for a light out of the dim. And the first thing I heard that made sense was the word of Mohammed, peace be upon him. (Earle, 2002)

Although still very much echoing the tropes of mainstream American culture (such as “raised on MTV” and “soda pop bands”), Earle builds a song that relies on ideologies of nationalism to question, rather than assume, the homogenous portrait of American citizenship and values endemic to the current moment. This is contrary to Springsteen’s

post 9/11 *The Rising*, whose ballads invoke a dominant populist appeal which sustains the hegemonic portrait of national mourning. Earle's characterizations of national identity further the basis for division between a conservative U.S. administration/media and an emerging leftist anti-war movement; but, the tropes he uses contest. That contestation gives rise to a democratic nationalism. The questions raised at these sites of national identification make room for democratic dissent to re-enter the mass popular-public sphere.

This chapter explores the public controversy surrounding Steve Earle's release of the song, "John Walker's Blues" as a moment that places counterpublic arguments within a popular public landscape and engenders deliberation on the value of his music centered squarely on the value of dissent in music and in democracy. Via an examination of professional music reviews, consumer album reviews, televised interviews, and the documentary *Just an American Boy*, I argue that counterpublicity emerges to contest the post 9/11 hegemony of patriotic silence. The texts analyzed highlight the contextual constraints on political criticism and the function of narrative, argument, and image in the creation of social action against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In a time when questioning was seen as inappropriate and even undemocratic in the dominant public sphere, Steve Earle inquired anyway and forced into popular consciousness questions concerning what it means to be an American citizen.

In the following pages, I will examine the evolution of Earle's ballad from lyrical narrative to political argument. In this section I will describe a) how the ballad comes to serve as an argumentative indictment against the non-questioning post 9/11 climate, b) how the media use Earle's lyrics as argumentative evidence centered around debates of

American nationalism, and c) how consumer album reviews cultivated deliberation on the place of politics in music. Whereas Springsteen's narratives serve to bolster the hegemonic discourse of the time, Earle's rely upon ideological tropes not only for identification but also for argumentative indictment within a mass public. It will be argued that this indictment, couple with Earle's own place in agitational vernacular cultures, echoes counterpublic spheres of dissent concerning U.S. action.

Finally, I will close with a brief exploration of how Steve Earle's simultaneous balance between vernacular and mass cultures is reflected in his iconic image as a "rebellious" country star. This exploration suggests that his image is grounded in traditional rhetorical action and vernacular counterpublicity; meaning, it works in cooperation with argument and activism, instrumentally. The rhetorical image functions not merely as cultural reformulation and identity change but for democratic reformulation and social change. In contesting the dominant sphere, Earle's representation and reflection of vernacular voices exercises a counterpublic dissent that splinters the hegemony of popular news media and cultivates deliberation within popular public spheres. Earle's exercising of his own link to counterpublics nourishes the visibility of vernacular argumentation in the post 911 context and challenges image based conceptions of social movements and social change.

#### **FROM MUSICAL NARRATIVE TO MEDIATED ARGUMENT**

Although the musical narrative of Steve Earle's "John Walker's Blues" is not an argument in and of itself, it does serve as the foundation for deliberation on the value of critical thought in the public sphere. In this section, I turn to the enthymematic function

of Earle's ballad as it makes room for both Earle and his fans to entertain arguments around fundamental tenets of U.S. nationalism as well as the relationship of political ideas to musical value. First, I will analyze the significance of the ballad of "John Walker's Blues" as public argument, highlighting the lyrical statements in relation to the dominant notions of nationalism and Earle's generic significance as a musical "storyteller" within a populist music tradition. Then, I will examine how the dominant news media situate Earle's ballad as argument around tenets of nationalism (free speech, faith, patriotic appropriateness). Finally, I will turn to the postings of citizen-consumers' reviews of Earle's album *Jerusalem* on Amazon.com as a way to locate the emergence and rejection of critical thought in the mass public within the "safe space" of music album reviews.

### **Lyrical Ballad as Enthymematic Argument**

Interestingly, the controversy that emerges in the American news media around the ballad of "John Walker's Blues" brands the song in such a way that its argumentative function cannot be divorced from the controversial attention it receives in the mass public sphere. However, it is not the labeling of the song as argument but the points of national identification around which that act of labeling occurs, that ultimately allow for an enthymematic argumentation to occur in the ballad of "John Walker's Blues." Whereas Springsteen's narratives became part of the hegemonic discourse of the time, Earle's rely upon ideological tropes not only for identification but also for argumentative indictment. This argumentation is heralded by a generic signification that incorporates critical thought as part of the process of popular music itself. When the generic signification is



married with ideological indictment, music works enthymematically to fissure the dominant public sphere.

### **Generic Signification**

One of the ways I have argued that music may act insurgently is in its abilities to foster critical rational thought through the generic signification of its form. Earle's location within a particular musical history is best noted through professional reviews of the album that chronicle the meaning inherent in the sound of music. Consider the following reviews that compare Earle to Springsteen within the genre of a "populist" popular music:

The most controversial song on Earle's latest CD is "John Walker's Blues," an attempt to understand the American Taliban before condemning him. Other songs question the president, the war on terror, drug laws, xenophobia, and the apathy and consumerism of baby boomers who were once "talkin' revolution." *It's the kind of provocative, populist record country musicians used to make.* (Demarco, Plain Dealer Cleveland Ohio, 12/13/02, emphasis added)

Earle has recorded the most complex and beautiful pop record of his career. *It easily eclipses Springsteen's "The Rising,"* which ostensibly covers some of the same emotional territory. The controversial "John Walker's Blues" is *an empathetic yet scathing indictment* of the spiritual naiveté as a door to purgative violence. The album perfectly balances the spiritual, political, and worldly

obsessions that have haunted Earle since day one. Not bad for a former crack addict. (1/3/03, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, emphasis added).

Earle's ability to question and indict become part of his musical prowess. That questioning and indictment is itself a trait of the genre of American popular folk and "populist" country music from which Earle emerges. Although populist signification alone, as the release of Springsteen's *The Rising* attests, is not enough to cultivate deliberation, it can be a very valuable ideological component of argumentation. The marriage of music and meaning makes Earle representative of the genre, here signified in both sound and provocative meaning. The difference between Earle's generic signification and Springsteen, however, may not be in the shared elements of sound as much as it is in the imbued meaning of that sound. Whereas Springsteen's meaning has historically been appropriated and contaminated with ideologies of the mass public, Earle has consistently maintained a stance counter to dominant culture. It is the signification of the genre, coupled with Earle's legacy as a politically meaningful spokesperson of the genre, that aids the argumentative function of the ballad. "Songwriter Steve Earle has never shied from exploring political and sometimes *unpopular* views" (Clark, Houston Chronicle, 9/29/02, emphasis added). This generic consistency yields Earle his own argumentative credibility:<sup>23</sup>

*In other hands, such ripped-from-the-news material would sound like hectoring.*

*But Earle is a sly storyteller—even when he's peering into the mind of American*

---

<sup>23</sup> Earle's credibility as a political spokesperson is constantly under scrutiny in the mass public; the comment in the earlier review that notes his struggles with cocaine addiction is a perfect exemplar of this scrutinizing. However, his credibility as a consistently political voice within music is unquestionable. Further effects of this will be discussed in the analysis of album reviews from citizen consumers on Amazon.com.

Taliban soldier John Walker Lindh, on the eerie Eastern devotional “John Walker's Blues,” *he's really telling a tale of great disillusionment, about a lost everykid who goes on a lonely search and finds out how faith can be twisted to justify extreme acts.* (Moon, Rolling Stone, 10/17/02)

Although Moon does not claim that Earle is making an argument in the way that media interviewers suggest, he actualizes the argumentative nature of Earle's ballad through the guise of musical narrative and the circulation of the narrative's proposition.

### **Ideological Indictment**

It is best to understand the argumentative function of popular culture through an Aristotelian reliance on the enthymeme. An enthymeme is a syllogism with a missing link; a chain of reasoning that requires the audience to supply information in order for the argument to achieve contradiction or adherence. The enthymeme does not necessitate that the audience will supply the needed information in agreement, only that it is able to read the missing information into the information provided in order to ascertain the claim of a given argument. As Aristotle explains in his writings on rhetoric:

The enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer often than those which make up the normal syllogism. *For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself.* Thus, to show that Dorieus has been victor in a contest for which the prize is a crown, it is enough to say "For he has been victor in the Olympic games," without adding "And in the Olympic games the prize is a crown," a fact which everybody knows. (*Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 2).

The enthymeme works expressly well for understanding popular music given that the form of music often relies upon the hearer to fill in gaps in the name of meaning making. Popular music will never follow the same guidelines as formal argumentation, even though it may act in the same way advancing claims that rely upon credible support. In the case of Earle's ballad "John Walker's Blues", much of the support is rooted in an American experience, and the enthymematic work to be done by the audience rests upon shared ideologies of American nationalism. Consider the lyrics of Earle's ballad in their entirety, to be followed by a discussion of the sound accompanying them:

*I'm just an American boy, raised on MTV*  
And I've seen all those kids in the soda pop ads  
But none of 'em looked like me  
So I started lookin' around for a light out of the dim  
And the first thing I heard that made sense was the word  
Of Mohammed, peace be upon him

A shadu la ilaha illa Allah  
There is no God but God

If my daddy could see me now – chains around my feet  
He don't understand that *sometimes a man*  
*Has got to fight for what he believes*  
*And I believe God is great, all praise due to him*  
And if I should die, I'll rise up to the sky  
Just like *Jesus*, peace be upon him

A shadu la ilaha illa Allah  
There is no God but God

We came to fight the Jihad and our *hearts were pure and strong*  
As death filled the air, we all offered up prayers  
And prepared for our *martyrdom*  
But Allah had some other plan, some secret not revealed  
Now they're *draggin' me back with my head in a sack*  
*To the land of the infidel*

A shadu la ilaha illa Allah  
A shadu la ilaha illa Allah

(Song ends with the sound of a male voice chanting in prayer the same chorus sung by Earle)<sup>24</sup>

Earle's ballad comes to function as argument in a mass public sphere because it relies upon American ideologies to make sense of Taliban ideologies. Whereas the dominant public sphere in post 9/11 America has done work to categorize American-ness as good and distinctly separate from the evils of the Taliban, in "John Walkers Blues" Earle collapses those binaries and complicates the picture of Walker-Lindh.

Specifically, the song calls upon American values to make sense of Lindh's actions. The most obvious might be Earle's portrait of John Walker Lindh as a displaced and alienated youth. In search of meaning outside of a corporate American landscape of "MTV and soda pop ads" a Muslim faith welcomes and makes sense to him. The most enthymematic points of argumentation, however, rely upon ideologies of free speech and faith. Earle's assertions in Lindh's voice that "sometimes a man has got to fight for what he believes" echo the same sentiment upon which the revolutionary history of the United States was founded. In making Lindh like the fabric of American values, Earle begins an enthymematic argument advancing the claim of fact put forth in the first line. Lindh is just an American boy, not the evil terrorist threat so depicted in the mass media.

Earle's ballad furthers the argument of Lindh's "sameness" over "difference" in relying upon narratives of faith that resonate with conceptions of protestant faith in the

---

<sup>24</sup> The aural cues of the voice would indicate that the vocalist is also of Middle-Eastern descent, or at the very least has been vocally trained to adeptly sing the language as though it sounds like native tongue. This adds another layer of meaning when contrasted against the southern twang of Earle's own voice. Unfortunately, after searching the liner notes for *Jerusalem*, and official and unofficial websites, I have been unable to locate the exact ethnicity of the artist or even his name for that matter. It is likely the material may have been sampled from another recording; but if so, that information has not been made available either.

American landscape. The power of conviction that guides Christian action now shares an ideological overlap in the power of conviction that guides terrorist actions. Consider Earle's chronicling of prayer, "I believe God is great, all praise due to him," purity, "our hearts were pure and strong," and sacrifice "prepared for martyrdom." Each of these can be characterized as defining ideological elements and enactments of an American Christian faith. This juxtaposition of similarities causes immense controversy. Especially, Earle questions the good and evil boundaries at work in the dominant public sphere by turning the enemy inward on an American audience; "Now they're draggin' me back with my head in a sack, to the land of the infidel." The argument of the song relies upon a shared view of a person's faith trumping, rather than being conflated with, his or her patriotic duty.

The juxtaposition of shared ideologies is furthered by the musical sound of the song. Earle blends a variety of musical sounds and styles, overlapping a roots-rock country sound with electric guitar and *a cappella* chanting. The song concludes with the music of the ballad waning and the clear unaccompanied voice of a man chanting an Islamic prayer, the same prayer Earle sings as the chorus. The lyrical disjuncture is musically intentional and clear, highlighting the fierce southern dialect of Earle's own voice. The meter, in basic 4/4 time, is the cornerstone of popular music and ensures an inviting rhythm. The blending of electric guitar with an otherwise simple musical arrangement signals a post-Dylan folkiness that is brasher and less consumed with pleasing the audience. The music itself supports the enthymematic disjuncture at work in the lyrics, perhaps most succinctly illustrated in Earle's twangy vocal recreation of the Muslim prayer/chorus that frames the entirety of the song.

It is in the presence of American ideologies within a portrait of Muslim faith, coupled with the disjuncture of American sound against the “anti-American” Taliban narrative, which creates a space for the audience to entreat the claim that John Walker Lindh is much more like America than unlike it. Even the possibility of likeness is controversial because it disrupts the us-them binary fueling dominant support for a war against terror. The ballad of John Walkers Blues, through a marriage of generic signification and ideological indictment via lyrics and sound, functions argumentatively to disrupt the irrational hegemony of silent support endemic to U.S. nationalism of this time.

#### **POPULAR NEWS AND THE BRANDING OF BALLAD AS ARGUMENT**

Earle’s “John Walker’s Blues” acts as critical argumentation in the public sphere in large part because of the use of the lyrics as argumentative evidence by interviewers in dominant news media outlets. Without the attention and focus of ABC, CNN, NBC, and FOX news to the controversial nature of the song, and their subsequent highlighting of the song itself as argument about U.S. policies concerning the Taliban, Earle’s ballad would serve as political public address but not necessarily argument. This section will highlight the various nationalist ideologies of free speech, faith, and patriotic appropriateness that news media use to invoke Earle’s “John Walkers Blues” as valid argumentation. It will be shown that the dominant sphere itself helps to substantiate the validity of Earle’s musical argument in use of lyrics and in Earle’s locating of counterpublic argument as having origins in a mass public sphere.

The media's use of song lyrics yield validity and grant space to Earle's political argument. Interviewers give credit to the role of music in the public sphere as a "valid" political voice, even if simply in the notification of lyrics as argument and the time allotted to entertaining critical perspectives. In every televised interview, Earle either performs "John Walker's Blues" live or a segment of a recorded performance is shown. Earle's character as popular musician allows him the space to voice counterpublic arguments in the public sphere. In other words, if Earle had only been a member of a counterpublic and had not occupied the role of popular entertainer, his ability to occupy this space would have been limited. However, given his dual occupancy of mass public and counterpublic spheres, Earle is able to simultaneously perform and invoke critical debate. Consider Greta Van Susteren's treatment of Earle's lyrics on CNN after he has responded to the difficult nature of having an exact answer to how Lindh should be dealt with given the limited information at the disposal of the mass public:

VS: That's sort of curious because—*let me put up some lyrics from your song because it seems at least in your song that you have a higher level of certainty in your mind*, whether I agree with it or not, about what was going on with him. And here's the lyrics from at least one part. It says: "We came to fight the jihad/and our hearts were pure and strong/and when death filled the air, we all offered up prayers and prepared for our martyrdom/ But all...

E: That...

VS: Go ahead...

E: *That part of the song came directly from John Walker himself in one of the CNN interviews*, and he said that—I mean, I'm paraphrasing to some extent, but



he said, “I think every person here was ready to martyr himself, but Allah has some other plans.” I think that’s what he said.

VS: Which is what the—the lyrics go on, which, indeed say, “ But Allah had some other plan, some secret not revealed/ Now they’re dragging me back with my head in a sack to the land of the infidel.”

VS: I guess, the—you know, you know, *in listening to your song and the lyrics, it seems like there’s a tremendous amount of sympathy for John Walker*. Is that not—I mean—would you give him time if you were in a position of sentencing? He did plead guilty.

E: Yeah, he did plead guilty, **but it’s a plea-bargaining arrangement**, which doesn’t—which I have some experience with, and that doesn’t really necessarily have *anything* to do with *being* guilty. (*On the Record*, 8/19/2002, in bold emphasis by Earle; in italics emphasis added).

Two important things emerge from this exchange. First, dominant mass media actually look to Earle’s song, not his speech, to serve as the basis of what they see as a sympathetic argument for Walker-Lindh. When Earle attempts to explain his position, he is held to the words of his lyrics, in the way that judicial appointees’ previous arguments serve as foundations for their criticism in the public sphere. The dominant mass media elevate the significance of song as an argument form in this attention to Earle’s ballad.

