Analyzing and Creating Playlists Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, PhD

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Trax on the Trail

**Overview**

Over the past few electoral cycles, political candidates have capitalized on the popularity of playlist sites such as Spotify, circulating campaign playlists in hopes of forging a bond with voters, communicating their values and vision, and asserting their pop culture cred.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Discuss the ways presidential candidates use music to communicate with voting communities and evaluate the effectiveness of their music strategies.
2. Analyze a playlist from a recent campaign and examine the ways in which genre associations can be used to establish the candidate’s brand or presidential persona.
3. Create a new playlist for a potential candidate and articulate the reasons *why* your music effectively captures the candidate’s biography, platform and character traits.

**Before Class Preparation: Analyze a Playlist**

Please read the following *New York Times* article, focusing on the playlists of Pete Buttigieg and Cory Booker. Take notes on your responses to the questions below.

Astead W. Herndon, Gabriel Gianordoli, Umi Syam and on Caramanica, “What Does Campaign Rally Music

Say About a Candidate?” *New York Times*, August 19, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/19/us/politics/presidential-campaign-songs-playlists.html

1. Choose one song from either Pete Buttigieg OR Cory Booker’s playlist: What does the song communicate about the candidate? (See list of songs below.)
2. What musical characteristics of the song (melody, tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, vocal timbre, etc.) help to cement the candidate’s message and persona?
3. Take a look at your candidate’s playlist overall. Music can sometimes be used to establish or solidify a candidate’s brand. Come up with three adjectives/phrases that describe the candidate’s brand (as implied by this music). Why do you think candidates choose to communicate through the medium of song? Do you think music is louder than words?

**In Class Assignment: Creating a Playlist**

Before class begins, your professors will assign each of you to a group with 3-4 students.

1. Elizabeth Warren is running for president! She already has an established playlist for her primary campaign, but let’s pretend that her campaign strategist is offering us $20K to create a winning playlist for the general election. Where do we start?
2. Take a few moments to read Warren’s website, focusing in on issues and biography. Create a brief **outline** of her policy positions and her background. What is Warren trying to convey to the public through her website? www.elizabethwarren.com
3. Using your outline as a starting point, work with your team make a list of adjectives or phrases that best **describe** Elizabeth Warren. (Consider identity categories, profession, party affiliation, key policies, upbringing, character traits, etc.)

Examples of traits used to describe candidate in previous elections:

Family values Former doctor Hometown boy

Child of the 1960s LGBTQ friendly Italian roots

Environmentalist Energetic Cosmopolitan

Family Man Feminist Soft spoken

1. Compile a playlist of between 8-10 songs that you feel best capture Warren’s persona, message, communication style, policies, etc. Include the following information for each song: title, artist, and genre, in the title box, then add a link to the song on YouTube. Explain *why* you feel the song is a good choice, taking into consideration the lyrics, the sound of the music, the artist, the genre, the song’s use in other media, the songs connection with specific groups of people, etc.

5. Be prepared to discuss/defend your choice of music for the candidate.

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| Cory Booker Playlist | Pete Buttigieg Playlist |
| Lovely Day Bill Withers  High Hopes Panic! At the Disco  Whatever it Takes Imagine Dragons  La Gozadera Gente de Zona  Little Talks Of Monsters and Men  I Wanna Dance with Somebody Whitney Houston  Survivor Destiny’s Child  Doo Wop (That Thing) Lauryn Hill  Good as Hell Lizzo  Dog Days are Over Florence + Machine  All Night Big Boi  Everyday People Sly and the Family Stone  Celebration Kool and the Gang  Love on Top Beyoncé  Higher Ground Stevie Wonder  Made in the USA Demi Lovato  I’m Good The Mowgli’s  It’s Your Thing The Isley Brothers  Waitin’ on a Sunny Day Bruce Springsteen  Glory (from Selma) Common  Amen Otis Redding  Love Train The O’Jays  (Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Jackie Wilson  Higher and Higher  Pump It Up Joe Budden  Wake Up Everybody John Legend  Hope the High Road Jason Isbell and the  400 Unit  Living for the City Stevie Wonder  Born Again Tomorrow Bon Jovi  My Shot The Roots  Mi Gente Marc Anthony  Tightrope Janelle Monaé  Love Me Now John Legend  The Ties That Bind Bruce Springsteen  Morris Brown Outkast  Got to Give It Up Marvin Gaye  Soar Christina Aguilera  Feeling Good Jennifer Hudson  Fire Time Flies  Freedom (Homecoming Live) Beyoncé  Stand Up for Something Andra Day | High Hopes Panic! At the Disco  Feel It Still Portugal. The Man  I’ll Be There Jess Glynne  You Make My Dreams Come Hall & Oates  True  American Boy Estelle  Confident Demi Lovato  Rebel Rebel David Bowie  Vivir Mi Vida Marc Anthony  Good as Hell Lizzo  Dog Days are Over Florence + The  Machine  Cut to the Feeling Carly Rae Jepsen  Think Aretha Franklin  The Distance Cake  Never Going Back Again Fleetwood Mac  Move on Up Curtis Mayfield  Ain’t No Man The Avett Brothers  Come Alive Years & Years with  Jess Glynne  It’s Your Thing The Isley Brothers  Ain’t No Stoppin’ Us Now McFadden &  Whitehead  This Darius Rucker  I’m So Free Beck  Freedom ’90 George Michael  My Next Thirty Years Time McGraw  Country Nation Brad Paisley  American Crazy Brother Osborne  Everyday People Joan Jett &The  Blackhearts  Yes We Can Can The Pointer Sisters  American Pie Shea Diamond  Won’t Get Fooled Again The Who  Tweezer Phish  Up Around the Bend Creedence Clearwater  Revival |