

# The History of Protest Music

## Class 2:

### The Civil Rights Era

Jim Dunphy

[dunphyjj@aol.com](mailto:dunphyjj@aol.com)

# When did the Civil Rights Era Begin?

- April 1947 – Jackie Robinson plays for the Brooklyn Dodgers
- May 1954 – *Brown v. Board of Education*
- August 1955 – Emmitt Till murdered
- December 1955 – Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat

# When did the Civil Rights Era Begin?

- For this course:
  - We will use these dates
  - There may be another class for abolition songs from the 1800's



## Traditional Songs

# Traditional Songs – Work Songs

- Arises out of a number of traditions:
- Work songs
  - Arose out of slavery, so only passed down orally
  - Use African rhythms
  - Very often are in a “call and response” format
  - Besides slavery, work songs were used by railroad gangs and boat workers

# Gospel

- Church music marked by strong lyrics and harmony
- Usually a capella
- Many songs passed down in oral tradition
- Marked by repetition and call and response

# Blues

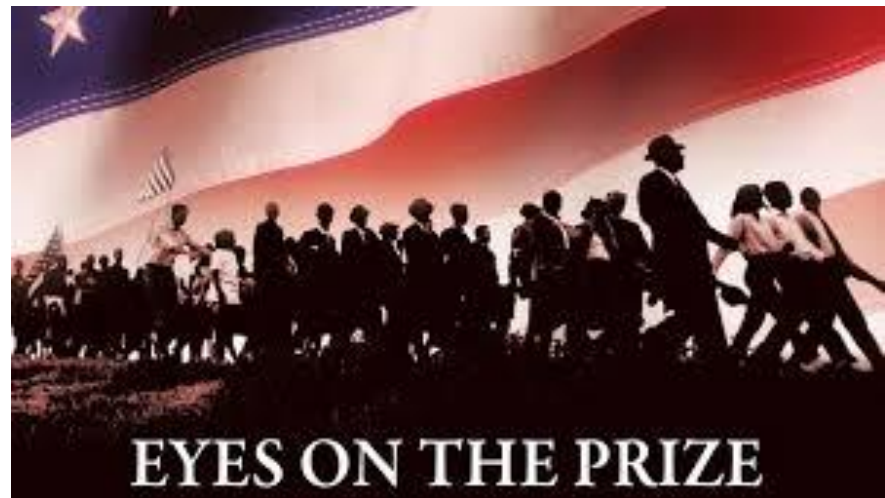
- Shares many characteristics with other forms – particularly call and response
- Songs provide a narrative, usually of hard times
- Repetition, particularly of the opening lines, is also common in the blues

# Eyes on the Prize

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZWdDI\\_fkns](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZWdDI_fkns)

# Eyes on the Prize

- Based on traditional *Gospel Plow*
- First put in written form by Alan Lomax in 1949