The second significant development from this passage is that as the song is elevated in status to argument,<sup>25</sup> Earle locates the information for his argument as having originated from the mass sphere now critiquing him. Earle roots his ballad/argument within information from “John Walker himself in *one of the CNN interviews*” to which Van Susteren recounts as “what the—the lyrics go on, which, indeed say.” Counterpublic critique in this case relies in part upon information located in a dominant public sphere.

In placing “John Walker’s Blues” as originating from information in a mass sphere, and coupling that with the critical thought of counterpublic deliberations, Earle’s lyrics become the foundation for entertaining critical thought about U.S. action. In the face of the hegemonic silence of post 9/11 nationalist discourse, this moment of fissuring is immensely important. Though the song does come to act as argument, it is the room it makes for entertaining critical questions in a dominant public that best serve the function of cultivating deliberation. The critical dialectic fostered in Earle’s interviews interrogates dominant U.S. ideologies of free speech, faith, and patriotic appropriateness, and ushers counterpublic voices into a mass public sphere.

### **Freedom of Speech**

One of the most fundamental aspects of American democracy is the ideology of free speech. I call this ideological because so often the function of free speech in American discourse is as a rights-based value that makes U.S. citizenship superior to other nation states, rather than a democratic action invoked to cultivate public thought or check government policy. Free speech is part of the pre-existing ideological foundation

---

<sup>25</sup> The labeling of a text, or treatment of it, as argument by a dominant mass media does not by itself make a rhetorical artifact an argument. This is about its public “status” as argument. I will examine how the song

of Western society, and as Billig asserts, “Intermittent crises depend upon existing ideological foundations,” (1995, p.6). But whereas Billig argues for a further introspection of their hegemonic function, here free speech becomes a site of contestation. In the circulation of Earle’s controversial “John Walker’s Blues,” Earle asserts critical claims around free speech that work to shift speaking out from a rights-based ideology to an essential element of public citizenship.

In an interview on the Today show with Matt Lauer, Lauer asks Earle of his thoughts on those who would reject his song or his message:

L: When you say, “Now they’re dragging me back with my head in a sack to the land of the infidel.” What do you say to the people who – who are going to hear that when it come out in September and say, “I don’t—I don’t want to hear this song. I think it should be boycotted. It should be banned on radio stations”?

E: Well I think...

*L: I mean its freedom of speech for you write it and say it.*

E: Right.

*L: Is it their right to say, “Boycott it,” as well?*

E: Well, sure it is. And, I don’t get played on that many mainstream radio stations anyway, and I haven’t in a long time, and I’ve made that choice. I get played on more public radio stations that I do anyplace else. Occasionally I get played on commercial radio stations with the odd record. I make a lot of different kinds of records. But for me, it’s a matter of when you assume a character, *you have to know as much as you can about that character and try to get in that voice, and*

I've always done it. There's been—I've written about more despicable characters and in the voice of more despicable characters than John Walker Lindh. (*The Today Show*, 8/19/2002, emphasis added)

The exchange between Earle and Lauer illustrates the tension between freedom of speech as ideology or action. In response to Lauer's asking of whether audiences had the right to boycott Earle's album, Earle shifts the focus of free speech from a question of individual rights to a question of authenticity and voice in a public sphere. Earle invokes free speech as a fluid and dynamic act of deliberation rather than a static ideology of advocacy and opposition. Earle's focus on the "public" vs. "mainstream" nature of his albums places freedom of speech within a civic, as opposed to the purely commercial realm. Earle further emphasizes the role of free speech to offer the truth of a perspective/voice no matter how despicable it might be. His role is not to please a commercial audience, rather it is to be "true" to a voice, which in this case is a voice vilified in the dominant public sphere. Earle's act emphasizes the action over the ideology of free speech as the action provides room for the voicing of arguments contrary to a mass public consensus.

The implications of commercial mass media upon the action and ideology of free speech also acts as a site of critical dialectic. The following segment, taken from *The O'Reilly Factor*, begins with O'Reilly charging Earle with being thoughtless and uncertain about his arguments. Consider this interaction, as Earle shifts thoughtfulness in free speech to critical questioning over certainty and dogmatism:

O: And, you know, it doesn't look like you've thought these things through. Am I wrong?

E: No, I think about these things all the time. Government running the media I don't necessarily think is the solution, and it may not be the solution in this country, but I do believe that there was a time when at least the news media was kept completely—the decisions made around what we saw on the news media was kept completely separate from other programming on television. I don't believe that's completely true now. *But when you—when it gets to the point where we have made a media climate that participates in accusing people that speak out against these policies of being unpatriotic and un-American, I think that's dangerous.*

Not only does Earle refocus free speech as action over ideology, he critiques the news media's quelling of free speech in its branding of dissent as unpatriotic and un-American. Thoughtfulness shifts from "certainty" to "struggling in uncertainty" and allows for the argumentation of dissent as democratic action to re-enter the public. This is a significant contribution to the fissuring of a post 9/11 hegemonic silence. The Dixie Chicks abilities to cultivate public deliberation and a public culture lie also in their critical questions around the ideology of free speech and the argumentation of free speech as a civic necessity in times of crisis. But because Earle's *song* is upheld as a practice of free speech itself, he is able to begin the splintering of the dominant post 9/11 hegemony, and connect his lyrical argument to counterpublic visions of democratic participation as dissent.

## **Faith**

Although U.S. nationalism rests upon a supposed separation between church and state, a monotheistic, largely protestant, faith cannot be divorced from American ideology. In fact, the most controversial element of Earle's empathetic ballad of John Walker Lindh is not how it might function as an argument about U.S. policy but as an argument about Islamic and Christian faith. In the ballad, Earle, speaking in the voice of Lindh, asserts: "And I believe God is great, all praise due to him; And if I should die, I'll rise up to the sky. Just like Jesus, peace be upon him." The allusion to Jesus becomes extremely controversial. Earle responds to accusations of blasphemy in his opening of a critical dialectic on sameness and difference between the demonized Lindh and the general American populace. Consider again the interview with Lauer, now in cooperation with ABC's *Up Close* with David Marash, as Earle responds to questions of faith:

### *The Today Show*

L: Let me read if you will, some lyrics from the song: "If my daddy could see me now, chains around my feet. He don't understand that sometimes a man has to fight for what he believes. And I believe God is great, all praise due to him. And if I should die, I'll rise up to the sky. Just like *Jesus*, peace be upon him".

Comparing, or—or even mentioning Jesus in this song...

E: Well, Matt...

L: ...has gotten the attention of some people. What do you think about that?

E: But that comes back to where *that line came from was my own ignorance of Islam* and—and doing the research for this, just trying to learn the Arabic words,

and of course, and all that. I went on Islam.com, and *what I found, that was something I didn't know, is that every time a Muslim says the name of Jesus, he says, 'peace be upon him,' because Jesus was recognized as the last prophet before Muhammad.* And, you know, I never knew that. And I don't think you could find 10,000 Americans that knew that, and that's why I put it in the song.

(8/19/2002, emphasis added)

*Up Close*

DM: (after clip of the song) Some folks listen to those lyrics and drew a conclusion that you were saying that John Walker Lindh is like Jesus. Now, other people read more deeply and said no, that's John Walker Lindh's voice saying "I am like Jesus." But actually you had something broader than that. It isn't just JWL sanctifying himself.

E: It's not. It's John Walker Lindh saying, *professing his faith*, which took him to some place very bad. And you know, *he arrived at Islam in such an American way*. I mean he was into hip hop. And you know, which exposed him to a lot of black culture. And he, he's from Marin country and he was already looking outside his culture for something. And I think that's, at that point, "oh I belong here. This is something that I can connect to." And you know I'm just, *I wanted to humanize John Walker Lindh when everybody else was vilifying him*. There were plenty of people, you know, that wanted to make him into a poster child for all of our fear...you have a right be judged as a human being and not as, you know, a boogie man. (11/15/2002, emphasis added)

Earle's conversations around faith attempt to notice the intersections rather than differences between Christianity and Islam. Earle's attempt to eradicate his own ignorance speaks to the ignorance of those outraged at the linking by rooting the analogy to Jesus in the tenets of Islam, which shares a basis in Christian doctrine. Furthermore, Earle suggests that the very manner in which Lindh arrives at his faith is essentially American. Relying upon a Christian language of "professing his faith," and locating his arrival at Islam through the quest of belonging amidst an American culture that privileges diversity and difference, Earle engages in critical dialogue about faith. He makes room for the simultaneous existence of Christian and Muslim faith in the face of an American hegemonic conflation of Islam with evil/terrorist acts and Christianity with good/American acts. Earle "humanizes" Lindh by rooting his faith and profession thereof in the same faith and profession of a mostly-Christian American audience.

### **Patriotism Post 9/11**

In addition to concerns of blasphemy with the linking of Lindh to Jesus, "John Walker's Blues" is controversial for the seditious nature it seems to pose by empathizing with someone of the Taliban army. To empathize with Lindh, in the collective American consciousness, was essentially un-American.<sup>26</sup> Earle's conversations concerning patriotism post 9/11 acknowledge the massive atrocities of September 11<sup>th</sup> alongside critical questions of the American government as a version of counterpublic patriotism in need of a home in the dominant public sphere.

---

<sup>26</sup> This is in large part because of the ideological manufacturing of an "either-or" fallacy from the Bush Administration in response to the terrorist attacks. Remember again Bush's address to the nation in January of 2002 where he says, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists". The strategy successfully



Van Susteren: Do you feel moved to use your talents to write a song in the voice of, for instance, let's say people who are on some of these flights who were condemned to die simply because they got on a plane? I mean, is there anything that sort of moves you—I mean the person—the American who boarded a flight thinking, “I’m going on a wonderful vacation,” and ends up flying into the World Trade Center?

Earle: Yeah. And I think those songs are getting written by other people. There are a few songs that I’ve run across that look at it from that viewpoint, and that’s fairly obvious. And, for just for some reason, I was moved to write what I wrote. You know, my take on this is may be a little different than most people’s, but I’m—this record—this is one song in a whole record that I was sort of moved to write, that *I probably wouldn’t have written...exactly the record I wrote if September 11<sup>th</sup> hadn’t happened. And you know I’m concerned about other things that you know, fallout from this, other than security. I’m worried about civil liberties, and I’m worried about a lot of other things that have changed since September 11<sup>th</sup>.* (On the Record, 8/19/2002, emphasis added)

The value of this passage lies in Earle’s ability to simultaneously acknowledge the terrorist attacks, and the American policies emergent from them, as a loss of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Earle is the first critical popular voice to enter into a mainstream culture and claim a solemn awareness of the tragedies that is not commiserate with vilifying enemies or honoring victims. In his concession that his “take on this may be a bit different than most

---

continues the silencing of dissent in the public sphere and erased any possibility for counterpublic voices of dissent to be a practicing part of American democracy post 9/11.

people's," he highlights his choice to voice a position unheard. Most notably, he points out that many have spoken on behalf of 9/11's victims to create the dominant hegemony of silence incumbent on American patriotism of the moment. He offers agreement on the tragedy, and disagreement on the silent notions of patriotism that have emerged from it.

Earle also highlights the role of September 11<sup>th</sup> in creating hostility toward the Taliban that emerges from a self-interested America rather than a patriotic alignment with American values on human rights:

DM: But he did take up arms. As you say, he committed himself to Jihad, to a crusade against the infidel, which in this case was his homeland, our country. And yet you don't seem to take offense at that.

E: No, because, I don't take offense to that in and of itself because I think, I mean, *we weren't particularly worried about what the Taliban was doing until after September 11<sup>th</sup>* and we figured out Osama Bin Laden was there in Afghanistan. The Taliban, I have major problems with. And a lot of people and some friends of mine have major problems and we were screaming you know, very loudly and jumping up and down saying, "there's this incredibly repressive regime in Afghanistan and we need to do something about it." And nobody was interested. And I was uncomfortable with the idea that we were heaping all of our fear and all of our anger on John Walker Lindh simply because we couldn't catch Osama Bin Laden. (*Up Close*, 11/15/2002, emphasis added)

Earle shifts patriotic concern of the Taliban's oppressive reign from "Good American Samaritan" to "Fearful American Self-interest," suggesting that Lindh becomes a scapegoat for our fear rather than an appropriately punished traitor. In asserting that no

one cared about the Taliban until after 9/11, Earle clearly articulates a counterpublic position to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Concern of the Taliban no longer equates to patriotism but rather patriotic fear. In locating critical questions around ideological sites of identification, Earle's rhetoric makes room for a multiplicity of perspectives to be integrated into the character or patriotic thought. The noted absence that variety of voices within American patriotism post 9/11 is made clear in the controversy of the ballad, but the incorporation (or at least the notification of counterpublic voices) is born in Earle's rhetoric surrounding the song. In the face of a hegemony that has boiled down civic responses to support for American action or support for terrorist action, Earle's remarks aid in the creation of a counterpublic civic space within the mass public sphere.

#### **DELIBERATIVE CITIZEN-CONSUMERS**

One of the clearest ways to see the fissuring of the dominant sphere in action is to turn to consumer reviews of Earle's album *Jerusalem* posted at Amazon.com.<sup>27</sup> Although the media interviews with Earle act as a site for critical questions from counterpublic voices, deliberations concerning appropriate patriotic thought and the role of dissent in democracy do not begin on a mass scale in those interviews. These debates do not open up on a mass scale until the Dixie Chicks enter the scene with controversial statements against U.S. president George W. Bush. However, Earle's "John Walker's Blues" and the

---

<sup>27</sup> Amazon is a methodological choice based primarily on the fact that it is the largest online retailer of products from a mediated popular culture. Secondly, and quite significantly, is the way in which reviews function at Amazon.com. Each review is titled, shows a clear rating of the album on a five star scale, and shows the number of people who read the review, and the number who marked it as having been helpful. I have analyzed reviews at the ends of both spectrums (1/2 star and 4/5 star) that were found to helpful by a minimum of two other people. This system allows for an analysis of consumer reviews that, should we put some faith in the system, display a deliberative interrogation by other consumers. Amazon's editorial policy does not censor individual review, thus the reviews of this dissertation can be reasonably assumed to

album *Jerusalem* begin the fissuring as consumers debate the value of critical thought via the safe terrain of musical value.

Although seemingly about music, both positive and negative album reviews articulate their claims on the album against norms of political appropriateness within the conservative American backdrop of 9/11. The music is either “good” or “bad” depending upon how each critic views the “appropriateness” of Earle’s political statements. While there is some talk of the musicality of the album, overwhelmingly positive reviewers find dissent an integral part of American democracy and find Earle’s quest to dissent a valuable addition to the history of political roots rock. Similarly, negative reviews are from “avowed fans” of Earle who *now* find his politics to be preachy, dogmatic diatribe that ruin the album, even though all of them admit some like for the music itself. The location of hegemonic disruption in the deliberations of citizen-consumers becomes an integral aspect of deliberations about democracy, dissent, and patriotism in the public sphere.

Although the reviews largely echo the sentiments of each other, showcasing their collective rhetorical abilities to engage in conversations on the place of dissent in music foreshadows the deliberative strains to come on the place of dissent in a patriotic public sphere. It should also be noted that these reviews have been taken from a designated time frame, starting with late September 2002 at the initial album release through January 2003 which is the waning of Earle’s mass public attention to the controversy of John Walker’s Blues. The posts do continue into the present day, but in an effort to illustrate

---

retain the author intent. However, the site does moderate, retaining the right to not publish reviews that use profanity or obscenity.

the engendering of deliberations amidst the initial controversy in the context just one year after the 9/11 attacks, the more recent posts have been left out of this analysis. A total of 18 positive posts and 19 negative posts from the time frame were collected. The following are the selections that best illustrate the potential emergence of civic deliberation.

