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Vincent Munoz

I think what we need to do is explain how our principles of free speech, free inquiry, will help serve the cause of justice.

Betty Friendan

The First Amendment, the constitutional freedom of speech and freedom of conscience that is the bulwark of our democracy.

00:21.94

Bettina Apthekar

There was a passion in what was being said affirming this, what people consider a sacred constitutional right, freedom of speech and freedom of association.

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Michelle Deutchman

From the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, this is Speech Matters, a podcast about expression, engagement, and democratic learning in higher education.

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I'm Michelle Deutchman, the Center's Executive Director and your host. As the United States celebrated its independence and 250th anniversary this month, Americans reflected on the people, ideas, and events that have shaped the nation's trajectory.

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While some of these stories are reflected in founding documents, landmark court cases, and political figures, they can also be told through music. Across the nation's history, music has shaped political debate, inspired action, strengthened civic engagement, and given voice to the American experience in ways that still resonate today.

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To help us explore how music has influenced the nation's history and democratic ideals, we are joined by Anna Harwell Celenza, an award-winning musicologist, historian, and author of *On the Record, Music That Changed America*.

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Through her research, Anna examines how influential songs and recordings highlight defining moments in American history and review the relationship between music, culture, and democracy.

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You'll learn more about her work after we turn to Class Notes, a look at what's making headlines. The American Council on Education and more than 60 higher education associations submitted formal comments urging the Office of Management and Budget to withdraw a proposed rule that would expand political appointees' authority over the awarding, administration, and termination of federal grants.

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The higher education associations argue that the proposal would shift grant making away from merit-based peer review, increase political influence over funding decisions, and eliminate administrative appeal rights for certain grant terminations.

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They also warn that the rule would create significant instability across higher education and undermine the longstanding partnership between the federal government and colleges and universities.

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During the comment period, which closed on July 13th, almost 100,000 comments were shared. The final decision about the proposed rule will likely be determined in October of this year.

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Research funding is not the only thing that may be changing in higher education. A new rule finalized on July 17th by the Trump administration will limit most international students to four years in the United States, regardless of the length of their academic programs.

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This change is set to take effect in mid-September. Critics decry the change, arguing that it will detrimentally harm U.S. higher education and innovation as international students will be discouraged from studying in the U.S.

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Six years after it stopped requiring standardized testing for undergraduate admission, the University of California will review whether to reinstate it. This review by the Academic Senate will be completed by spring 2027. The review follows an open letter from thousands of UC STEM faculty urging the regents to restore the SAT, arguing that many incoming students are academically unprepared.

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This episode, we're going to end class notes on a bright note. In a huge victory for academic freedom and for the integrity of higher education, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the higher education provisions of Florida's StopWoke Act violate the First Amendment, finding that the law restricts what faculty at public colleges and universities can teach about race, gender, and other topics.

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Now back to today's guest. Today we are joined by Anna Harwell Celenza, professor at Johns Hopkins University, award-winning musicologist, author, and educator.

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Anna's work explores the intersection of music, history, and culture through books like *On the Record*, *Music That Changed America*. She examines how some of the most significant moments in American political history were influenced by songs and recordings from the Star Spangled

Banner and Lift Every Voice and Sing to Appalachian Spring, Graceland, and Hamilton.

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Before joining Johns Hopkins faculty, Anna built her career as both a scholar and public historian dedicated to making music history accessible to audiences. She's authored numerous books for adults and children that use music to explain historical and cultural themes. And her research has helped readers understand how artistic expressions shape society, politics, and national identity.

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Anna earned her bachelor's in art history and music history at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, before completing both her master's degree and PhD in musicology at Duke University.

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Her scholarship has been recognized with numerous awards. She is widely known for bringing a music history to life through engaging storytelling that connects the past to contemporary discussions around culture and democracy. Anna, thank you so much for joining us. It's wonderful to have you on Speech Matters.

Anna Harwell Celenza

This is really a pleasure. I'm excited to be here.

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So we always usually start each episode by asking about someone's trajectory. So you are a musicologist and a historian and an author. And I'm wondering what sparked your interest in studying music as a window into history and maybe how is that connected to writing on the record?