# Eyes on the Prize

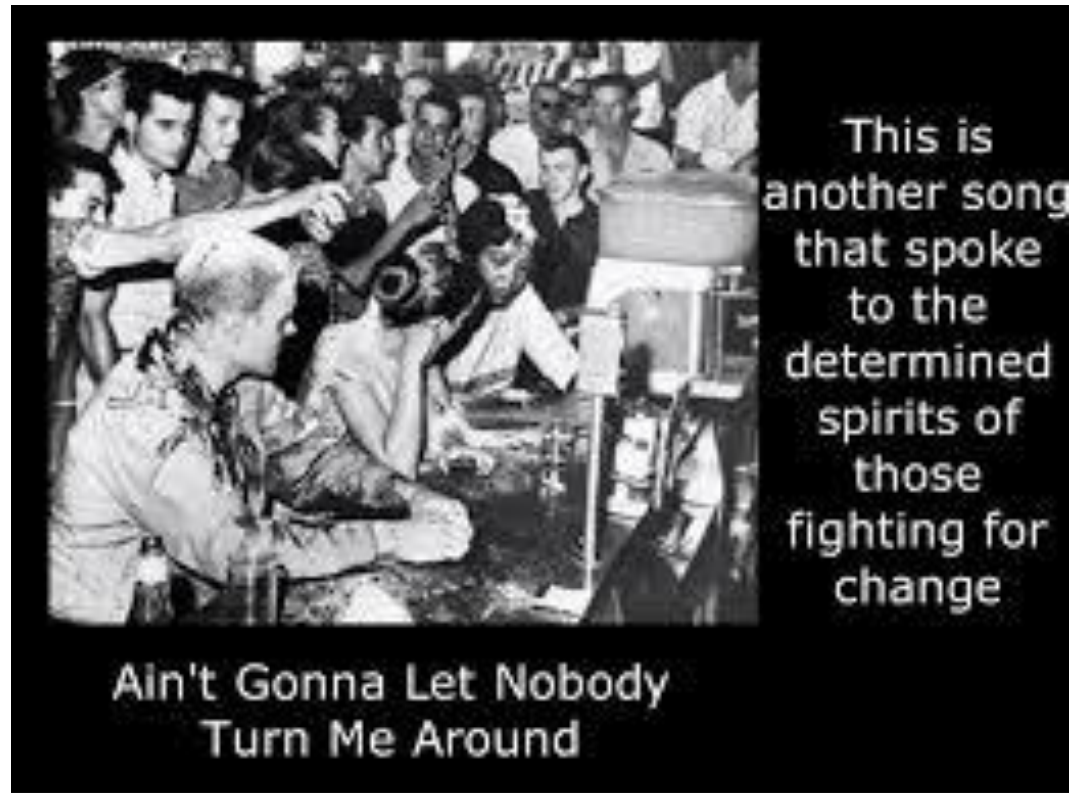
- Sung in the call and response format of traditional folk songs
- Full of bible imagery
- Was the title and the theme music for the 1987 PBS history of the Civil rights years

# **Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Around**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPuBGcn  
g6Tw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPuBGcn<br/>g6Tw)

# Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around

- Another call and response song
- Based on a gospel song of the same name
- In the original, “marching into freedom land” is “walking into heaven’s land”



# Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Around

- Like many songs of the Civil Rights era, more verses could be topically added
- Some other examples
  - Ain't gonna let no politicians
  - Ain't gonna let no Bull Conner



# **Pete Seeger**

May 3, 1919 – January 27, 2014

# Pete Seeger

- Was one of the earliest singers in support of Civil Rights
- Was able to merge traditional folk music into gospel

# We Shall Overcome

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_Ld8JGv56E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_Ld8JGv56E)

# We shall overcome

- Seeger published the song in the September 1948 edition of *People's Song Bulletin*
- Originally was considered a union song more than a civil rights song.
- Seeger later wrote that “nobody knows who wrote the original song, instead was passed down”



# We Shall Overcome

- Recent research indicates that it was based on the gospel song *If My Jesus Wills*
- Other sources are the Methodist hymn *I Shall Overcome* and the Spritual *No More Auction Block for Me*

# We Shall Overcome

- Was used first as a union song in 1950, and published first as *We Shall Overcome* in a union songbook in 1950
- Became first associated with the Civil Rights movement when Pete Seeger played it at the Highlander Folk School for an audience that include Dr. Martin Luther King

# **We Shall Overcome**

- Became the most famous of the Movement songs
- Many of the Movement's leaders, to include Dr. King and others, used it in speeches

# **We Shall Overcome**

Most famously used by LBJ in addressing Congress in March 1965 in support of the voting rights bill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKDVNSpsBZE>



**Bob Dylan**

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jiYV  
UU1RXQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jiYVUU1RXQ)

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

**William Zantzinger**



**Hattie Carroll**



*Hattie Carroll, as pictured in The Baltimore Sun, February 10, 1963.*

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

- Largely based on fact – arose out of an incident in Baltimore in February 1963
- William Zantzinger (Dylan dropped the “t” to make the name more melodic) showed up drunk at a ball and harrassed members of the staff

# **The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll**

- After Carroll did not supply a drink fast enough, he cursed her (calling her a black bitch) and striking her with a toy cane
- Zantzinger also struck his wife with the cane and then his shoe

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

- After the incident, Carroll told a coworker *"I feel deathly ill, that man has upset me so."*
- She collapsed, and was taken to the hospital, where she died 8 hours later