### **Positive Reviews**

Positive reviews center on their mutual valuing of critical thought and dissent within portraits of American patriotism and democratic action. Earle receives positive marks on the album for his allegiance with their ideological perspectives of dissent as democratic; the music becomes appreciated because of its rhetorical power. Titles of positive posts range from “Refreshing voice of dissent amid mindless flag-waving, September 25, 2002” to “Outstanding Patriotic Album, September 28, 2002” to “The Most Vital Protest Music Since the 60's, November 2, 2002.” All of the posts signal very quickly, however, that the value of Earle’s album, and music generally, lies in its instrumental dissenting function. Consider the following segments from a reviewer who begins the deliberations on the patriotism in Earle’s music:

**★★★★★ Outstanding Patriotic Album** I bought this album on a whim, and was immediately struck by it's vivid melodies and uncommonly heartfelt lyrics. *I was surprised (although I shouldn't have been) at the ruckus it's caused. As a supporter of American Democracy and a patriotic defender of the Constitution (and a Conservative Republican, to boot!), it's heartening to hear someone speak*

*out against the Bush Administrations dangerous cry for love...* (A music lover  
09/28/02, emphasis added)

This music lover clearly locates his/her admiration of the album in its alignment with his/her own identity. The reviewer's character as an avid "supporter of American Democracy and a patriotic defender of the Constitution" trumps his/her identity as a conservative Republican. Though the reviewer is "struck" by the musical elements of melody, it is the action of the "heartfelt lyrics" to enact a value of patriotism aligned with the reviewers interests that grant *Jerusalem* a perfect five star review. Consider this in cooperation with the following reviewer's remarks, which also demonstrates the reviewer's alignment with Earle over dominant conceptions of the role of religion and patriotic dissent:

★★★★☆ **The Most Vital Protest Music Since the 60's**, Steve Earle has produced the most vital protest music since the sixties. Only Bruce Cockburn in our day has successfully pulled off such powerful protest music that flexes musical muscle and does not come off preachy. Steve Earle's music on this CD is prophetic, in the sense of the Hebrew prophets, *critiquing injustice in our society and American arrogance and complacency. I love our country as much as anyone, but I think the true patriot offers dissent; otherwise, what is the point of being in a democracy? The Bush administration has left me with a chilling feeling with all of their hubris about war against Iraq, and their utter contempt for any debate or dissent on the issue.* When I heard right-wing talk show hosts up in arms over Earle's CD, I had to get it for myself. *I thought it was important to buy it simply to make a statement.* But I was also rewarded

musically- this CD ROCKS!!! - Amerika ver. 6.0, the second cut on the CD, is protest music you can dance to!!! *I also, as a person of Christian faith, deeply appreciate Earle's allusions to religious themes on the CD. True religion offers protest and social critique.* In the Bible it is known as the "voice of prophecy." I do not know what Steve Earle's personal faith commitment is, but he is speaking with that prophetic voice on this CD. If you can only buy one new CD title this year, this should be it!!! (Lance Goldsberry, 11/4/02, emphasis added)

Similar to the reviewer who speaks in spite of his conservative republican-ness, this reviewer unifies his Christian faith in Earle's visions of protest and social critique. Both posts highlight how those citizens most associated with upholding the dominant vision of the Bush administration post 9/11, Conservative Republicans and Christians, hold the capacity to identify to arguments outside of that normative framework. The reviewers use the album review as a place to cite their own political arguments against that administration and its visions of democratic silence over democratic dissent. The music reviews concerning Earle's album become one of the first "safe sites" in a mass public sphere for the articulations of civic dissent. The reviewers articulate critical questioning within a democratic framework and revere Earle's album for its abilities to enact a critical democratic speech. Reviewers thus marry musical merit with political meaning. Consider this in light of the next review:

★★★★☆ **Thought provoking and the music is great too** *So much of the response to the 9/11 atrocity has been reflexive (though not too reflective) jingoism and militarism masquerading as patriotism.* Steve Earle's newest album, with songs written in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing and America's

imperial "war on terror," is a much needed antidote to this overwhelming hostility. As well, Earle's lyrics are superb. Whether discussing the personal turmoil that accompanies the loss of gainful employment (and indicting greedy multinational corporations and maquiladoras) or speculating on our unsavory motivations behind discipline and punishment, *he provokes us, makes us think, and leads us to question things we may have previously "figured out."* All in all a wonderful addition to the music collection of any freethinker and roots rock, alt-country fan. (Jason Meirek, 10/18/2002, emphasis added)

The significant addition of this reviewer's praise for *Jerusalem*, is the distinction he makes of Earle's critical voice against the "jingoism and militarism masquerading as patriotism" in the dominant discourses of post 9/11 America. This reviewer rejects hegemonic conceptions of patriotism as silent support, relying upon the album as "a much needed antidote." Also important is again, the emphasis made here on Earle's abilities to cultivate critical questioning within the minds of audience; "*he provokes us, makes us think, and leads us to question things we may have previously "figured out."*" This mimics the value placed on critical thought from the previous positive posts, but now invokes the critical deliberative process on behalf of the audience as a part of Earle's musical merit. It is his abilities to "make the audience think" that are central to the value placed in the album. The final review selected works to make that critical deliberation not just a part of valuable music but the identity of American:

★★★★☆ **Jerusalem is a good CD.** For me the issues that Steve Earle raises in *Jerusalem* are daily issues. The struggle with culture, religion, personal ideals, and politics are constant in my life. There are many reasons for this that I will not go



into in this short review. Suffice to say, that when Steve Earle sings about these issues I am moved. *I agree that this is a deeply American CD. American in the sense that it is critical, desperate, hopeful, and filled with other voices.*

Sometimes we forget how diverse American voices are -- it is easy to believe that we speak with a single voice and that we have moved together towards one particular, bright, shining goal. *We need to be constantly reminded that we struggle and question and oppose. We need to be constantly reminded that struggle and opposition are American. Steve Earle keeps reminding us of this.*

(Tori Eggherman 01/14/03 emphasis added)

The entirety of the evidence supporting this reviewer's argument that "Jerusalem is a good CD" rests upon the conception put forth about what it means to be American. Not once, save for the title, does the reviewer discuss the value of the album without making comparative claims as to the truth of its American-ness via multiple voices or the dialectic of struggle and opposition. The review is barely about the music of the album; more accurately, the argument focuses on the album's ability to portray an alternative vision of American as born through the deliberative framework of multiple voices of societal struggle. Although these reviews meet opposition, as we will now direct our attention, their focus on dissent, democracy, and patriotism as values endemic to the merit of Earle's music makes them fertile ground for understanding the emergence of critical thought and civic action through popular music.

## Negative Reviews

If positive reviews of Jerusalem centered on the value of political dissent in the public sphere, negative reviews mimic this same phenomenon in reverse. Negative reviews chronicle disappointment from reviewers, most of whom acknowledge a long history with Earle's music, for being preachy, dogmatic diatribe. With the exception of one negative album review, reviewers who find the album *Jerusalem* disdainful do so because of its political function, not its musical merit:

### ☆☆☆☆☆ Believing his own hype

There is no doubt that Steve Earle is a talented singer/songwriter. He has proven that fact time and time again in a variety of styles ranging from straight up country, bluegrass, folk, and good ol' rootsy rock and roll. Music critics have been singing his praises since 1986, calling him everything from a blast of fresh air to a musical saviour while marveling at his self-proclaimed Marxist take on the world. It seems he has begun to believe his own press-clippings and is now writing for the media types he once hurled insults at... 'John Walker's Blues' is a calculated and contrived track, and it accomplished what Steve Earle wanted by drumming up controversy and getting him quite a bit of exposure. For a while you could not turn on Fox News or CNN without seeing his face as he explained the tune. The facts of this matter are that 'John Walker's Blues' is an awful song, no matter where your political beliefs may fall... The rest of the album is more of the same tedious leftist bumper sticker sloganeering that takes up more and more of his live shows. *Personally, I don't really care how an ex-con, junior high dropout, recovering junkie, may feel about the death penalty or tax cuts. I just want to hear*

*Steve blast out a killer version of 'Hardcore Troubador'. (Jesse Taylor, 10/07/02, emphasis added).*

Earle's talent as a singer-songwriter is subordinate to the fact that he uses his music as a platform for political argument. Even though the reviewer states that "John Walker's Blues" is an awful song regardless of political belief, Earle's attention in the mass public is seen as derogatory to his musicianship and an un-earnest attempt at public attention. The credibility of his political thought replaces the credibility he holds as a musician, and reviewers seek "killer versions" of song over political thought. Similar themes of disappointment emerge from negative reviews as consumers, many of whom identify as long-time Earle fans, argue that controversy or politics replace musicianship:

★★★★★ **A Monumental Disappointment** I should cut Steve Earle some slack - - after all, anyone who puts out five unbelievable albums in a row is due for a letdown. But I had such high hopes for this CD, especially in light of the 9/11 subject material. Sadly, JERUSALEM doesn't deliver in the slightest, save for a few thought-provoking lyrics sprinkled here and there. But they can't save this record. *I guess we'll have to wait for the next Steve Earle CD -- on JERUSALEM, he let his politics get in the way of good music.* (Michael A. Beyer, 01/02/03, emphasis added)

★★★★★ **Disappointing** Steve Earle put out some great records in the last five years, showing himself to be adept at many types and styles of American music from bluegrass to blues to folk to rock and roll. However, "Jerusalem" does not even come close to his recent work. Instead, it is overproduced, disjointed,

shallow, and depressing. *He beats the listener over the head with the political stuff, but doesn't seem to be paying any attention to what really matters: the music.* Hopefully, on the next disc, he'll get back to what he does best. Thumbs down on this one. (Music fan, 1/14/30, emphasis added).

Negative reviews suggest the exact opposite correlation from positive reviews; here, politics ruin rather benefit musicianship. The issues raised are not endemic to American values; they threaten them. Although reviewers assert Earle as having musical talent given previous work, negative music reviews are supported with evidence that it is Earle's focus on politics that has aided the demise of musical value. Some reviewers suggest a wait-and-see approach to Earle's music; but, not all reviewers are willing to wait until he "gets back to what he does best":

★☆☆☆☆ **Trashed** I found 'John Walkers Blues' so disgusting that it completely ruined the album for me. *I threw it in the [garbage]. First time I've ever done something like that. The music is great, Mr. Earle has a voice to match the blues riffs he plays. But the lyrics were simply so disgusting that I threw the thing in the [garbage].* (A music fan, 10/9/02, emphasis added)

★☆☆☆☆ **No more for me,** I have just bought my very last Steve Earle CD. I have listened to his music since the late eighties. He has progressed and his style has changed but I have been fine with that he is a great story teller. But he has started to get more and more into the social commentary. I was fine with one or two songs like this but this whole album is nothing but a liberal agenda fest. *I'm glad we live in the U.S. and Mr. Earle has the right to sing about whatever he*

*wants but that doesn't mean I have to buy any more of his albums and I will not.*

(Ellipse 75, 01/14/03, emphasis added)

These reviewers actually praise the music, but find the political commentary so intrusive that they permanently reject Earle. When faced with the critical commentary of the album, opponents who do not engage the message reject it. This is a significant moment, because much of the criticism of popular culture to engage critical deliberative thought argues that controversy gives us a series of parallel monologues as opposed to actual deliberation. Here, we do see this back in forth exchange between consumers who say they love Earle or they hate him. This exchange does not give us deliberation but a form of cultural debate. However, the goal is to understand how *arguments* about Earle's music, may actually lead us to more civic *argumentation*. While the reviews reiterate disdain for Earle, they begin relying upon support about what it means to be an American over the problems inherent in the music. It is in the use of support concerning "American-ness" where the arguments begin to engage each other. One review actually takes Earle's liner notes from *Jerusalem* and develops a refutation style argument against the Earle's conceptions of patriots who asked "the hardest questions in the darkest hours". Another reviewer engages the Amazon.com reviewer on his conceptions on America in regards to praise for Earle's album:

★☆☆☆☆ "You can't write satire anymore"

Tom Wolfe said you can't write satire any more, because no one could think of anything more absurd than what people are already doing. I guess this album and its reviews prove that. Anders Smith Lindall, the Amazon.com reviewer praises Steve Earle for attacking the "corrosive cultural forces as consumerism." Talk

about self-loathing! Of course, self-loathing is just what this album's about. Mr. Lindall tells us the Taliban John song raised “the ire of many who misunderstood it.” *I'm afraid it's Mr. Lindall who doesn't understand. Steve Earle believes John Walker Lindh is just an innocent man caught in a miscarriage of justice. He's said so in public interviews. Perhaps Mr. Lindall agrees, but unlike Steve Earle, most Americans \*do\* understand what Taliban John was doing in Afghanistan and why. It really wasn't very hard to figure out, except for some self-loathing "intellectuals" who must always find a way to blame America first.* One has to wonder, if Mr. Lindall and Mr. Earle really hate "corrosive consumerism," why do they permit their work to be here on Amazon.com, the ultimate bastion of consumerism? Could it be for the money? (Earle reminds me of the folk singer in the Alan Jackson song who says, "I don't believe in money, but a man could make him a killing!") Taliban John, at least, was willing to give up the money. It's ironic that Amazon chooses to hire a "reviewer" who thinks consumerism is "corrosive," but in America, they have that right. *What's more ironic is that this is the very right John Walker Lindh wanted to destroy.* (A music fan; January 3, 2003)

As parallel monologues of praise and disdain are negotiated in Walker-Lindh's role in destroying American values, the reasoning of praise or disdain on the part of any particular reviewer becomes the site of critical conversation in a mass public sphere. Deliberation begins to form around what an American value is, and what each reviewer believes to be central to American values designates whether he or she will praise or reject Earle. Although we do not get to assume that this reviewer will adhere to Earle's

political claims, it is possible to see the process of argumentation unfolding around the reasoning process of American-ness used to substantiate *Jerusalem* as a good or bad album. Consider finally the following review:

★★★★☆ **The "right wing" weighs in I guess**

*It would appear that NOT liking this album is a lot like not supporting America's patriotic push. If you don't, then you must be suspect. As a long time Earle fan (Early Tracks anyone?) I was totally disappointed to find that Mr. Earle felt the need to beat me with his political views for almost an hour. While most of his CD's have often offered an alternate view of something political (**and often times have forced me to think or rethink some of my own views**) this one comes across as preachy, intolerant garbage.* (Andrew Linnenkohl, 09/26/02, emphasis added)

This review highlights the paradox of the parallel monologues of praise and disdain with the deliberative voice of reasoning at work within them. Here, the reviewer voices patriotic alienation as part of his negative appraisal of Earle's album. Mind you, in no way has the dominant culture of the time began to embrace the alternative vision of America voiced by Earle, as can be seen in the analysis of media interviews from the earlier portion of this chapter. Yet, the controversy surrounding "John Walker's Blues" has clashed so loudly with dominant discourses of patriotism that this reviewer feels subjugated to the version of patriotic dissent put forth in the album and Earle's rhetorics outside of it.

The significance of this review lies in the portrait of affect from Earle's voicing of vernacular counterpublicity in a mass sphere. Linnenkohl's remarks signal the emergence

of a “conservative counterpublicity,”<sup>28</sup> or at the very least a perceived marginalization from a dominant “liberal” public. The power of both the ideological constraints of the context, and the album within it, is immense. The reviewer is admittedly a long time fan of Earle, and has previously welcomed Earle’s “alternative view” as central to rethinking his own ideas. But in the fierce ideological silence of post 9/11 patriotism, such rethinking is untenable. When faced with controversial questioning, the reviewer’s own feelings of alienation prevent tolerance and engagement in a critical dialectic.

The paradox of understanding the process of deliberation amidst series of parallel monologues lies in negotiating consumers’ alienation and identification. Positive posts identified with the political messages, often outside other conservative identity components (Christian, conservative), where as negative reviews feel largely “disappointed” alienation by the version of America purported in acclaim for Earle’s album and in the album itself. It is not politics that ruins the album here per se, but “*his* politics”—“tedious leftist bumper sticker sloganeering” and “liberal agenda fests” that isolates the negative reviewers from the album. However, the willingness to voice reasoning on both sides, from a standpoint of identification and alienation, is where the platform for critical civic engagement begins to emerge. Part of the venom felt here for the rupture of the dominant sphere lies in the therapeutic function of American ideologies to this point in the post 9/11 moment. Interrogating them disrupts the therapy as well.

---

<sup>28</sup> This concept of “conservative counterpublicity” is the current investigation of Rob Asen who has argued for a necessary inquiry of the counterpublic project to account for whether or not marginalized dominant voices can in fact act as counterpublics. (taken from presentations at the NCA 2005 conference in Boston, MA and the RSA 2006 conference in Memphis, TN)



Therefore, citizen consumer arguments become significant for two reasons. First, they highlight the way deliberations will play out in the subsequent chapter around the value of dissent in American democracy; and second, the consumer negotiation of the relationship of politics and music offer valuable insight to the controversial stance that music may occupy in a dominant public culture. While the civic deliberation of these reviews is about the appropriateness of dissent in a 9/11 mass public, the cultural deliberations are about the place of politics in music more generally. Earle's music was characterized as both "politics" and "social commentary"; music as political is seen differently here than music as social commentary. To comment is fine, but to argue is inappropriate. Comments can be deflected easily, but arguments require the audience to "work" to discard them. In these reviews rejection does appear as outcome to consumers' cognitive dissonance, noted through their avowal to never listen to Earle's music again. While arguments in music may be rejected by a significant segment of popular audiences, they still require an engagement that critical commentary alone does not. That engagement, though limited, deflective, and arguably not in the practice of self-risk, is still the seed of civic participation. Dominant dissent against counterpublic thought works to substantiate dominant ideologies of American nationalism, but does not silence counterpublic thought outright. Rather, it highlights the tension needed for civic deliberations in the development of argumentation for and against the album, for and against the album's version of American-ness. Understanding this becomes crucial to the way in which a deliberative public culture emerges in the analysis of the next chapter.