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So actually, I started out as a performer, as a lot of musicologists do, and really loved being a part of music, the sense of community of music as something that we do as a lived experience. And I was a cellist, so I was in an orchestra. And that's like a little community and culture in and of itself. I also did band in high school, and that has its own sort of, you know, community to it. And I always saw music as not just sort of this thing we listen to, but an activity and a way of kind of joining together with others.

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And so in college, as I started to take academic classes, I became fascinated by music history and seeing that it's not just communities that are made now, but even before Recorded Sound, the various communities that got created were by just people coming together and making music and all the different ways that happens. I was also interested in art history.

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I should note, I was a horrible writer in college, and I had an amazing professor who basically sat me down and gave me a bunch of old copies of The New Yorker magazine and said, you need to read these closely, and

then let's talk about the articles you like and why you like them and what is it that draws your attention. And he really helped me become a writer in that way, connecting with others, you know, as community in that way. And I guess all of these things sort of came together in graduate school, even to the point that I did a lot of babysitting in graduate school. And when parents heard that I was studying music history, they'd say, oh, you know, we don't know anything about music. Could you introduce our kids to music?

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And I found the best way to do it was when I put them to bed at night, I told them a story about a famous piece and then I played the music. And that kind of started me on the path of writing children's books and also kind of the way I teach in class. I think storytelling is a really powerful force in scholarship.

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Thanks for sharing that. I think that's wonderful, especially the idea of starting people on music and music history from like a really, really young age, making it really accessible.

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On the Record really tells the story of American politics through music. And each of the songs you discuss provide a snapshot of a larger cultural or political moment. And I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about what led you to view songs as active agents of political and legislative change and to position them as historical documents, which I don't think everybody always does.

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Yeah, so that I have to thank students at Georgetown University who came to me again and again and said, we would really love you to teach a class on music and politics.

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And I had always done, you know, looking at music and community and music culture and how music interacts with visual arts and literature, but yeah I had not really looked at politics. And it started with, okay, how am I going to do this? And I didn't want to do, I didn't want to teach a class that was just, okay, how are musicians reacting to political issues?

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And I knew there were a couple of pieces that had really changed politics, had you know, that where politicians had really become connected with them. And I thought, I'd like to teach a class about that. So not just music reflecting politics, but music changing politics. And so, you know, over the years, I would. do my research, I would you know get more and more pieces. And eventually was like, you know, this is more than a class. This could really be a book. And there is a way of telling the story of American politics through some of the American compositions and songs that really changed politicians' minds. And I think especially more recently,

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as technology has sort of become, you know, more and more prevalent in society, I feel like we' it's easy to put music in the background because it's just so accessible to us. And I wanted a way to push it in the foreground again. And I thought, you know, telling the story of America's politics through the musical works that change people's minds is a way to get us to maybe listen more closely and think about music with a little bit more focus I really like how you're distinguishing between not how not just having music reflect politics, but how it changed politics. And that's sort of where I want to go Your book provides many examples of how music influenced legislation and public opinion and social movements. And I'm wondering if there is one song in particular that you believe had a significant legislative impact.

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You can tell us a story about it. Yeah, I would say, and this was actually the first piece that I sort of taught in this way in that class. And it's Strange Fruit, the song Strange Fruit.

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It was composed by Abel Meeropol, also known as Lewis Allan. He was a high school teacher in the Bronx, a son of Russian immigrants. He was Jewish. He was a card-carrying communist in the early nineteen thirties And he wrote this poem in reaction to all the sort of increase in lynchings that had taken place in the United States. Once the Great Depression hits, the country is really divided in a lot of ways, economically, racially, a lot of violence, come racial violence becomes ever more present.

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And he reacted by writing this, what I think is one of the most amazing poems ever. And then he let her set it to music. Can I read the poem? Because I do think it's important for us to really listen to the text.

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Yeah. So, okay. Strange Fruit. Southern trees bear a strange fruit. Blood on the leaves and blood at the root. Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze.

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Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees. Pastoral scene of the gallant south. the bulging eyes and the twisted mouth. Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh.

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Then the sudden smell of burning flesh. Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck, for the rain to gather, for the wind to suck, for the sun to rot, for the tree to drop.

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Here is a strange and bitter crop. I think that's one of the most powerful protest poems ever written. And I think part of the power is that second stanza where you have these sort of beautiful images like pastoral scene of the gallant south.