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

- Zantzinger was initially charged with murder, with his defense being he was too drunk and had no memory of the attack
- The charge was reduced to manslaughter and assault
- His attorneys were able to get a change of venue to rural Hagerstown

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

- Sentence:
  - For assault: a \$125 fine
  - For the death of Hattie Carroll: a \$500 fine and six months in jail (postponed for six months so Zantzinger could bring in his tobacco crop)

# The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

- The judgement – by a panel of three judges and not a jury – was handed down the same day Dr. King gave his “I have a dream” speech
- Zantzinger began his sentence in September 1963, and Dylan had written the song and released it in October 1963
- Note that the fact that Zantzinger was white and Carroll black is never mentioned or even implied in the song – you just understand it to be so

# **The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll**

- Zantzinger was later charged with rental fraud against poor blacks
- He was convicted in 1991 and sentenced to 19 months in prison – 13 more than for the death of Hattie Carroll



**Sam Cooke**

January 22 1931-December 22 1964

# Sam Cooke

- Born in Mississippi, but raised in Chicago
- Father was a minister
- Began his career as lead singer in a gospel group
- Crossed over to R&B, and his song *You Send Me* made it to #1 on the R&B charts

# Sam Cooke

- Other hits include *Another Saturday Night* and *Twisting the Night Away*
- In December 1964, he was killed in a motel under questionable circumstances, still unresolved to this day
- *A Change is Going to Come* was a posthumous hit

# Sam Cooke

- Honors included
  - Member of the initial class of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
  - Member of the Songwriters Hall of Fame
  - Given Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award

# A Change is Gonna Come

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4>

# A Change is Gonna Come

- Instruments set the mood
- Strings first verse, horns second verse
- French horn sets up a melancholic mood



# A Change is Gonna Come

- Shortly before writing the song, Cooke was arrested for disturbing the peace at a motel that refused him service because he was black
- Cooke later wrote that the song came to him quickly and without effort

# A Change is Gonna Come

- Given the arrangement, it was only played once live before his death
- Continues to be an anthem of hope and change

# A Change is Gonna Come

From the song

It's been a long long  
time coming, but I  
know

A change is gonna  
come, oh yes it will

From Barack Obama's speech  
the night of the 2008 election

It's been a long time  
coming, but tonight,  
because of what we  
did on this day, in this  
election, at this  
defining moment,  
change has come to  
America.



**Nina Simone**  
**February 21, 1933 – April 21, 2003**

# **Nina Simone**

- Born in SC and raised in NC
- Like many singers of her generation, first sang in a church choir
- Applied to a prestigious music school in Philadelphia, but was denied, and believed it was based on race.

# Nina Simone

- Began singing in a nightclub
- Took the name Nina Simone (nina – young girl in Spanish and Simone – from Simone Signoret) so her mother would not know she was singing “the devil’s music”
- Her first and only top 20 song was a song from *Porgy and Bess*

# Nina Simone

- Became more associated with civil rights songs in the mid 1960's
- Disappointed at her lack of success, she left for Barbados
- She had begun to refuse to pay taxes in protest of the Vietnam War
- When she attempted to return to the US, she was arrested and fled again to Barbados

# **Nina Simone**

- She later lived in a number of countries, but never returned to the US
- Diagnosed with bipolar disease, she died from breast cancer in France in 2003

# Mississippi Goddam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=De0JKNsi58g>

# Mississippi Goddam

Written in the aftermath of the death of Medgar Evers and the bombing of the 16th St Church



# Mississippi Goddam

- Key line: *This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet*
- Calls out three states: Alabama and Tennessee, but Mississippi is the worst (before the killings of the three civil rights workers)
- No specific incidents (such as Evers or the killing of the 4 girls) is mentioned in the song

# Mississippi Goddam

- In a way, it is a hopeful song – Simone is not calling for riots, but *just give me my equality*.
- She even prefaces that with *you don't need to live next to me*
- Song was banned in a number of southern states, and the records were returned broken

# Mississippi Goddam

- Simone also uses as a device the mid 60's call to "go slow"
- *The thinking's crazy, do it slow*
- *Desegregation, do it slow*
- But
- *Bring more tragedy, do it slow*