## **IMAGE AND ACTION**

Even in the midst of immense pressure to adhere to an American citizenship that silently supports the actions of its government, Steve Earle's ballad of "John Walker's Blues" and the album *Jerusalem* fissure that silence, engendering deliberative thought on what the appropriate version of a U.S. civic identity post 9/11 should be. But Earle was certainly not the first voice to critique the dominant ideologies of the time; rather his voice was at the intersection of mass publics and counterpublic vernaculars in such a way that his criticism became difficult to ignore. One of the most striking examples to this effect was a moment in which a reviewer stated, "Now I'm generally not one to harp on the political and historical literacy of rock'n'rollers, except that Earle makes it hard to look the other way" (Nice tunes, 9/27/02, Amazon.com). It is this inability of listeners to ignore Earle's musical counter-publicity that inserts his controversial image as evidence toward counterpublic action.

One of the more recent interrogations of the role of image in publics is Kevin Deluca's *Image Politics*, based on environmental activists' use of image as spectacular interference into dominant publics. Deluca critiques a rhetorical tradition where "rhetoric" is too steeply "conceived as civil, reasoned, verbal discourse" noting that such conceptualizations "discount image events as rhetoric and marginalizes the groups that practice such a form as rhetoric" (Deluca, 1999, p. 14). Understanding the significance of image as rhetorical phenomenon is central to understanding how Earle comes to act as a critical voice in the public sphere. Earle's interviews can be viewed as image events acting in this way, but these events are grounded in counterpublic argumentation.

Consider how music reviewers characterize Earle's image in the public sphere during this time:

*The artist has long been a vocal humanist, boldly speaking out against the death penalty or cruelty of any kind. In his tireless crusade, he actually is the preacher that Springsteen plays onstage, rightly laying claim to the tradition of Woody Guthrie as an activist with a guitar. But he is neither pedantic nor humorless...his gruff, emotional vocals and alternating mix of chiming, Byrds- and Beatles-inspired jangle and explosive fuzz guitar add layers of meaning to the songs that simply cannot be conveyed when the lyrics are merely read as words on paper. (DeRogatis, Chicago Sun Times, 9/29/02, emphasis added).*

*For a guy who'd love to be thought of as the thinking Marxist's rock'n'roll addict, Steve Earle's political punch lines are libertarian enough to set liberals and conservatives spinning. Political pundits are coughing up hair balls over his new tune, "John Walker's Blues," and routinely invite the Texas alt-country singer/songwriter to explain the First Amendment on news/talk shows...Nobody ever accused Earle of not having the courage of his convictions, and this tour around his recent CD "Jerusalem," is his most overtly political yet, though it's too bad that most media attention focused not on the excellence of the songs but rather on whether Earle glorifies the actions of the "American Taliban" on "John Walker's Blues." In a time of manufactured entertainment and coerced consensus, Earle proves his status as one of American music's towering talents by making music that matters. (The Sunday Oregonian, 1/26/03).*

These reviews suggest that much of Earle's "image" actually revolves around the power of his reasoned verbal discourse. Earle's conception as a "*vocal humanist*" with abilities to "*boldly speak out*" against injustice given the "*courage of his convictions*" place his image and the image events of the "John Walker's Blues" controversy as reliant rather than reactionary toward a reasoning, deliberative conception of counterpublics.

Therefore, Deluca's portrait of the role of image may be too exclusionary of traditional rhetoric, arguing:

In a social field characterized *more by the conflictual process of hegemony than by communal deliberation and community consensus*, radical environmental groups are competing in a corporate-owned public sphere that needs to be understood not as a civic forum but as "the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics take place" (Eley, 1992, p.306). This conceptualization of the public sphere avoids restricting it to the medium of talk characterized by rationality and recognizes that "the public sphere was always constituted by conflict" (Eley, 1992, p.306). (Deluca, 1999, p. 21, emphasis added)

Loosening the restrictions on publicness from a world only of "talk" is central to understanding the hegemonic contestation within publics; however, the conflict characteristic of the public Deluca espouses is reliant upon the traditional rhetorical phenomenon in order to enact social change.

In regards to what we see emerging from Earle's public controversy, his image helps to make his music noticeable; but, it is his role as an activist and his connection to counterpublic argumentation that ensure critical dissent in the public sphere. If we

theorize social action only in the image, we run the risk of audience appropriation and denunciation. In this framework, Earle at best becomes a provocative-populist, “country-rock renegade” (Pareles, NYT, 9/8/02, Demarco, Plain Dealer Cleveland Ohio, 12/13/02), open to be appropriated by any dominant version of populism. At worst, Earle can be easily dismissed as merely a “former crack addict” (1/3/03, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) or “Nashville bad boy” (DeRogatis, Chicago Sun Times, 9/29/02). But when his image is grounded in argument, and teamed with his relentless rhetorical agitation for change, it becomes impossible to ignore, if not discount Earle’s image as activist. His brand of provocative musical populism is not open for appropriation in the way that the Republican National committee used Springsteen’s “Born in the USA,” stripping the song of its original indictments about the displacement felt from returning Vietnam veterans. Furthermore, his argumentation makes it more difficult for those who would like to discredit his political credibility based upon previous criminal behaviors. Consider this in light of the following segment from Earle’s interview on ABC’s *Up Close* with David Marash, where he articulates his reasoned objections against the death penalty in relation to the Lindh controversy:

DM: So it isn’t poor Karla. It’s poor us.<sup>29</sup>

E: Absolutely. My objection to the death penalty is spiritual. In a democracy, if the government executes somebody then I’m executing somebody and I object to the damage that does to my spirit. I’ve said that over and over and over again and I believe that. My opposition, I do have a political opposition to the death penalty

---

<sup>29</sup> Karla is in reference to Karla Faye Tucker, the first woman executed on the Texas Death Row, about whom Earle has written and produced an anti-death penalty play.

which is a totally separate thing. I simply don't believe any government should have that much power because they eventually will abuse it and someone innocent will die.

DM: Is it safe to say that the bottom line of John Walker Lindh episode for you, is that, notwithstanding the slings and arrows and controversy and threats that it's produced for you, not only would you do it again, but *knowing Steve Earle you will do it again?*

E: Something will probably come up. I don't know. I hope so. I mean, I hope that, *you know this didn't require any courage because this never occurred to me not to write this song or any other song. I just wasn't raised as an artist to believe that you censor yourself because of, being afraid of offending someone. That's just anti-art, to my way of thinking.* (*Up Close*, 11/15/2002, emphasis added).

Earle does not merely represent the voices of a ordinary people; rather, he voices opposition as a member of agitational counterpublics against the death penalty.

Moreover, he harnesses this image to further challenge the absence of dissent from the portrait of American artist and citizen of the time. Earle's relationship to the vernacular contrasts with Springsteen's populist appeals, and further illustrates the reason that *The Rising* fails to foster critical thought in post 9/11 America. Earle's image works insurgently in the public sphere only because it is based in his abilities to argue from the location of counterpublics. Without the verbal reasoned argumentation from counterpublics, Earle's image falls merely to spectacle; but with it, it becomes a valuable part of social action.

### **POPULAR INSURGENCE THROUGH POLITICAL CONTROVERSY**

The controversy over “John Walker’s Blues” gives scholars of popular culture, politics, and the public sphere a complex portrait of the possibilities for engendering deliberation amidst the hegemonic silence of post 9/11 America. In context, Earle’s ballad of Lindh comes to serve as enthymematic indictment on the similarities between American nationalism and Islamic faith thus giving way for consumer deliberations on the place of critical thought and alternative views of American-ness as part of our civic culture. Earle’s image works in cooperation with argument and activism for democratic reformulation and social change. His ability to voice counterpublicity in song and in speech, rather than merely represent ordinary voices, prevents that image from a long history of appropriation or denunciation in a dominant public sphere. Given these components of the controversy, popular music comes to rely on democratic nationalism, taking on an integral role in creating room for civic discourse on American citizenship and the value of critical thought in post 9/11 America.

The next chapter will build upon the deliberative threads that run through Steve Earle’s voicing of critical dissent through “John Walker’s Blues.” In particular, I will now turn to understanding the convergence of counterpublic dissent in the mass public sphere through the Dixie Chicks’ controversial disapproval of President George W. Bush’s plan to invade Iraq. Here, the voices of counterpublics are reflected in the public voice of the Dixie Chicks in such a way as to engender deliberations on a mass scale concerning the appropriate place of dissent in American democracy. The result is the formation of a public culture via popular music.

## **Chapter Six: Dissident Dixie Chicks and the Emergence of a Deliberative Public Culture**

*“You don’t like the sound of the truth, Coming from my mouth...” --The Dixie Chicks in “Truth #2*

In the days following the largest anti-war demonstrations since the Vietnam Era, it was not Jesse Jackson, the Pope, Michael Moore, or even George W. Bush who garnered the most public attention for their comments on the impending war and the rise of agitating social movements against the conflict. It was Natalie Maines, lead singer of The Dixie Chicks. The group, then world renowned as the sweethearts of popular country music, stood by Maines’ dissent days before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Her comment, “We’re ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas,” permanently ruptured a dominant public silence and changed the music trio’s relationship to popular culture and the public sphere.

The Dixie Chicks’ voicing of dissent marks the emergence of critical deliberations concerning the citizen’s responsibility to question U.S. foreign policy within mass popular culture. When popular culture emerges to cultivate critical rationality and democratic dissent, that public formation is essentially different than other types of public spheres. A conceptualization of a “public culture” stretches, relies upon, and expands the way we currently theorize popular culture and publics; it asks us to see democratic participation enacted via the popular as a distinct public culture.

This project will highlight the emergence of a democratic public culture via a rhetorical analysis of the multiple texts comprising the Dixie Chicks controversy. I will account for the literatures in popular culture, the public sphere as it pertains to the uses of



popular culture, and ideology critique to derive a definition of public culture as distinct from a public sphere. Following a theoretical discussion of public culture, I will offer a textual analysis that depicts the various ways in which this case serves to bolster democratic deliberation. Using features and editorials that detail public responses to the initial statement from the country trio, news articles detailing the beginning of their U.S. tour almost six months later, a televised interview with the women, and a recounting of song lyrics and concert footage from the U.S. *Home* tour, this chapter will illustrate the ability for popular culture to foster deliberations on democracy and spawn social awareness about divergent ideas on national conflict. From this analysis I will argue that public culture opens the possibilities for democratic participation and social change by relying upon popular culture as a platform for debate. This emergence exists in the proliferation of texts that the political economy of popular music affords, in the reflection of counterpublic argumentation into a mass sphere, in the invocation of democratic nationalism in debates on proper modes of American citizenship, and in the critical rationality of musical performance.

### **DEFINING PUBLIC CULTURE**

The idea of a public culture is often referenced as an assumed social collectivity, but rarely theorized outside of ambiguous allusions. Biesecker's (2002) interrogation of the popular remembrances of WWII, Roberts' (2002) discussions of Native American identity in relation to performance and gender, and Parsley's (2005) examination of public art and law all require the audience to assume a function or scope of public culture that is never fully theorized inside the papers themselves. To reference "public culture"

has too long been an ambiguously mentionable context for understanding cultural artifacts. Though all of these papers are exemplary in their analysis of popular/cultural artifacts, to truly understand their effect in a public culture we must interrogate the shape, scope, and function of what this concept means.

One other limitation of scholarship on public culture is an overt interest in the transnational and global impact of cultural politics. The journal of *Public Culture*, sponsored by the Society for Transnational Cultural Studies, cites as its editorial vision a quest to examine “the cultural flows that draw cities, societies and states into larger transnational relationships and global political economies” ([www.publicculture.org](http://www.publicculture.org)). While such an inquiry is commendable and important, to construe public culture as inherently transcendent of nation states is myopic. This construction follows the trend of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2001) to forgo interrogating the dominance of one nation over others in an effort to examine the construction of new transnational cultures. This limited conceptualization of public culture leaves little room to understand the *function*, as opposed to the *construction*, of public cultural politics.

The clearest attempt at a rhetorical theorization of public culture may be seen in Hariman and Lucaites’ work on iconic photography as a visual mode of public deliberation (2003, 2002). Here, they argue that public culture relies upon peoples’ abilities to identify to composite materials of media and popular discourse (for their study, iconic photographs). Following Michael Warner, they argue,

Because the public is a discursively organized body of strangers constituted solely by the acts of being addressed and paying attention (Warner, 2002, pp. 65–124), it can only acquire self-awareness and historical agency if individual auditors “see

themselves” in the collective representations that are the materials of public culture. (2003, p.36)

While the theory advanced here is significant to understanding what constitutes a public culture, the work does not articulate the possibilities for instrumentality within that public culture. Furthermore, there is a conflation, it seems, between their discussion of a public sphere and a public culture. Though they reference public culture as their site of civic engagement, they never make a distinction between them. Public culture and public sphere are used interchangeably. Similarly, Deluca and Peeples use the aims of a public sphere interchangeably with a “public screen,” arguing for imaged based publics as the “current place for participatory democracy” (2002, p. 145). Although the authors go to great lengths to support their distinction of a screen based in technocratic media rather than a sphere of rational debate, the project hyper-focuses on mode over action.

My contribution to the study of public culture is to speak to the inadequacies of public culture scholarship in understanding both its function and formation. Namely, I want to suggest a version of public culture that is threefold: a) a public culture that comes into existence in the coupling of constitutive textual circulation with instrumental argument formation around those texts, b) a public culture that shares much, but is necessarily distinct from, the concept of a public sphere, and c) a public culture that exists inside the “boundaries” of nation states with transnational mobility.

### **On Deliberative Instrumentality**

To describe the face of a public culture, I claim we must first answer the question, “What does it mean to be civically engaged in a mass mediated, consumerist,

political and economic system?” Barry Brummett cites a need for people to see their “engagement with popular culture as participation in *rhetorical* struggles over who they are and how the world will be made (1991, p.xxi).” He reformulates our relationship to popular culture as an active engagement with, rather than a passive penetration of, popular texts. This enables a definition of public culture as rooted in the engagement of citizens specifically with popular ideas and images.

This rhetorical engagement, however, is not enough to warrant public culture. The formulation stops short of theorizing how people may then enact deliberation and social change based upon their engagement with popular texts. Brummett asserts,

such awareness *must inherently be subversive* when it is awakened among people who live in twentieth-century America, with its numerous injustices and oppressions, as well as its resources for overcoming injustices and oppression (1991, p.xxi, emphasis added),

However, the argument that engagement with popular texts is *inherently subversive* goes too far. Public culture requires an activity that is not inherently subversive but actively subversive. It is not simply in the act of engagement with culture, but in the deliberative exchange about that culture, that allows for the formation of a public culture. In the Dixie Chicks political dissension concerning a U.S. war with Iraq, it was not only people’s engagement with, but also their deliberation about, that becomes instrumental in public culture formation.

It is the argument of this project that the raising of awareness in the engagement with the popular creates a public culture when coupled with people’s deliberation about those circulating texts and ideas. Following Rosa Eberly, public culture relies on “what

people *do with their judgment* about books and other cultural products, not the books or even the authors in and of themselves, *that enables books to affect shared worlds*" (Eberly, 2000, p.xii, emphasis added). Here, Eberly raises two critical acts that are central to public culture's relationship to social change: "doing" and "judgment."

In these acts we can locate public culture's great potential as a context for social movement growth. "Doing" can be likened to deliberative engagement, which I have already pointed out as a central constituent of public culture. Judgment, as referenced in Hauser's work on vernacular in earlier discussions of Springsteen, is the precursor to that engagement and a central component of the consciousness raising which holds the capacity to fuel social change. Following Hannah Arendt's conception of judgment, Lisa Disch (1997) argues for consciousness raising as a necessary "democratic breakthrough"

orchestrated by women for women, consciousness-raising originated what turns out to be radical feminism's most genuinely baffling bequest to contemporary feminist theory: the "commonplace" that "every woman has wisdom and knowledge through her own life experiences that will lead to working for revolutionary changes in her position." (p.132)

Although consciousness raising is best remembered as a central tool for women's liberation, its benefit to social change at large should not go unnoticed. Judgment through consciousness raising suggests that tapping into the life experiences of peoples positions holds the capacity for revolutionary action. The life experiences consciousness raising tapped into in the lives of women in 20<sup>th</sup> century America are assuredly different than the life experiences of American citizens living in a post 9/11 world. However, in the same way that "consciousness raising began as a resistance against the stultifying normalcy of

the household” (Disch, 1997, p.135), consciousness raising via popular culture in the post 9/11 public sphere can said to have engaged in a similar resistance to the “stultifying normalcy” of the assumed portrait of the dutiful citizen as patriotically silent.

Nancy Fraser asserts that Disch’s reliance on Arendtian judgment is perhaps “too dissociated from questions of dominance, subordination, and justice to deal adequately with the complex phenomenon of consciousness raising” (1997, p.174).

Instead, we need a theorization of political judgment

that encompasses those issues, as well as issues of individuality...only an account of judgment that simultaneously does justice to the two moments—both the individuality of judgment and the its structural locatedness in contexts of inequality—can possibly be acceptable today. (Fraser, 1997, p.174-175)

Thus, the act of judgment, rooted in consciousness raising, must account for structural inequalities of difference and subordination. That said, popular culture as a mode of consciousness raising holds the capacity to draw skeptics into radical deliberation via popular appeals, making social change palatable by attending to peoples experience in that network of domination. Public culture’s relevance to social movements, then, is as a fertile starting point. It is a critical beginning, not an end. It is an addition to the strategies of social movements, not a substitution.