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And then there's this kind of crush against a horrific scene, the bulging eyes and twisted mouth. And so that creates a sense of drama in the poem. He also opens the first stanza again.

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When he talks about southern trees bear strange fruit as if this is a natural thing, as if it's normal that you would see bodies hanging from trees. And then he concludes it with sort of America's indifference to paying attention. So here's a strange and bitter crop. We're just letting it rot. I thought it was incredibly powerful as a poem.

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He and his wife, Anne Meeropol, were both members of the communist American Communist Party. They very much believed in equality for all, gender, economic, racial.

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And they would go to communist rallies and they would sing this. He said it to music. And they started that in 1937. And then in 1939, he got to know the folks who had opened up a club called Cafe Society in New York. It was the first racially integrated club in New York City.

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And Billie Holiday was the house singer. And he thought, wow, if she were to sing this, it would really send a message. And in fact, when she did agree to sing it, she started singing it.

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People would say, have you been to Cafe Society to witness Billie Holiday sing the song? And that's really what it was. It was this witnessing. And, you know, in the nineteen thirties and the forties and the fifties There kept being a number of politicians who pushed for anti-lynching legislation.

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In fact, there were many people who sent copies of this record of Billy Holiday's recording to politicians. It really did get talked about a lot.

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But change didn't happen right away. Every time it looked as if that federal anti-lynching legislation was going to happen, it fell away. Even to the point that in 2005, the U.S. Senate apologized for never passing anti-lynching legislation.

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And then finally in 2018, Kamala Harris put forward this legislation. It took a few years, but finally in 2022, the Till anti-lynching legislation passed. Biden signed it in the Rose Garden. And I remember watching that on television and I had my social media up.

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And all of these people were posting on social media, Billie Holiday singing Strange Fruit. And so it, you know, it the seeds had taken, you

know, root and we finally saw the change. And I think this is one of the most powerful.

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It took a while, but it did kind of have its impact. Well, first of all, I am familiar with the song, but I don't think I've ever listened that as closely to the lyrics and hearing you read them. It's such a contrast between how beautiful it is and how bleak it is. And I learned a lot from you and from your book. And I am glad that you were able to show that arc that you know it can take time, but things can affect change.

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I want to turn to your first chapter and talk a little bit about the Star Spangled Banner. What I learned was that there was a much more complex history to that than I knew. It's you know often thought to be this timeless symbol of patriotism, but you show that its meaning has constantly evolved from abolitionist rewrites in the 19th century to Colin Kaepernick's protest in 2016. And hoping that can

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talk a little bit about what the anthem's history teaches us about our relationship between both patriotism and dissent, which are both two really important American values.

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Yeah. So the song was written in 1814 during the end of the War of 1812 in Baltimore. And it didn't become our national anthem through Congress until 1931.

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And again, this was in reaction to the Great Depression. You have politicians who are desperate to find a way to unify the country. And there were all these different bills that were put forward. And the Star Spangled Banner becomes our national anthem as a way of having sort of a secular ritual that we do that unites us all.

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and to have a symbol that unites everybody, which is the flag. So that's, you know, why politicians decided to make that the national anthem. There's that. But as you note, the whole history of this, you know, if there's a century of history of the song before that happens.

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First of all, it's also what we call a parody song in that the melody had already existed for quite a long time. The melody is called To Anacreon in Heaven. It was a song that came from a men's sort of dining club in London, sort of an aristocratic club for men. And that it was called the Anacreon Club. And Anacreon was this, you know, ancient Greek god who kind of promoted women and wine and lots of good times. And he was sort of their mascot and this was the sort of club song. So that's the melody.

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And it got used for a lot of things. That melody also got used for the first ever campaign song the United States for John Adams. And by the

time you get Francis Scott Key, writing the star spangled banner he has also used that tune a number of times he knows it well so to begin you know the melody is did not start in the United States and it's you know the text is set to it so already it's sort of You know, it's setting words to a tune that existed for a long time. And that practice continues. So people will change the verses. You get suffragists that change the verses. You get abolitionists that change the verses. You get nativists that change the verses. And the song, it's in that whole first century of existence, was really became a place where you can protest and put forward your point of view.