# **James Brown**

May 3, 1933 – December 25, 2006

# James Brown

- Known as “The Godfather of Soul”
- Born in SC and began singing in his church choir
- Was arrested for robbery at age 16, and one story has him being paroled to join a musical act

# James Brown

- Joined the group the Fabulous Flames
- Group was taken under the wing of Little Richard in the mid 1950's
- Brown's first #1 hit was *Try Me* in October 1958, the first of 17 #1 R&B hits
- Hit #1 on the pop charts in 1965 with *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag*, which also won a Grammy

# James Brown

- After the killing of Dr. King in 1968, famously appeared on stage at a concert in Boston with the Mayor, and Boston was not visited by riots
- Also visited troops in Vietnam, where he played in combat zones
- Continued to record until his death on Christmas Day 2006
- One of his last projects was a duet with Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics

# **Say it Loud – I'm Black and Proud**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bJA6W9CqvE>

# Split in Civil Rights Philosophy

**Dr. King**  
**Integration**  
**Non Violence**



**H. Rap Brown**  
**Separation – black power**  
**Any means necessary**



# Say it Loud – I'm Black and Proud

- Prior to the late 1960's James Brown was not political
- His joke was the most important color was green
- H. Rap Brown encouraged James Brown to become more political
- Released in the summer of 1968, after Dr. King's death, *Say it Loud* was released against a backdrop of riots

# Say it Loud – I'm Black and Proud

- Reached #1 on the R&B charts in the fall of 1968 and stayed there for 6 weeks
- Brown did not make the song part of his regular playlist
- He later stated he regretted the song
- In his 1986 autobiography, he stated:

*The song is obsolete now... But it was necessary to teach pride then, and I think the song did a lot of good for a lot of people*



# **Marvin Gaye**

April 2, 1939 – April 1, 1984

# Marvin Gaye

- Born in DC, father (Marvin Gaye Sr) was a minister (more about his father later!)
- Like others, first started singing in church at age 4
- Attended Cardozo HS in DC, and after dropping out, had a short stint in the USAF

# Marvin Gaye

- Moved to Detroit, and worked for Motown, first as a songwriter and drummer then as a singer
- Became famous for duets with Mary Wells, Kim Weston and most often, Tammi Terrell
- In 1968, his solo hit *I Heard it Through the Grapevine* became his first #1 hit

# Marvin Gaye

- Married and later divorced the sister of Motown founder Barry Gordy
- Struggle with tax evasion charges and an addiction to cocaine

# Marvin Gaye

- In April 1984, after he intervened in an argument between his parents, his father fatally shot the singer
- The father was brought to trial for manslaughter after it was revealed the father had a brain tumor and Marvin was on drugs
- Father convicted and sentenced to a suspended six year sentence

# What's Going on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6jKE6Ylxmc>

# What's Going on



# What's Going On

- Inspired by an incident of police brutality seen by Obie Benson of the 4 Tops while touring in Berkeley CA
- With the question of “What is happening here” he turned to songwriter Al Cleveland to write the song
- Benson offered it to the 4 Tops but they turned it down – they said they didn’t do “protest songs”

# What's Going On

- It was then presented to Gaye, who tweaked both the words and melody
- Gaye used a combination of Motown studio bands and others, to include 2 Detroit Lions football players, on the recording.
- Motown head Gordy called the song “the worst thing I ever heard in my life”

# What's Going On

- Stations were desperate for new Gaye material, so it was shipped
- Later became a huge hit
- Allowed Gaye the opportunity to expand the song into a concept album, reflecting his take on the current world situation
- Both the song and the album are regularly on lists of greatest songs and albums

# What's Going On

- The overall concept of the album is that the singer is a returning VN veteran, disillusioned by poverty, drug abuse and police brutality
- Gaye's brother was a VN veteran and Gaye used many of his thoughts and feelings
- Song appeals to unnamed "mother," "father" and "brother"
- Call for peace and understanding rather than struggle – somewhat out of tune for the early 1970's

# Other songs

- **Bob Dylan            Only a Pawn in their Game**
- **Bob Dylan            Hurricane**
- **Nina Simone        To Be Young, Gifted and Black**
- **Traditional           This Little Light of Mine**
- **Mavis Staples      We Shall Not be Moved**