If we return to Eberly’s advice about action and judgment as central to the abilities of cultural texts to “reinvigorate participatory democratic practice” (2001, p.1), this manner of “affecting shared worlds” becomes the active constitutive element of a public culture. The value of the popular within a public culture is not only to “combine to constitute a public culture known to itself by the continued circulation of iconic images”

(Hariman and Lucaites, 2003, p.59), but to serve as the composite matter for deliberation and the basis for raised public consciousness. It is not only how people engage a popular text, but also how the text engages their conscious judgment and how they in turn engage one another about those texts, that allow us to form a public culture and engage in a struggle for social change.

### **Distinguishing Public Culture from the Public Sphere**

In addition to the incorporation of instrumentality to notions of a public culture, we also need to see public culture as a distinct form of publicness from a public sphere. My main critique of rhetorical theorizations of public culture has been the synonymous referencing of public culture with the public sphere. However, this conflation makes sense within their limited constitutive theorization of publicness. Current work in public culture has followed Michael Warner's conception of the public as formed in the address to citizens rather than the addressing performed by the citizens themselves. As Warner suggests, publics "exist by virtue of their address" (2002, p. 417).

If we focus on address as the sole constituent of publics, then we easily conflate public culture with the public sphere, given that the predominant manner of address in contemporary society is highly mitigated by the machination of a popular mediated culture. However, if we locate deliberative exchange as the central constituent of the public, then we can differentiate between publics formed around deliberations over popular texts versus publics formed around deliberation of lived oppression, governmental systems and institutions, and other lived experiences and localized discourses. The manner of texts for deliberation is significant in the information it

espouses. Thus, the public culture that emerges around the dissent of the Dixie Chicks is fundamentally different than the publics and counterpublics that deliberated the unjust actions of American foreign policy.

A public culture is therefore a different composite than a public sphere. Public culture is not the same as public formed via deliberation and debate around a nexus of information and experience that is not gained via popular culture. Certainly, public culture shares much with the public sphere. The two have a relationship one to the other but should not be conflated. Deliberation about political ideas generated from an engagement with the popular serves as the essential foundation of a public culture. This reliance on popular artifacts in some way lessens the bourgeois vision<sup>30</sup> of the public sphere, as the popular has been a historically constant element of ordinary peoples' lives. This distinctness of public culture as centered in popular texts is important to understanding both the potentials of public culture over other deliberative spaces, but also its weaknesses and limitations in comparison to those publics formed outside of popular culture. In this way, public culture will never be a substitute for counterpublic social movements, but it can be a service to them, fostering fertile soil for mass counterpublicity in a dominant public sphere.

### **On the Nation**

As the ideologies of nationhood serve as the sites for deliberation, understanding the boundaries of nationalism are an integral component of public culture. In the case of the Dixie Chicks controversy, critical questions surface regarding the implicit American

---

<sup>30</sup> This claim is following Negt and Kluge's critique for the need for a necessarily proletarian conception of the public sphere.



imperialism in the post 9/11 context. The relevance of the nation to public culture is immense. The actions and ideologies of nation states simultaneously contain and inform our deliberations within a public culture. This formulation contradicts Hardt and Negri's (2000) abandonment of national power in favor of diasporic globalization. In *Empire*, the authors suggest the death of national interests and imperialism. "The fundamental principle of Empire" write Hardt and Negri, "is that *its power has no actual and localizable terrain or center*. Imperial power is distributed in networks, through mobile and articulated mechanisms of control" (2001, p. 384, emphasis added). However the very context of this case study, the United States invasion of Iraq, was not an action rooted in an ambiguously dispersed global empire but in the interests of an American nation. As Maines herself notes, President Bush was "*ignoring the opinion of many in the U.S. and alienating the rest of the world*". These critical statements are not properly understood in relation to a decentered global conflict; the conflict is driven by the interests of one nation.

The formation of public culture beckons an interrogation of centered power. This is not to suggest that public culture cannot have mobility and transnational significance. Rather, in the formation of global public cultures, deliberations continue to center on centralized conceptions of power that reflect the ideological assumptions particular to the nation espousing those deliberations. For example, some of the more interesting manifestations of public culture emerging from this controversy are other nations' responses to the conservative backlash within the U.S. against the Dixie Chicks' dissent. International audiences challenged the ideological boundaries of American nationalism, becoming suspect of what "freedom" meant in the land of the free; "Canadians consider

criticizing and challenging their political leaders as a basic democratic right, extending even to times of war, when so much more is at stake” (Pynn, July 10, 2003).

There are two significant implications of this example to the relevance of nation within public culture. First, the centralized nation still controls the ideological boundaries of the deliberative context. Although “democratic rights” are not inherently American, in this context of debate it is the role of democratic ideology within the American nation state that is in question. Second, the ideological boundaries of one nation (the U.S.) serve as impetus for articulating the contrasting norms of another nation (Canada). Hardt and Negri’s formulation of empire discards too readily fundamental forces of nations that are at work within public culture. Retaining an understanding of the power of national interests, and the ideological boundaries incumbent, is imperative to conceptualizing public culture’s parameters of deliberation and constitution.

Following these ideas on instrumentality, distinctness, and the nation, I am advancing a definition of public culture that values the power of people’s ability to deliberate and mobilize about and against dominant hegemonic forces via a raised consciousness stemming from an engagement with popular culture. *Public Culture is a particular manifestation of the public sphere, where popular texts shape and guide civic deliberation and social action within the ideological boundaries of a nation state.* The rhetorical exigence surrounding the Dixie Chicks controversy is an exemplary case for understanding this distinct theorization of a public culture, as we may begin to see how popular artists and texts make room for opinion formation and cultivation in public spheres.

## **THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC CULTURE IN DIXIE CHICKS DISSENT**

The case of the Dixie Chicks' post 9/11 dissent is interesting because it opens a door for civic debate *directly* through popular culture. In so doing, it affords people a credibility of opinion and action in a way that traditional politics does not. As I mentioned in the introduction to this project, people often seem to disavow their "politics" but seldom deny their links with popular culture. The defining distinction of a public culture over a public sphere may be precisely the manner in which citizens feel compelled to participate in it.

Of course, not all unions of politics and popular culture invoke the enormous response as did the Dixie Chicks controversy. Fewer still invoke some kind of deliberative action. Along the path of this dissertation, I have attempted to point out where, and under what conditions, deliberative engagement emerges, or fails to emerge, in popular music. Springsteen's release of the *The Rising* fell short because it referenced only populist appeals that served to bolster silent citizenship, whereas Earle adeptly inserted critical questions via his own counterpublic actions. This case study takes on a new significance as it highlights distinct pathways that popular music, *from a mass sphere*, can tap into counterpublicity and engage in deliberative politics. Here, the Dixie Chicks' dissent cultivates civic deliberation and aids the formation of a democratic public culture. In large part, this occurs because of the band's immense popularity, and the contradiction of their statements in relations to the populist ideology of the conservative country fan-base. However, the significance of their statements is in its relationship to a counterpublic political struggle invoked and sustained in the public sphere. Public culture emerges as a) the Dixie Chicks reflect that struggle, b) as nationalism takes on

democratic ends in the mobilization and management of new dissent, and c) as the women navigate context to invoke new creative articulations of dissent. The following pages will look now specifically at each of these active components form of a deliberative public culture.

### **Political deliberations on the economy of popular music**

As has been argued throughout this dissertation, the economic production of popular texts is both a limitation and an advantage to the circulation of dissent on a mass scale. In this instance, the Dixie Chicks placement within a mass popular allows not only for the dissemination of political dissent on a large scale, but also aids the proliferation of debate on the role economic forces in constraining musical messages. John Thompson (1990) claims that one cannot understand the ideological significance of mass mediated texts without acknowledging this production in relation to textual construction, and audience appropriation. Because the production of popular texts will always be tied to a capitalist industry, the economic question becomes part of the rhetorical question. Without looking at the meaning at each level of a text, one is inclined to the “fallacy of internalism” – “the assumption that the ideological character of media messages can be read off the messages themselves” (Thompson, 1990, p.306).

As argued in Chapter Three, although the economic production of media often confines the way in which political messages enter the public sphere for deliberation, sometimes that market system allows for mass dispersal of political messages. In this way, the public reach of popular culture relies upon the economic function of the industry to circulate critical dissent. In spite of the economic confinement of the production of popular texts, public culture is created.

Furthermore, the Dixie Chicks' dissent evokes a proliferation of ideas not only around the vernacular arguments of the statement, but the capacities of critical dissent to continue to surface in the ideological confinements of that market. Thus, deliberation is invoked not only around American values of citizenship, as will be turned to momentarily, but also around American values of the market.

Consumer modes of citizenship erupt quickly in response to the controversy. Pressure to ban the Dixie Chicks' music across the conservative south, from people previously identifying as part of the fanbase, was immense:

Female Caller(1): We're going to boycott them for their music and we're going to boycott you for playing it if you don't stop playing it.

DJ: Well, Ma'm, that's one's the last one you're going to hear.

Hundreds of stations simply stopped playing the songs they had celebrated over and over again hours before.

FC(2): I love their songs but I don't agree with what they did.

FC(3): Thank you all for pulling the Dixie Chicks. And I think we should be just as embarrassed for them (April 24, 2003).

Radio stations followed their listeners' complaints and banned Dixie Chicks' music for months. Those bans in turn fostered serious discussion about the dangers of media ownership and conglomeration as congressional hearings tried to decipher which corporations had enacted banning beyond local sites of dissent:

A Senate Commerce Committee hearing on radio ownership and consolidation Tuesday plunged into debate on the circumstances surrounding the country music performers the Dixie Chicks. Committee Chairman McCain (R-Ariz) grilled

Cumulus Media CEO Lewis Dickey on whether he has ordered the country stations in his chain to stop playing Dixie Chicks' music after they made widely publicized criticisms of President Bush. McCain said *the incident was a textbook example of concerns about media consolidation*. Dickey said *the controversy surrounding the Dixie Chicks was unprecedented and left many program directors confused about what to do*. He said he issued the ban after program directors and other corporate officers voted on how to handle the situation. Sen. Sununu (R- N.H.) asked several questions about the rights of stations to cater to their audience's desires and make business decisions on what to play. *McCain emphasized that his objection was to the decision's being made on the corporate level*. Simon Renshaw, the Dixie Chicks' manager and representative of the Recording Artists Coalition, said the often-maligned Clear Channel Communications was "getting a bad rap" on its handling of the Dixie Chicks incident. "Clear Channel was very proactive *at the local level*," he said. "*The people who acted, acted at the local level. Nothing was done at a corporate level.*" (July 9, 2003)

For the engendering of public culture, this moment suggests three levels of activity. First, the reach of the Dixie Chicks dissent transcended located counterpublicity to inform a mass public. Second, people were compelled to enact their politics through consumer behavior. Third, ideologies of the nation (American values of free trade and free speech) surface as the boundaries for public debate. The formation of public culture lies in the centrality of the political economy to act as part of the process and possibilities for deliberative exchange.

There are several illustrations of this centrality, moments of both concern and hope, which arise from the mass proliferation of texts. First, corporate media does in fact confine who gets to speak in the public sphere as noted by Republican Senator John McCain. In senate hearing on Clear Channels corporate bans on the Dixie Chicks music, McCain remarked, “This is remarkable; You restrained their trade because they exercised their free speech.” (source). However, in a twistedly hopeful moment, corporate actions seem to have been informed by the opinions articulated within localized communities. Consider again both the radio interaction,

F(1): We’re going to boycott them for their music and we’re going to boycott you for playing it if you don’t stop playing it.

*DJ: Well, Ma’m, that’s one’s the last one you’re going to hear.*

And the pressure corporations felt from local audience listeners,

*Dickey said the controversy surrounding the Dixie Chicks was unprecedented and left many program directors confused about what to do. He said he issued the ban after program directors and other corporate officers voted on how to handle the situation. Sen. Sununu (R- N.H.) asked several questions about the rights of stations to cater to their audience’s desires and make business decisions on what to play. McCain emphasized that his objection was to the decision’s being made on the corporate level. (July 9, 2003)*

The problem, of course, is that the voices molding corporate action were exercising opinions that *reinforced* the strategies of control issued by the White House rather than *challenging* or *agitating* against them. It is hopeful, however, in that the political statements of ordinary people demanded corporate agents act on their behalf. Again, the

significance here is not so much how the boycott limited the proliferation of Dixie Chicks' music, but to recognize the immense reach and response of dissent as articulated in popular culture. Though the bans become their own locus of deliberation; ultimately, they do not limit the band's rhetorical argument. In actuality, the opposition made room for officials to interrogate the market mode of entertainment deliberation, raising serious questions about the contaminants of the economic system and the power of shrinking

### **Reflecting Counterpublicity of Dixie Chicks Dissent**

When looking for populist representations of ordinary voices within mass culture, popular country music is arguably one of the richest resources for articulating the quandaries of vernacular publics. However, as I demonstrated with the case of Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*, populist appeals do not necessarily lead us to critical argumentation in the public sphere. It is the dissonance of the Dixie Chicks' appeals to populist vernaculars countered with the reflection of counterpublic argumentation that gives way to mass deliberation in the public sphere.

Sharing the historical lineage of American roots music, popular country music exemplifies an inability to separate one life-practice from another, understanding "how texts are stitched into patterns of lived experience," (Hoggart, 1957, p. xii). This lived experience is the same place where some locate the political nature of all vernacular voices. However, vernacular voices are not inherently insurgent voices. On the album *Home* (2002), the Dixie Chicks quote lyrics that invoke populist arguments, problematizing the inability of working class people to transcend their economic



conditions. Consider the following lyrics from first track off the album, accompanied by an upbeat tempo in 4/4 time with a strong melodic fiddle:

*My brother found work in Indiana, Sister's a nurse at the old folks home,  
Momma's still cookin' too much for supper, And me I've been a long time gone,  
Tryin' to be the big deal, Getting' there the hard way, Livin' from a tip jar,  
Sleepin' in my car* ("Long Time Gone," *Home*, 2002)

The lyrics depict the plight of the American dream, and the reality of its practice. It is a catchy, sing-along populist song. The women continue with references to peoples voices, giving face to the largely working class armed forces (*Two days past eighteen/ he was waiting for the bus in army greens*) and highlighting the prominence of traditional notions of protestant faith and nationalism (*The Lord's prayer said and the Anthem sang; I wished I loved Jesus, the way my wife did*). Although the lyrics lean toward a critical argument, it falls short as appeals to a commonality of lived experience does not disrupt the dominant sphere.

The band's claiming of the vernacular of their fan base as part of their own creates an uncomfortable identification with a now adversarial audience. In an interview with Diane Sawyer on Prime-Time Live, Emily Robison says,

I do think we are like our fans in lot of ways. I do, I do think we are, *Our basic moral fiber is made from the very same thing*. Family is so important to us. I know making singing songs about real issues is very important to us. *We're not any different today than we were before this statement was made*. (April 24, 2003; emphasis added)

Robison places the voice of the Dixie Chicks as sharing the foundation of her country music fan base, and does not retract the statement of dissent. The statement feels inconsistent with the majority of the band's fan base, as thousands of fans boycott the band. The women's arguments, and the voices of a country music vernacular, are simultaneously in conflict and unity. This dissonance is key to the entertaining of political arguments on mass scale.

The Dixie Chick's reflection of counterpublicity breaks with a conservative country music fan base expectation of the artists, and initiates a deliberative discomfort. The clash with a populist vernacular is made as the women articulate the arguments of counterpublic vernaculars from social movements against an American invasion of Iraq. The Dixie Chicks' statements mimic those of protestors. Consider first the argument from a protestor in comparison to Maine's critical questions about her reasoning for dissent:

I would like to say to all the world leaders who think they not as tyrannical as Saddam Hussein, you're lying, you do want war, *you have not exhausted all the diplomatic pathways* (anti-war protestor, CNN, 3/5/2003, emphasis added)

On this part, *I just personally felt like, why tomorrow?* It's not that I don't ever want you to go over there. It's not that I don't ever want you to clean things up and fix things. *It's just why can't we find the chemical weapons first? Why can't we, just why tomorrow?* (Natalie Maines, ABC, 4/2003)

The rephrasing of counterpublicity in terms of critical questions invites a response from a mass public. As is a constant with dissonance, some of these responses are both violent and emotional, with little open-ness for deliberation. However voices do rise to debate the ensuing war around the band's reflection of counterpublicity. As will be seen in the following section on democratic nationalism, both popular artists and fans emerge to argue for their appropriate visions of citizenship.