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And I thought it was so powerful when Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the Star-Spangled Banner, because what he was doing, I mean, I think a lot of people got it wrong. A lot of people were saying, you know, oh, he doesn't respect the flag. He doesn't respect our veterans.

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But that's not what he was doing. He was taking a knee because it made us go, wait, he's not doing the ritual of standing and putting your hand over your heart and singing. And if you break a ritual, it gets someone's attention.

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And to be honest, the whole history of that song is about breaking rituals and putting your own words in and gathering attention. I think that your question about dissent or patriotism. I would say free speech is like the cornerstone of this nation. And this song sort of became a vehicle for everybody's free speech. You kind of put your text in there that you wanted to have. And in that way, I think it is a really important song. But I also think Colin Kaepernick was very insightful to make us pay attention and ask, okay,

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Are we truly the land, you know, home of the free and brave? Or are we just kind of going through the rituals without really thinking about what the song means? I did not realize that people had written their own verses and sort of that the historical nerd in me wants to pull out all of the different versions. It'd be so interesting to compare them all and see how people articulated what their vision of America was in that moment.

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You know, you also compare the Star Spangled Banner with Lift Every Voice and Sing, which is a song that emerged during Jim Crow to become a symbol of resilience and hope for Black Americans. Today, there are ongoing conversations about whose stories are reflected in our national symbols and whose voices have historically been excluded, including in higher education.

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How did these two songs, Star Spangled Banner, Lift Every Voice and Sing, and their histories help us better understand the evolution of American identity.

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Yeah, well, I think the one of the things that I talk about in the chapter is that for that century until 1931, there are lots of songs sort of being put forward as, well, maybe this could be like our national song. And one of those is Lift Every Voice and Sing.

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And I think it would have made a very powerful national anthem. It also, know, there are politicians who are proposing that it become our national hymn.

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to let sort of sit next to the Star Spangled Banner. And we're already sort of doing that in our rituals. You go to the Super Bowl, they sing Lift Every Voice and Sing before they sing the Star Spangled Banner. That started in 2020.

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And I think what's interesting is the rituals of these songs kind of take start begin to take place before it actually gets legislated I'm seeing this as a hopeful sign. But the James Weldon Johnson, who composed Lift Every Voice and Sing in the round nineteen the early nineteen thirties as Congress is determining what's going to be the national anthem. He had thought it would be a great national anthem. And he said, you know, it doesn't just represent black America. It represents sort of what all of us are doing. We've had tough times in the past and there is hope for the future and we are striving.

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you know, we should all lift our voices together and move forward. I that is why I sort of paired those two pieces in the first chapter, because I do think together they share a similar message that we often overlook because we sort of segregate our music sometimes. And I think, you know, these are works that sort of need to come together.

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All right. So confession, as someone who does not typically watch the Super Bowl except for the halftime show. I'm now going to have to tune in in the beginning because I didn't know that they also sang Lift Every Voice and Sing. So, thank you for that. I want to talk a little bit about music in political campaigns because, again, one of the things you highlight is the use of the song in Abraham Lincoln's 1860 presidential campaign. And the song was called Lincoln and Liberty. And it highlighted political issues, which Lincoln aimed to address if elected, including calling out racial injustices and promoting the liberation of enslaved people in America. I'm going to ask if you want to read the lyrics and then maybe

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if you would be willing to share maybe a couple or one or a couple contemporary examples of a political candidate using music to share their vision of America.

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I'll start off by reading the lyrics. Lincoln and Liberty. Come all you true friends of the nation. Attend to humanity's call. Oh, aid of the slaves liberation and roll on the Liberty Ball.

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We'll finish the temple of freedom and make it capacious within, that all who seek shelter may find it, whatever the hue of their skin. The campaign songs are a great way of sort of putting forward our ideals. I would say more recently, what has happened is that you have had politicians take music that is popular and sort of say, this is what I'm trying to do. Obama started with his playlists. I loved his playlist. And in a lot of ways, he was saying, you know, this is who I am. In fact,

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Something I do when I start one of my ice breaking things for the very first day of class is I make everyone take out their phones and look up the last piece of music they listen to and then share it with their neighbor.

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And what's interesting is that over the last, say, 15 years of me doing that, it used to be that in a class of 30, there would be maybe 10 different songs that people had.

