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Social Activism in the U.S. Music Industry

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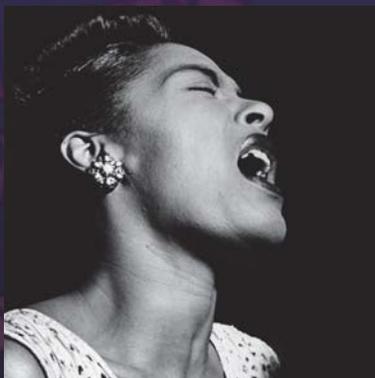
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Social ACTIVISM

IN THE U.S. MUSIC INDUSTRY THROUGH THE DECADES

Music has played a key role in social activism and various rights movements throughout history. Through political protest and social commentary, artists have used the power of music to share critical messages, inspire action, and achieve lasting change.



1930

"Strange Fruit"

BILLIE HOLIDAY (1939)

A protest of racism and lynching prior to start of the Civil Rights movement, "Strange Fruit" is praised as the first protest song to break the barrier between propaganda and mainstream art.



1940

"This Land is Your Land"

WOODY GUTHRIE (1945)

As one of the most famous U.S. folk songs, "This Land is Your Land" calls attention to the economic inequalities that followed the Great Depression while making the liberal claim that the U.S. should be open to all.



1950

"We Shall Overcome"

VARIOUS, PETE SEEGER (1950s)

Rather than a call to action, "We Shall Overcome" is a promise of hope. Derived from early 20th century slave and work songs, it became a Civil Rights movement anthem, popularized by folk singer and social activist Pete Seeger.



1960

"The Times They Are A-Changin'"

BOB DYLAN (1964)

This influential song highlights the importance of embracing social change while addressing the lack of cultural awareness that becomes a barrier to acceptance.



1970

"What's Going On"

MARVIN GAYE (1971)

"What's Going On" is an anthem for social awareness that addresses the Vietnam War and police brutality. The song expresses the importance of knowing what's happening in the world around us and taking part in social activism.



1980

"Born in the U.S.A."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN (1984)

Often misinterpreted as a patriotic anthem, "Born in the U.S.A." addresses the harmful impacts of the Vietnam War and the irony of the poor treatment of war veterans upon returning to the U.S.



1990

"Killing in the Name"

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE (1992)

An explicit rebellion against authority, "Killing in the Name," addresses police brutality, KKK lynch mobs, and abuses of power within society.



2000

"American Idiot"

GREEN DAY (2004)

Punk rock band Green Day released this song in criticism of the bias and corruption within the media and politics, particularly in response to 9/11 and President George W. Bush's reelection.



2010

"This is America"

CHILDISH GAMBINO (2018)

With numerous references to the Jim Crow era, "This is America" comments on black oppression in the U.S. by juxtaposing the brutal reality of racial discrimination and the entertainment derived from black pop culture that is praised by society.



LISTEN ON SPOTIFY:
bit.ly/ActivismInMusic

SOURCES:

Genius Lyrics, genius.com
National Public Radio, npr.org

CREATED BY JOEY TAN
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