Thus, the relationship of reflective counterpublicity is circular and mutually informing. The Dixie Chicks' arguments in a mass sphere are informed by the vernacular voices of social movements. The vernacular of their fan base is then forced to reconcile a new counterpublicity of the artists. Consider the circulation in the following interview segment from Prime-time Live:

Diane Sawyer: ...the girls admit *back before the fighting began, they were questioning the whole idea of war*. The possibility of a terrorism backlash, they say, the lack of international support. And they add that they were suffering at the thought of Americans dropping bombs and all the lives that could be lost....

NM: I ask questions. That's smart. That's intelligent. To find out facts, not to just say okay, we're going over here now. I say, why are we going over there? And I don't mean to Iraq. I mean across the room. Since I was tiny you've had to tell me why I have to do something.

DS: But even people, who said it's fine to question the war, were shocked that someone would stand on stage and attack the Commander In Chief.

NM: You know, *when all the protests were going on* and he was asked, "Mr. President, what did you think about all the protests this weekend?" And I would

like to have seen, “you know, I, I saw them. I appreciate the sentiment that they’re coming from. I appreciate that these are passionate citizens of the United States, but I feel, I really feel like this is the right thing to do. And I have to (do) what I (have to do).” *You know, just, just an acknowledgement.*

DS: He said it’s a free country and that people have the right to express. He said people have right to express their opinion.

NM: Well, *that’s not what I saw on CNN*, but.

BUSH: First of all you know signs of protest it’s like deciding well I’m going to decide policy based upon a focus group. The role of a leader is to decide policy based upon the security, in this case the security of the people. (March 6<sup>th</sup>)

Martie Maguire: I felt like *there was a lack of compassion every time I saw Bush talking about this*. I honestly felt a lack of compassion. And I realized he’s got people...

DS: *For whom? For?*

MM: *For me. For, a lack of compassion for the people that are questioning this*, for the people that are about to die for this on both sides.

NM: It’s the whole atmosphere with the setting up of you’re either with us or against us. That’s not true. That’ not true. (April 24 2003, emphasis added)

In this interview, the Dixie Chicks distance themselves from the anti-war protestors, but in doing so, act as advocates for social change. Advocacy is the enactment of argument for social intervention (Goodnight, 2006). This act is distinct from the way Steve Earle navigates insurgent critique. In Earle’s case, he becomes an advocate for a

person (Lindh) but not the activity of a movement. Furthermore, many fans already acknowledged a prior level of comfort between the dissonance of their politics and the artist. Earle spoke from an already established counterpublic argumentation.

The Dixie Chicks do not occupy a counterpublic space. Their fan base perceived a political reality of the artists that turns out to be false. Steve Earle, because of his consistent vocalizing of counter-argumentation, and his own place in agitational counterpublics against the death penalty, makes music a mode of counterpublic argumentation and births a deliberative response from his fans. But the texts born in the controversy of John Walker's Blues suggest music as mode over context. By context, I mean to argue that popular culture takes central stage in the public sphere as place of civic contestation. The Dixie Chicks dissent, resonant with counterpublics and coupled with a disquieting break from the expectations of their fan base, results in popular music not only as a vehicle but as a site for civic debate. Within mass popular culture, the Dixie Chicks become one of the first outspoken critics of the Bush administration and their war. The addition of context as a place for popular music to act deliberatively yields the creation of a public culture.

The Dixie Chicks *reflect* the arguments of social movements on a mass scale because they do not occupy a counterpublic space. Contrary to Earle or Guthrie, the Dixie Chicks *take on* the argumentation of vernacular voices, but they themselves never stand in the social location of the vernacular counterpublics. The Dixie Chicks act insurgently because their place within the realm of mass popular music allows for the women to become a conduit for counterpublic critique in the mass sphere. This is not a representation; it is a reflection. Consider the band's discussion of their controversial

cover of Entertainment Weekly with slogans such as “traitors” and “Saddam’s angels” superimposed on their nude bodies.

“*It deserved a strong response* from us and we felt it had to be in your face,” Maguire says. “The magazine wanted us standing in front *in our jeans and smiling* for the cover. And we thought no. We had to hit them over the head with it and expose the absurdity of the things we were being called. It’s made me realize our country has not progressed as far as I thought we had. If this can happen to three white girls playing country music....”

Robison picks up the thread: “*They’ve set this tone that they’re not to be questioned and if you do then you are unpatriotic. That’s somehow gotten into the American Psyche and that’s scary. If you can’t question your government, then you are just mindless followers*” (Williamson, August 22, 2003, emphasis added).

The women not only stand by the initial statement, after some weathering in conservative public spheres, but also re-articulate their opinion formations with great strength; *If you can’t question your government, then you are just mindless follower*. Furthermore, when asked to embody American values visually, “*The magazine wanted us standing in front in our jeans and smiling for the cover. And we thought no. We had to hit them over the head with it and expose the absurdity of the things we were being called,*” the women chose not to support a visual monument to ideological American values but rather exposed themselves and the controversial discourse that emerged from the initial voicing of dissent.

This bold exposure mirrors simultaneous nude protest from anti-war activists. Grace Knight, Australian singer and activist, claim the protestors choice to go nude as based in exposing a “total vulnerability...It's absolute complete vulnerability, and in that vulnerability there's also an awful lot of power, there's a mighty well of power there” (CNN, 3/5/2003). While the merit of nude performance as a strategy of social change can be debated, notice how similar the choice of the Dixie Chicks and the protestors mirror one another. The fearlessness of nudity results in the voicing of similar arguments on the strength of acting vulnerable in the face of power. Again, in articulating their own dissent, the Dixie Chicks reflect counterpublicity into a mass public sphere and engender the creation of a new context for civic debate, a public culture.

### **Invocation of Democratic Nationalism**

As the Dixie Chicks' comment in London sounded through multiple audiences, the country-music fan base, the community of creative artists, and anti-war counterpublics entered into deliberations that relied upon ideological conceptions of what it means to be “patriotic,” “American,” and “democratic.” The Dixie Chicks dissident statement has been construed as anti-war and anti-Bush, but it was its “anti-American-ness” that gets called into question both by the audiences who hear it, and by the women themselves as they articulate responses back to those publics.

Consequently, the role of nationalism is of great significant to mediating the possibility for democratic engagement. National identity works as both thought and action, and can reveal itself in a multitude of ways. Consider Burney's account of

national displays, from “heightened awareness” to “laying down one’s life for the nation”:

Nationalism can be simply defined as a heightened sense of awareness of belonging to a nation, which, in turn, can be described as a group of people brought together by ties of history, culture, and ancestry...As a cultural phenomenon, nationalism asserts that, while an individual may have several identities, it is the nation that defines the individual (Kellas, 1991, p. 5).

*Nationalism is therefore both an ideology and a form of social and political conduct* that arouses strong feelings of patriotism and love for one’s country, *inviting and initiating attitudes and actions of affection and service, unity, and community*. Service to the state, unconditional love of one’s country, and the desire to lay down one’s life for the nation – these are all manifestations of nationalism. (Burney, 2003, emphasis added)

From existential awareness to self-sacrifice, the variant displays of nationalism work similarly to foster both ideology and action.

Identification with national constructs work to invite audiences into communal deliberation while constraining the manner of that engagement. This dualism is at the heart of the Dixie Chicks controversy. While national conceptions of citizenship as silent support for America dominate the public sphere at the moment of the trio’s dissent, their speaking out reconceptualizes national civic character around norms of asking critical questions. This appeal to audiences around critical conceptions of American-ness results in a democratic nationalism. In this section I argue that the ideologies of nationalism



surrounding the Dixie Chicks controversy work as a point of Burkian identification for the engendering of deliberation necessary to a public culture.

The controversy from the original statement spawned a series of responses from the women that manage the mobilization of dissent. The earliest responses were both explanatory and even apologetic, responding to disciplinary discourses that had emerged in their country-music fan base and throughout the conservative south. The first public comment to follow the incident is detailed in the following passage:

Just two days later, the Dixie Chicks were backpedaling on their website: “We’ve been overseas for several weeks and *have been reading and following the news accounts of our government’s position*. The anti-American sentiment that has unfolded here is astounding. While *we support our troops*, there is nothing more frightening than the notion of going to war with Iraq and the prospect of all the innocent lives that will be lost.”

Maines further stated, “*I feel the President is ignoring the opinion of many in the U.S. and alienating the rest of the world*. My comments were made in frustration and *one of the privileges of being an American is you are free to voice your own point of view*.” (2003)

Although many of their supporters were disappointed in the retraction, these comments are immensely important for the management of dissent around tenants of nationalism. The initial statement of “We’re ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas,” does not inform audience of the reasoning that the women had used in process to arrive at their position. In the statements following, however, the women manage the cultivation of dissent, shifting away from simply being for or against the war, or for or

against the president, to a debate on appropriate “American-ness.” While Maines continues to focus criticism on President Bush, emphasizing her discontent in the president’s “ignoring the opinion of many in the U.S. and alienating the rest of the world,” the basis for that criticism lies in the president’s un-American actions. As he ignores citizen voices and fails to recognize alternative points of view, he fails to meet the standards of the Dixie Chicks’ conception of the American citizen.

These statements reconstruct the citizen’s responsibility to the nation as being informed (“reading and following the news accounts”), complex (supporting troops but opposing war), and opinionated (“being an American” means freedom “to voice your own point of view”). This account of nationalism conflicted heavily, however, with a largely conservative fan base where ideologies of liberalism construed the ideal citizen of one in silent support for the country and its actions. “Keeping one’s mouth shut” becomes the dominant trope for civic responsibility from the largely conservative fanbase:

M: I think they should send Natalie over to Iraq, strap her to a bomb and drop her over Baghdad.

F: I say *lock up the CDs*

F: The *president is working so she can keep that mouth of hers* (April 24, 2003).

The mobilization of oppositional arguments focuses on homogenously silencing opinion, not cultivating it. The counter-claims from actual people ironically mimic the manner that other scholars have seen popular culture acting in the public sphere. As Biesecker argues:

By manufacturing and embracing a particular *kind* of American, a certain idea of what it means to be a “good citizen,” these popular texts [*Saving Private Ryan* and *The Next Generation*], best understood as technologies of national cultural transformation, promote social cohesion by rhetorically inducing differently positioned audiences...to disregard rather than actively to seek to dismantle the inequitable power relations that continue to structure collective life in the United States (2002, p.394).

The impetus of dismantling the good citizen in this case actually emerges from popular culture. It is the articulation of dominant ideologies on the ground that works to sustain it. Two men interviewed at an airport in Cincinnati, OH suggested to a reporter that, “They should string those girls up,” and that “Those girls need to learn to keep their mouths shut,” (Williamson, August 22, 2003). And in South Carolina, the women’s civic positioning led legislators to deliberate on what did and did not count as “patriotic” in the public sphere. South Carolina legislators passed a bill that declared the original “we’re ashamed the president is from Texas” remark as unpatriotic (Nichols, April 24, 2003). An elected official responded that he thought “we in South Carolina should say good-bye to the Dixie Chicks,” (April, 24 2003). The immense proliferation of discourses chastising the Dixie Chicks’ conception of patriotism was vast, as can be seen in the reflection of Natalie Maines’ second statement:

Two more days (after the first response) and Maines was down on her knees, forced into painful retraction: “As a *concerned American Citizen*, I apologize to President Bush because my remark was disrespectful. I feel that *whoever holds that office should be treated with the utmost respect*. We are currently in Europe and witnessing

a huge anti-American sentiment as a result of the perceived rush to war. While war may remain a viable option, *as a mother, I just want to see every possible alternative exhausted before children and American soldier's lives are lost. I love my country. I am proud to be an American.*

Although the apology is redolent of the gendered position of the trio, even in apologetic critical and democratic notions of American citizenship are rearticulated. Maine's appeal to her *private* self, "as a mother," with *public* argumentation, "I just want to see every possible alternative exhausted before children and American soldier's lives are lost," fuses the public and private into norms of democratic citizenship. Hannah Arendt (1998) argues that:

The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could before. (1998, p. 50)

Certainly, the artists' gender as relegated to a private sphere risks marginalizing their ability to speak and be heard in a public sphere. Maines' apology grasps for civic legitimacy through a mothering role, crafted around what Guillaumin would term an "ideology of familialism" (year, p. ). On the other hand, Mari Boor Tonn's work on Mother Jones, who "became the industrial labor movement's most sought after, beloved and effective agitator," (1996, p.1) depicts a "militant motherhood" that can transform

this private location into democratic agitation. In fact, “early women reformers at times assumed maternal roles to bolster their ethos and deflect criticism of their speaking and independent lifestyles” (Tonn, p.2). Thus, the private space here actually engages a public further to entertain deliberative arguments.

The spread of deliberative argumentation is exactly what happened following the apology. As once silent but sympathetic audiences soon found the retraction suspect, and became increasingly alarmed at the venom from conservative voices, people joined in to echo the Dixie Chicks dissent. In particular, the artistic community began a new process of deliberations centering not only on nationalist ideals concerning freedom of expression, but also essential to the creative processes of American popular music. Bruce Springsteen entered into the debate in his support for the Dixie Chicks, seen in the following statement:

The Dixie Chicks have taken a big hit lately for exercising their *basic right to express themselves*. To me, they’re *terrific American artists expressing American values by using their American right to free speech*. For them *to be banished wholesale from radio stations, and even entire radio networks, for speaking out is un-American*.

The pressure coming from the government and big business to enforce conformity of thought concerning the war and politics goes against everything that this country is about—namely freedom. *Right now, we are supposedly fighting to create freedom in Iraq, at the same time that some are trying to intimidate and*

*punish people for using that same freedom here at home.* (Nichols, April 24 2003, emphasis added)

Springsteen and countless others in the creative community<sup>31</sup> elevate the level of debate and re-center the Dixie Chicks' remarks now specifically around the American value of "freedom" and the tenet of liberalism that protects "free" speech for creative artists. Of course, counter-opposition surfaces within the musical community. Some popular musicians responded with claims for "protecting" of freedom as the American duty over the "expression" of freedom. In country artist Toby Keith's *Shock 'N Y'all* tour, Keith performed his "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue—The Angry American" against a backdrop of the American flag, with special pyrotechnic fireworks that erupt on the lyrics warning future terrorists that "we'll put a boot in your ass." While it is fair to question the deliberative value of such an act as ignorant and uninformed, leaning toward discipline over deliberation, his response is still centered on the national controversy on the value of *protecting* freedom over *expressing* it. Again, nationalism serves a democratic function as the context for public culture debate.

Thus, audiences are exhorted to deliberations within national ideologies of liberalism—individual rights, freedoms of expressions, obligations of support, which together comprise a democratic nationalism constitutive of the ideal American citizen and debate-able in larger public spheres. These deliberations mimic the model of agitation

---

<sup>31</sup> In addition to the conversation about how women may enter into the public, this analysis needs further exploration of the deliberations that were spawned from this rhetorical moment as to how creative artists do and should enter into the public sphere for deliberation. One journalist remarks that "with the experience of the Dixie Chicks providing a cautionary tale—and with high-profile actors who have expressed anti-war views...being branded as "casting couch Bolsheviks"...--there was a clear signal coming from the entertainment industry in general, and the music industry in particular, about what happens when artists

and control that fuel consciousness raising efforts in the beginning of social movements, (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1993). The identification of audiences with ideologies of national identity and civic responsibility, managed in the Dixie Chicks' dissent and following statements of explanation, mobilizes civic debate on both sides. On the right, radio stations organized rallies to voice dissent against the trio and support for the war in Iraq with public protest and activism:

*A few hundred protesters in Bossier City, LA gather to run over a heap of Dixie Chicks CDs with a 33,000-pound tractor, as they did yesterday. The tractor activists said they were supporters of President Bush and of nearby Barksdale Air Force Base, (Zacharek, March 18, 2003, emphasis mine)*

On the left, those in support of the trio's dissent used their voiced opposition as new evidence against the war in Iraq:

*We are against this war, Mr. Bush. And any time you've got the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you; you're time is up, (Michael Moore, April 24, 2003).*

Six months after the initial statement, The Dixie Chicks emerge reflecting the tensions, mobilizations, deliberations that had since engendered a public culture, but imply that agitation against the control of dominant White House discourse and a conservative country music fan base is strong:

“We were told the official White House quote on our ordeal,” Maines recalls. “I thought it was going to be *something empowering about the first amendment and*

---

speaking out,” (Nichols, April 24, 2003). Others liken the climate to McCarthyism. Again, It's noteworthy and a necessary part of this analysis for future work.

*our rights as American citizens.* I don't know why I thought such an educated thing could have come out of there. Instead it was "their fans have spoken." Which makes your mind go back to the death threats and the trashing of Emily's ranch and the corporate banning," says Maguire. "So this is the President condoning those things?" Robison demands.

"He was asked about the end of the war in Iraq, and he said, 'Freedom is a beautiful thing and these people now have a right to speak and we've given them that'," recalls Maines. "It was everything he should have said when he was asked about us."

And most significantly, the women again problematize the predicament of being both democratic and patriotic in the current moment stating that,

*They've set this tone that they're not to be questioned and if you do then you are unpatriotic. That's somehow gotten into the American Psyche and that's scary. If you can't question your government, then you are just mindless followers.*

Thus, while normative ideologies of nationalism provoke audiences identification to and consubstantiality with the original text, the deliberation within public spheres stretches the conceptions of those ideological constructs and makes room for the emergence of a democratic nationalism. Room for social change is constructed by interrogating social schemata for the "patriotic American," opening space for the continuation of dissent in conceptual norms on what patriotism looks like and realigning future norms for identification and consubstantiality.



## **Contextualization and Musical Argumentation**

Following the controversial statement, the Dixie Chicks music takes on a new argumentative function. Once synonymous with only a vernacular populism, the narratives in context provoke audiences to consider claims about civic dissent as an essential element of American citizenship. Public culture emerges in the critical claims advanced in musical texts located in social context. In the midst of public scrutiny and public heralding for their political views, the Dixie Chicks began the U.S. leg of their album *Home*. Though under immense pressure to retreat from the fanbases who were to attend their concerts, the women did not shy away from the public controversy surrounding their political personas but instead incorporated their claims the musical performance. In this final section of how popular culture formed from the women's dissident statements, I will argue that popular music forms a public culture in its power to promote deliberations in the public sphere based on musical argumentation from the new social context.

There is a point in the Dixie Chicks' *Home* tour<sup>32</sup> where they perform the song "Truth No. 2," written by Patty Griffin. Before singing, Maines explains to the audience that the women had no idea how significant the message of the ballad would become to them when they had recorded the song. The three women, once disparately located at various points on the massive arena set, now merge into one tight unit. It is a physically cohesive moment not seen often in the show. Once reaching the formation, they begin to sing the following lyrics, accompanied by their own execution of an up-beat instrumental

---

<sup>32</sup> While I was able to find some external writing documenting this moment in the concert, and have incorporated that, this analysis is largely based on written notes made from my own experiences observing the performance at the Austin, TX concert, May 2003.

folk arrangement. Places in italics are moments in the music where phrases and notes are emphasized; bolded italics illustrate both unison and crescendo:

You don't like the sound of the truth  
Coming from my mouth  
You say that I lack the proof  
Well Baby the might be so  
I might get to the end of my life  
Find out everyone was lying  
I don't think that I'm afraid anymore say that I would rather die trying

Chorus: Who-oh, Swing me way down south  
Sing me something brave from your mouth  
And I'll bring you  
Pearls of water on my hips  
And the love in my lips  
All the love from my lips

This time when he swung the bat  
And I found myself laying flat I wondered  
What a way to spend a dime  
What way to use the time, ain't it baby  
*I looked at my reflection in the window walking past*  
*And I saw a stranger*  
Just so scared all the time  
It makes me one more reason why the world's dangerous

Chorus (musical interlude)  
*You don't like the sound of the truth*  
***Coming from my mouth***  
*You say that I lack the proof*  
***Baby that might be so***  
*Tell me what's wrong with having a little faith*  
*In what you're feeling in your heart*  
Why must we be so afraid?  
And always so far apart...

Chorus Chorus: Who-oh, Swing me way down south  
*Sing me something brave from your mouth*  
And I'll bring you  
Pearls of water on my hips  
And the love in my lips  
All the love from my lips

Two occurrences happen in the performance to engage the audience in new musical arguments about civic dissent. First, the recontextualized interpersonal ballad of the song takes on civic significance. In the lyrics, “he swung the bat, and I found myself laying flat I wondered, what a way to spend a dime, what way to use the time, ain’t is baby? I looked at my reflection in the window walking past, And I saw a *stranger*” the woman lay claim to the power of speaking out and overcoming the loss of self in an abusive domestic relationship. But the new social context invokes the enthymematic argument of the trio’s dissent. Speaking out for relational self-preservation becomes speaking out for democratic preservation.

Second, the contextual elements coupled by the artistic framing make it possible to implore the audience to entertain new assertions about civic dissent as integral to the practice of citizenship. The song makes an invitation to deliberation musically. The emphasis furthers the already impassioned delivery of their public statements and couples the public doubts of their political ideas with the self assured veracity of their arguments. In a musical call and response between the women toward the end of the song, the women resound a musical argument:

You don’t like the sound of the truth,

*Coming from my mouth,*

You say that I lack the proof,

*Baby that might be so.*

This choice to emphasize “truth” and “lack of proof” with the irreverence of “Baby that might be so” conjures up previous exchanges between the Dixie Chicks and their critics. The musical emphasis advocates a standing up for their ideas even in the midst of

immense doubt of their reasoning. All three women come together in crescendo at the italicized lines, singing powerfully in a rich harmony. This musical decision contrasts with softer solo lines from Maines earlier in the ballad. The performance recreates the back and forth exchange of deliberations about citizenship in the public sphere. Public doubt of their civic actions is alluded to in the narrative's doubt of the woman speaking back to her abusive partner while the bold ending reiterates an unyielding strength of conviction. As a result, the combination of sound, lyric, and musical choice enforces a compelling delivery of the Dixie Chick's civic arguments about free speech.

By itself, the song encourages audiences to consider thinking critically by invoking previous arguments from the socio-historical context. However, the Dixie Chicks rely not only on the music but the polysemy of performance to advocate dissent. During the performance, large overhead screens roll footage of various social movements from throughout history against the narrative of the song. A journalist chronicling the performance in Memphis, TN details this use of visual arguments in the following passage:

Yet the show-which is prefaced by Elvis Costello's version of (What's so funny 'Bout) Peace Love and Understanding- is well received, even when a song called Truth No 2 is accompanied by a video featuring Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Malcolm X and footage of civil rights protests<sup>33</sup>. The film also shows archive footage of Nazi book burning before it ends with shots of the destruction of Dixie Chicks' records and the on-screen messages, "Seek the Truth" and "Tolerance".

---

<sup>33</sup> The Austin performance had notable pieces of early women's rights movements as well.

Throughout the show, Maines sports a “Dare to be Free” T-shirt<sup>34</sup>, and it is lost on no one that we’re in the city where King was assassinated (Williamson, 2003). The Dixie Chicks’ argument is further negotiated in the circulation of these rhetorical images. Musical performance becomes multi-textual. Consequently, Michael Warner’s theorizing still holds value for the engendering of critically deliberative publics by noting this kind of textual circulation and overlap within public culture:

Between the discourse that comes before and the discourse that comes after one must postulate some kind of link. And the link has a social character; it is not mere consecutiveness in time, but a context of interaction...any position is reflexive, not only asserting itself but characterizing its relation to other positions up to limits which are the imagined scene of circulation” (Warner, 2002, p.420).

The postulated link of the visual texts in combination within lyrical claims works enthymematically to further argumentation in the public sphere. The circulation of texts is not a fragmented image based “public screen” (Deluca and Peeples, 2002) but added evidence for public argument. The visuals advance critical rationality by voicing the counterpublic argumentation of social movements.

Even the artists’ style of dress in black, torn and pinned clothing calls forth the lineage of punk rock, a genre of music well known for speaking against the status quo. It is a noticeably visual divorce from their previous country-western attire. The signifying elements of style add yet another enthymematic element to the band’s argument. The

---

<sup>34</sup> During the Austin performance, part of which was aired live for the Association of Country Music Awards, Maines wore a t-shirt with the acronym “F.U.T.K”. Though the concert evoked the words as freedom, unity, tolerance, and knowledge, the popular press picked this up as a searing indictment of Toby Keith.

clothing choice works here to aid argumentation. The nod to the history of punk is not an ungrounded signifier but a variant strand of generic claim. In the addition of visual argumentation to the performance of musical dissent, the political narrative of the song transcends its interpersonal narrative to invite audiences further into public deliberation. The multiplicity of texts does not erase potentials for deliberation, but initiates it.

### **THE CONTROVERSIAL POPULAR OF PUBLIC CULTURE**

McGuigan notes that, “culture has always been political and shows no sign of escaping the ruses of power and public controversy” (1996, p.7). In this way, I have argued that popular culture manages and constructs a distinct deliberative public space known as a public culture. Public culture should not be seen as a substitute for mass social movements or mass protest; rather, it is a fertile context for movement growth, and supportive of variant forms of popular deliberation and protest. Public culture should be seen as an integral site for theorizing democratic action.

As has been the testament of this chapter, the Dixie Chicks’ dissent is an exemplary case for illustrating public culture formation. Their utterance, “Just so you know, we’re ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas” (Prime-Time Live, p.5) caused a proliferation of discourses, which in turn shaped a sphere of instrumental action and deliberative engagement. When we marry Maines’ statement with the immense popularity of the band, the ideological confinement of the post 9/11 context, and the reflection of social movement vernaculars in her voice of dissent, a passionate manifestation of civic ideas emerges within a once silent public.

## **Conclusion: Music, Publics, and Protest**

It has been over three years now since the moment of the Dixie Chicks' statement of dissent. In that time, George Bush was re-elected and the war in Iraq continues. Obviously, the abilities of popular music to change the course of human events is limited. However, some things have changed. Bush's approval rating is now hovering around a dismal 30%; and the proliferation of dissenting popular texts around the 2004 presidential election was so immense that American society actually came to term the conflict between the popular and the political a "culture war". The dissent within popular culture came to signal a pattern of growing dissatisfaction with George W. Bush and the war in Iraq. Music becomes one of the many powerful cultural forces that aid the incorporation of dissent and critical questioning of this period. While there is still much work to be done in order to make a causal link between popular music and social change, dissent in the mass sphere cannot be silenced, and its rupture seems to have paved the way for the reincorporation of disagreement and protest as part of the civic democracy.

In this conclusion, I will briefly review my arguments on the role of publics, popular music, and protest to the cultivation of civic dissent in a public sphere. Following I will return to the centrality of argumentation, ideological criticism, and multitextual studies of music as essential aspects of understanding popular music's potential as an insurgent mode of public address. The examination of popular music in this dissertation contributes a theory of music to democratic publics that locates civic dissent and democratic action not in traditional political actions but in a complex circulation of popular musical dissent. In closing I will articulate what I see are the necessary extensions of this study for a truly comprehensive theory of popular music as public deliberation.

## **PUBLICS, POPULAR, AND PROTEST**

The concept of a public sphere has been the prominent mode of understanding political participation as a deliberative engagement between ordinary people and mass culture. The public sphere is important because it advances a concept of political participation that is central to engaging in civic action and social change. In the public sphere an activity of political argumentation is required for cultivating democratic engagement. Again, the public sphere is important because it is here we can see that it is what people are able to do with popular texts that are the lasting power of dissenting popular music.

Thus, the public sphere is a rubric for understanding the kind of political participation that I see as necessary for the evolution of democratic society. In this project I decided not to look at how people vote or how people see their individual selves, but how people may come to the table for societal discussions of politics. The activity of a public sphere requires an interactive critical rationality. Political participation in a public sphere is not a rearticulation of identity nor is it necessarily concerned with the individuated actions of traditional political behavior. There is a reason why I have not chosen to focus on MTV's "Rock the Vote" campaign as such events do not suggest the centrality of critical rationality, argumentation, and debate that are central to political participation in a public sphere. This project has argued that popular music is important as a mode of civic debate and a location for people to enter into debate. Following, we must stretch the boundaries immensely of what can count as a form of civic deliberation. Accordingly, this project is a move toward reconceptualizing where people can locate



their civic agency. Today's debate is not located where 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment scholarship, central to original theories of the public sphere, once placed it.

Mass popular culture has also been a central component of this dissertation for its various relationships to publics. Part of this dissertation emphasizes mass culture as a *mode* of civic discourse in a the public sphere. Popular culture is important as a way for popular artists to exercise civic argumentation and a way for regular people to exercise civic argument in response. The latter modality, located within the voices of ordinary people, alerts us to the second relationship mass culture has to publics. In this way, mass culture becomes a *location for public building*. This is the distinction that should be made. We have long been concerned with how mass culture works as a mode, and I will do much work in this dissertation to show how popular music acts critically as a vehicle for public debate. However, the aspect often under theorized in relation to a public sphere is how popular culture now serves as the site of publics. Public building occurs in a mass mediated sphere. The industry of mass culture has lead to an almost un-ignorable dominance to the context of public address. We cannot turn back the clock and go to a time period in which televisions were not part of people's family rooms. In this way, mass popular culture is not only as a mode of civic discourse but the context for all civic discourse.

Protest through popular music has been a complex negotiation of nationalism, hegemony, and vernacular voices. In speaking to the potential of mass culture to act as protest and invoke further protest, nationalism, hegemony, and the vernacular all surface as integral components of the explanation. There are a couple of different reasons for this. The specificity of the context, in post 9/11 America, led to a necessary discussion of

the relationship of citizens to the nation. Grief and silent support framed civic duty after 9/11. As ideologies of nationalism became the paths through which civic identity is negotiated, the nation state came to define the topic of debate and protest in a public sphere. When critiquing popular music, citizens comment utilizing criteria of ideological American values. Contrast this phenomenon with the absence of commentary invoking criteria of great musical composition. Identification to ideologies of the nation turns out to be the site for critical contestation in publics. Protest is therefore linked with adherence of dominant ideology in order to invite ordinary people to the table for the critical questioning of social change.

The placement of national identification within popular culture opens the door for hegemony to explain popular music's potential as civic protest. If I had been analyzing ideologies of nationhood present in high school civics texts instead of popular music, another theoretical lens may have been more useful. But nationalism's location within the popular suggests that the room for hegemonic contestation is great. Theories of hegemony are useful because they portray popular culture as not inherently good or bad for political participation, but that culture is always a site of contestation. Though ideologies of nationalism maintain dominant notions of citizenship, they also invite people to deliberations about that civic identity. Hegemony allows us to see struggle as the inherent component of culture. The inherency of struggle is significant as contestation becomes the critical building block of democratic and active publics.

Finally musical protest requires a vernacular counterpublicity. All too often the use of vernacular voices is dispelled in popular culture and academic scholarship with an inherent political critique. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Popular music as protest

needs the argumentation of counterpublic vernacular voices. It is not enough to make a populist appeal to the “voice of the people.” Protest requires a linking with counterpublic critique to act insurgently in the public sphere.

### **RETURNING TO IDEOLOGY, ARGUMENT, AND THE CIRCULATION OF DISCOURSE**

This dissertation has been an exploration of mass culture. Consequently, I chose to examine the deliberative potential of popular texts as they work on public identification to ideological conceptions of citizenship. Although ideology and argument are perhaps not the en vogue critique of a moment, they are the only way to theorize both active contestation and dominant constitution in publics. Terry Eagleton writes that understanding ideology “is a function of the relation of an utterance to its social context” (1991, p. 9). Furthermore, ideology is not to be thought of as mere illusion, or “false consciousness” but rather “the interplay of meaning and power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 9). Thus ideological criticism is necessary for work on popular culture and deliberation. As the critic is able to understand how the narratives, sounds, and images of dominant culture work cooperatively to tell us the story of their particular social contexts, so too are we able to see the potential for speaking back to that context.

Ideology becomes the manner in which to understand argumentation within popular music in relation to a system of power. It is imperative then to return to a conceptualization of ideological criticism that is closely connected to a quest in Marxist thought that analyzes social texts not only for their surface meanings but for the clues that lay within mass texts as to the relationship between people and power: “According to Karl Marx...social knowledge is significantly influenced by the predominant forms of

social organization...and rely on the process of mass communication to help reinforce the ideological thrust of a particular world view” (Hardt, 2004, p.27).

The analyses of this dissertation rely upon ideology critique in order to understand the struggle of this historical epoch following September 11, 2001. Ideologies simultaneously depict societal power struggles while inviting contestation. In social unification via these ideological discourses, tropes that normally work to subordinate common people from those in power can be utilized to make counter-ideological public arguments in the popular form. In fact, the potential use of popular culture for revolutionary ends has long been an important part of a Marxist project, as Trotsky argues in *Literature and Revolution*:

Tens of millions of people for the first time in history to master reading and writing and arithmetic, is in itself a new cultural fact of great importance. The essence of the new culture will be not an aristocratic one for a privileged minority, *but a mass culture, a universal and popular one.* (Trotsky, 1991 [orig. 1925], p.221, emphasis added)

This dissertation also expands traditional notions of argumentation while retaining fundamental notions of equality and interlocutory exchange, agent centered argument, and argument as dialectic, counter-dominant discourse. It advances the rhetorical argument as a practical endeavor emerging from unexpected sites and in genres not normally regarded as argumentative.

Argument as method becomes is central to the analyses of this dissertation because if we remove argument and deliberation from notions of the public, then we remove the *practical processes* of democracy from publicness as well. There are certainly

some disagreements on the particularities of the use of argumentation as method. Specifically, navigating the relation of argumentation to rationality, philosophy, and the audience have been places of discord since emergent theorizations of argumentation within rhetorical inquiry (Johnstone, 1973; Perelman, 1969; Toulmin, 1958). All theorists, however, agree that the power of argument as a rhetorical action lies in its function as a practical process of common people. Popular music as argumentation is important specifically for the way it has laid claim to practical processes with ordinary people. Understanding the many ways in which common people advance arguments via the popular means, though it assuredly appears differently today than within the era of Lincoln-Douglas Debates, is an important theory building exercise in the evolution of argumentative discourse in the public sphere.

Finally, what is perhaps the most innovative addition to popular music scholarship is a shift toward conceptualizing popular music as a multi-textual address. Multiple texts make insurgent popular music possible in mass culture. Once new music emerges, texts concerning that music are produced. Critics publish reviews of the album, audiences discuss new sounds and attend new concert performances, and artists create new rhetorics to explain their new sounds. Texts bear new texts via their circulation. There are countless rhetorical analyses of public address that pay acute attention to any one of these particular details of speech, song, film, protest, performance, or media. They are sound, close readings of public argument that yield incredible insight to a fragment of public speech, yet it is only a fragment. Speech acts within our public culture no longer stand alone as individual texts; they are flanked with a diverse set of representational and/or oppositional discourses. Michael Warner argues that it is this very circulation of

“multigeneric” texts, or multiply layered discourses, allow democratic publics to exist (2002).

Although I do not concur that publics *exist* in discursive address as such a belief dangerously limits our ability to theorize participation, action, and common interests as the conceptual basis for membership in the public sphere, I do believe that public formations *result* via deliberations that are spawned from a multi-textual address from a breadth of textual sources. Certainly we are constituted subjects in some way, and that constitution is not based upon a singular text. As we recognize the textual circularity of every moment in our popular culture and our political age, we cultivate democratic deliberation. Music as a rhetorical exigency must be evaluated en chorus, via the reviews of songs and performances, the songs and performances themselves, the rhetoric of the artists who produce that work, the machinations of the industry that contains it, and other cultural products (television, film, internet, and print) containing interviews with and representations of the artists and their music. In order to understand the potential of public formation we *must* consider texts in cooperation with one another, especially when trying to adequately conceptualize the particularities of popular music as both a political activity and a cultural commodity. Thus, our abilities to understand the democratic potential of popular texts to cultivate public argument require a move away from traditional rhetorical conceptions of textual analysis and move toward an interdisciplinary and multilayered analysis of the text itself, its economic and artistic production, audiences’ reception and/or deliberation, and its cultural circulation.

## **POSSIBILITIES FOR POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Counterpublicity and vernacular voices are fundamental to understanding the relevance of counterpublic agitation to the cultivation of democratic deliberation.

A *counterpublic* is the resultant formation of people in deliberation and agitation for social change. *Counterpublicity* is the publicizing of the argumentation of that formation in an effort for broader social agitation. *Vernacular* describes the social location of people in counterpublics. To occupy the position of a vernacular voice requires a social location outside of dominant mass culture. However, the vernacular does not inherently require the argumentation and deliberation of counterpublic activity. Thus, while counterpublic voices are vernacular voices, to occupy a space in vernacular culture does not automatically signal the existence of deliberative and agitational counterpublic activity.

These distinctions are pivotal to the emergence of *insurgent popular* music and yield insight for how scholars may future theorize the relationship between insurgent popular music and social change. To act insurgently is to rebel, or participate in social uprising. Thus, insurgency results from music's relationship to a counterpublic vernacular. When counterpublicity is invoked by mass popular music, it begins the process of dissatisfied deliberation in mass public spheres. In this dissertation, I have argued for necessary distinctions between making populist appeals (Springsteen), representing counterpublics (Earle), and reflecting counterpublicity in a mass sphere (The Dixie Chicks). The distinctions are crucial to understanding the various positions popular music can take in relation to the cultivation of deliberation, democratic dissent, and social

change. The following chart helps to map out the variance between popular music’s relationship to vernacular voices and counterpublic argumentation.

**Political Effectivity of Insurgent Popular Music**

	Populist Appeal	Representational Counterpublicity	Reflective Counterpublicity
Mass Circulation	YES	NO	YES
Cultivation of Deliberation	NO	YES	YES

The importance of popular music, as has been argued in this dissertation, is its role in building active and engaged publics and counterpublics. The splintering of the public sphere, performed in insurgent musical critique, yields the necessary disruption for democratic critique. Yet discussing modes of public argument often becomes too mired in the process, forgetting the ends of civic deliberation. The ends of civic deliberation are social change. This project suggests that social change is possible when democratic deliberation is in play, and deliberation is cultivated in insurgent popular music when artists are able to represent and reflect counterpublic argumentation. While there is still much work to be done in understanding how people move from democratic deliberation to more active and involved members of social movements, we can now attest that music is a powerfully under scrutinized resource of counterpublic argumentation in a mass sphere. As with any untapped resource, the quest is now to understand and utilize the potential stored within it. My goal has been to show you the immense possibilities of popular music as a deliberative discourse. I hope now that scholars will turn to interrogate that potential and activists will turn to unleash it. Popular music must be mined as a viable alternative to traditional political discourse, let loose as a common



modality of civic deliberation, revealed as an invaluable aspect of our civic selves, and consistently interrogated as an integral component of social justice and social change.

## References

- (2004). Culture wars. In *Nightline*. New York, NY: American Broadcasting Companies.
- Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. (1979). "The Culture Industry; Enlightenment as mass deception." *Mass Communication and Society*. James Curran et al Eds. Beverly Hills; Sage. Pp 349-383. (originally published in 1945).
- Althusser, L. (1971). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Tr. Ben Brewster. NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso Press.
- Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle. (n.d.). Books 1,2,3. In *Rhetoric*. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from <http://http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet1-1.html>
- Asen, R. (2004). Discourse theory of citizenship as a mode of public engagement. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 90 (2), 189-211.
- Asen, R. (2001). "Representing the State in South Central Los Angeles." In Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (Eds.) *Counterpublics and the State*. Albany; University of New York Press, pp.137-160.
- Asen, R. and Brouwer, D.C. (2001). "Introduction." In Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (Eds.) *Counterpublics and the State*. Albany; University of New York Press, pp.1-34.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other later essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

- Balliger, R. (1999). Politics. In B. Horner & T. Swiss (Eds.), *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (pp. 57-70). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Benjamin, W. (1936). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television Web site: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>
- Biesecker, B. (2002). Remember World War II: The Rhetoric of politics and national commemoration at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88 (4), 393-410.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Blomquist, A., & Cash, J. C. (Producers), Dennis, G., Mangold, J., Cash, J., & Carr, P. (Writers), & Mangold, J. (Director). (2005). *Walk the Line* [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
- Bowers, J.; Ochs, D.; and Jensen, R. (1993). *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Brummett, B. (1991). *The Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*. Tuscaloosa, AL; The University of Alabama Press.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Burney, S. (2002). "Manufacturing Nationalism: Post-September 11 Discourse in United States Media," *Simile* May Issue.
- Calhoun, C. (1997). "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," In C. Calhoun (Ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. London, England: Cambridge University Press, pp.1-48.

- Calhoun, C. (1997). *Nationalism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Campbell, K.K. and Jamieson, K. H. (2000, original 1978). Form and genre in rhetorical criticism: And introduction. In C. Burghardt (Ed.), *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*. (pp. 408-425). State College, PA: Strata Publishing.
- Carpignano, P. (1999). "The Shape of the Sphere: The Public Sphere and the materiality of Communication." *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 6(2), pp. 177-190.
- Charland, M. (1987). Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the *Peuple Quebecois*. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73, pp.133-150.
- Chesebro, J. W., Foulger, D. A., Nachman, J. E., & Yannelli, A. (1985). Popular music as a mode of communication, 1955-1982. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2, 115-135.
- Clegg, S. (1991). "The Remains of Louis Althusser." *International Socialism*, 53, 57-78.
- Cloud, D. (2003). Therapy, Silence, and War. *POROI: Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry*. Retrieved June 18, 2006, from University of Iowa Web site:  
[http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/papers/cloud030816\\_outline.html](http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/papers/cloud030816_outline.html)
- Cloud, D. (1998). *Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics*. London: Sage.
- Cloud, D. (1994). "The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric." *Western Journal of Communication*, 58, pp.141-163.
- Cloud, D. (1994). "Socialism of the Mind." In Herbert Simons and Michael Billig (Eds.) *After Postmodernism: Reconstructing Ideology Critique*. Eds. London; Sage. pp. 22-251.

- Cyphert, D. (2001). Ideology, Knowledge and Text: Pulling at the knot in Ariadne's thread. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 87 (4), 378-396.
- DeLuca, K. (1999). *Image Politics: The new rhetoric of environmental activism*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- DeLuca, K & Peeples, J. (2002). "From public sphere to public screen: Democracy, activism, and the "violence" of Seattle." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 19, pp. 125-151.
- Denning, M. (1998). *The Cultural Front*. London; Verso.
- Denselow, R. (1989). *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop*. Boston: Faber and Faber.
- Dewey, J. (1993). *The Political Writings*. (Eds.) D. Morris and I. Shapiro. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Disch, L. (1997). "Please sit down but don't make yourself at home": Arendtian "visiting" and the prefigurative politics of consciousness-raising. In C. Calhoun and J. McGowan (Eds.). *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. (pp. 132-165). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dow, B. (1996). *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, media culture, and the women's movement since 1970*. Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Durig, A. (1994). What did Susanne Langer really mean? *Sociological Theory*, 12, 254-65.
- During, S. (1999). Introduction. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Simon During Ed. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London; Routledge, pp.1-28.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology*. New York: Verso.

- Earle, S. (2002). John Walker's Blues. On *Jerusalem* [CD]. New York, NY: Artemis Records.
- Eberly, R. (2000). *Citizen Critics*. Urbana, IL; University of Illinois Press.
- Edensor, T. (2002). *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality: Volume one*. New York; Vintage Books.
- Fraser, N. (1997). Communication, Transformation, and Consciousness-Raising. In C. Calhoun and J. McGowan (Eds.). *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. (pp. 166-178). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fraser, N. (1997). "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," In C. Calhoun (Ed.). *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. (pp. 109-143). London, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Frith, S. (2004). "And I guess it doesn't matter anymore": European thoughts on American music. In E. Weisbard, (Ed.). *This is Pop*, (pp. 15-25). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Golding, P. and Murdock, G. (1991). "Culture, Communications, and Political Economy." In J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (pp.15-32). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Goodnight, G. T. (2006, June 28). *The Duties of Advocacy: Argumentation under conditions of disparity, asymmetry, and difference*. Paper presented at International Society for the Study of Argumentation Conference, Amsterdam.
- Goodnight, G. T. (1982). The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A speculative inquiry into the art of public deliberation. *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 18, 214-227.

- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Griffin, P. (2002). Truth #2 [Recorded by The Dixie Chicks]. On *Home* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Sony.
- Grossberg, L. (1999). Same as it ever was? Rock culture. Same as it ever was! Rock Theory. In K. Kelly and E. McDonnell (Eds.). *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky*. (pp. 98-121). New York: New York University Press.
- Grossberg, L. (1992) *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Guthrie, W. (1998). Jesus Christ for President. [Recorded by Billy Bragg and Wilco]. On *Mermaid Avenue* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Elektra/WEA.
- Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D. (1999). "Democratic Disagreement," in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, (ed. Stephen Macedo). New York; Oxford University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hall, S. (1980). "Cultural Studies and the Center: some problematics and problems." *Culture Media and Language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79*. London; Hutchinson, pp. 15-48.
- Hall, S. (1980). "Encoding/Decoding." *Culture Media and Language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79*. London; Hutchinson, pp.128-138.
- Hardt, H. (2004). *Myths for the Masses*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2001). *Empire*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hariman, R. and Lucaites, J. (2003). "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20: 35-67.
- Hauser, G. (1999). *Vernacular Voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoggart, R. (1992, original 1957). *The Uses of Literacy*. New Brunswick; Transaction Publishers.
- Immerman, W. J., & King, J. R. (Producers), Hackford, T., & White, J. L. (Writers), & Hackford, T. (Director). (2004). *Ray* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Irvine, J., & Kirkpatrick, W. (1972). The musical form in rhetorical exchange: Theoretical considerations. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58, 272-284.
- Jameson, F. (1998). *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. New York: Verso.
- Johnstone, H. (1973). Rationality and Rhetoric in Philosophy. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59, 4, 381-389.
- Jones, S. C., & Schumacher, T. G. (1992). Muzak: On functional music and power. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9, 156-169.
- Klein, J. (1980). *Woody Guthrie: A life*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.



- LeCoat, G. G. (1976, April). Music and the Three Appeals of Classical Rhetoric. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 62, 157-166.
- Lipsitz, G. (1990). *Time Passages*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press.
- Lucaites, J. and Hariman, R. (2001). "Visual Rhetoric, Photojournalism, and Democratic Public Culture," *Rhetoric Review* 20: 37-43.
- MacDonald, I. (2003). *The People's Music*. London: Pimlico Press.
- Matula, T. (2000). "Contextualizing Musical Rhetorics of the Pixies." *Central States Communication Journal*, 51, 218-237.
- Maxwell, R. (2001). Political Economy within Cultural Studies. In T. Miller (Ed.), *A Companion to Cultural Studies*. London: Blackwell.
- McChesney, R. W. (1999). *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. University of Illinois Press.
- McDonnell, E. (1999). Preface. In K. Kelly and E. McDonnell (Eds.). *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky*. (pp. 10-15). New York: New York University Press.
- McGuigan, J. (1996). *Culture and the Public Sphere*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Negt, O. and Kluge, A. (1993). *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press.
- Ono, K. and Sloop, J. (1995). "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse." *Communication Monographs*, 62, pp.19-46.
- Perelman, C. and Olbrechts-Tysteca, L. (1969). *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Notre Dame; University of Notre Dame Press.

- Pezzullo, P., Sloop, J., Finnegan, C., & Watts, E. K. (2005, November). *From public spheres to public modalities*. Paper presented at National Communication Association, Boston, MA.
- Rein, I. J., & Springer, C. M. (1986, June). Where's the music? The problems of lyric analysis. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 252-256.
- Roberts, K. G. (2002). Speech, Gender, and the Performance of Culture: Native American "Princesses." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 22(4), 261-279.
- Rogers, R.A. (1998). A Dialogics of Rhythm: Dance and the performance of cultural conflict. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 9, 5-27.
- Rowland, R. (1987). On Defining Argument. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 20(3), 140-159.
- Said, E. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sellnow, D., & Sellnow, T. (2001, December). The "Illusion of Life" Rhetorical Perspective: An integrated approach to the study of music as communication. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 18(4), 395-415.
- Shepherd, J. (1991). *Music as Social Text*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Shuker, R. (1994). *Understanding Popular Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Rutledge.
- Shumway, D. (1999). Performance. In B. Horner & T. Swiss (Eds.), *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (pp. 57-70). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Simons, J. (2003). Popular culture and mediated politics: Intellectuals, elites and democracy. In J. Corner and D. Pels (Eds), *Media and the Restyling of Politics* (pp. 171-189). London: Sage.
- Smelser, N. (2004). Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as cultural trauma. In J. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. Smelser, and P. Sztompka (Eds.), *Cultural Trauma*

- and Collective Identity* (pp. 264-282). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Springsteen, B. (2004, August 5). Chords for Change [Editorial]. *The New York Times*.
- Springsteen, B. (2002). Countin' on a Miracle. On *The Rising* [CD]. New York: Sony.
- Springsteen, B. (2002). Empty Sky. On *The Rising* [CD]. New York: Sony.
- Street, J. (1997). *Politics and popular culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Thompson, J.B. (1990). *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Tonn, M. B. (1996). Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris "Mother" Jones. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82, 1-21.
- Toulmin, S. (1958) "The Uses of Argument," Cambridge, MA; University of Cambridge Press.
- Trotsky, L. (1991). *Literature and Revolution*. London: RedWords. (Original work published 1925)
- van Zoonen, L. (2005). *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge*. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Waldman, T. (2003). *We All Want to Change the World: Rock and Politics from Elvis to Eminem*. New York: Taylor Trade Publishing.
- Walser, R. (1993). *Running with the devil: Power, gender, and madness in heavy metal music*. London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Warner, M. (2002). "Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, 4, 413-425.
- Warner, T. (2003). *Pop Music, Technology, and Creativity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

- Weinstein, D. (1999). Art vs. commerce: Deconstructing a (useful) romantic illusion. In K. Kelly & E. McDonnell (Eds.), *Stars don't stand still in the sky: Music and myth*. (pp. 56-69). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Williams, R. (1989) *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London; Verso.

## VITA

Lisa Renee Foster was born in Louisville, Kentucky on July 10, 1976, the daughter of Margaret Wayne Curtsinger Foster and Joseph Darrol Foster. After completing her studies at Campbellsville High School in 1994, Foster enrolled at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. In 1998 she graduated from Centre College with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, and enrolled in graduate courses in Communication Studies at the University of Kentucky. In December 2000, she attained a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from the University of Kentucky and entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin. In August 2005 Foster joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor of Mass and Political Communication at the University of Oklahoma. She teaches and researches rhetorical theories of argumentation, free speech, political and popular culture, and the public sphere there today.

Permanent Address: 218 Chautauqua, Norman, Oklahoma 73069

This dissertation was typed by the author.