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And then more recently, the last time I did it in 30 students, there were 30 different pieces. And I think that also shows the way, as opposed to like everybody's sort of looking for, oh let me find that song that's just me that I can share with others that nobody else knows. And I say this because I think in some ways, Obama was doing that with his playlist. He wasn't putting together a playlist of like,

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I'm going to show you that I like all the stuff you like. He was saying, I'm going to share with you this song or these songs that really say something about who I am in my past and a great time from my youth and an ideal I have for the future or a problem I see in our nation. And so it was very much a curated list to kind of send a message. And I thought that was great.

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You have Hillary Clinton, who very much used Hamilton. And you know, Lin-Manuel Miranda did fundraisers for her. They did performances of Hamilton. She quoted excerpts from Hamilton in her speeches, in her acceptance speech as the Democratic candidate.

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And I would even argue this in the book. We even see the Democratic Party after, you know, Hamilton has come out sort of. starting to be Hamiltonized in that you see kind of some of the issues that they are pushing forward are ones that really get sort of highlighted in Hamilton. So that's an interesting thing, I think.

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However, I think that has sort of ended, at least in the last couple of campaigns. For example, I think Trump does use a lot of music in his campaigning and his rallies, but and I don't mean this to sound bad, but he basically gaslights his critics. Like he chooses tunes like YMCA and stuff that are connected to people's past and are connected to maybe issues that are sort of maybe more on the left. And so I do think he's using it to sometimes to sort of bait people. He's definitely not saying that what is in this music I am putting forth as part of my agenda.

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And I think to give a critique on the other side, I think when Kamala Harris ran, we have shifted from here is this piece of music that has this message that is really important to look, Taylor Swift is supporting me and Beyonce is supporting me. So we've shifted from, well, wait, what's the power and the message of this music to the celebrities of the performers? And I think that's one thing that I, a point I try to make in this book is that I think in politics and in music and in what music means to us, we've kind of stopped listening.

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We started sort of symbolizing things and having supporters that are celebrities, but I don't know that we're really listening to each other anymore. And that kind of scares me.

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You mean that across the board in terms of dialogue and polarization and would it be accurate to say that this sort of move from using the power of music to the power of celebrity is an indication of that, that we're no longer speaking to each other through music. We're using sort of the power of the actual musician rather than the lyrics or to express something.

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Yeah, I really do think that. And I think that, as you say, it's in some ways, that use of music is almost like a metaphor for what we're doing politically with the way we communicate with our and with constituents and that sort of thing.

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That sounds like it could be another book. That's but one of the many things I learned from your book is how often music directly influences public policy. And whether it was the Grand Canyon Suite helping shape conservation efforts or West Side Story influencing juvenile justice legislation, music has affected far more than popular culture. And I'm curious if there were any examples of this type of impact that particularly surprised or captivated you as you conducted your research.

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Yeah, I think one that is really important is Paul Simon's Graceland album. First of all, it's an amazing album. It's an amazing piece of music. I do think there are a number of scholars who will say, oh, but he was white and he went to South Africa and, you know, he included their music on his album. And is that appropriation? Or is it and, you know,

that is a lot of what I had heard and read in scholarship. And when I really got into it, I realized that's not what was happening.

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And yeah, in many powerful ways, the Graceland album really convinced a lot of American politicians that cultural boycotts are not effective, that economic boycotts can be effective. But when you have a cultural boycott where you're basically saying, we are not going to communicate with these people, we are going to sort of pretend like they don't exist, we're not going to interact with the scholars or the artists or their music.

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That I don't see as helpful. I think if anything, it creates more distortions and more divisions in people. And in doing the research for that chapter and really looking at the cultural boycott that the UN was calling for and the various economic boycotts that were happening, and then also just discovering Nelson Mandela's true appreciation for Paul Simon and connection with Paul Simon and sort of support of it, that sort of blew me away. And it made me think and have a very kind of firm opinion about cultural boycotts. And I just am not a fan. So I will just, I will put that out there. The other thing I'll say is that it made me think a little bit more about this idea of, say, appropriation versus admiration.

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And there are There are various ways to look at it. So if am going to write about or if a so somebody is going to write about an ethnicity or a a culture that's not their own, there are various ways you can approach it. You can be the invader where you kind of just go in and take what you want and you bring and you put it in your book.

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Or you can be you can be a traveler where you're going in and saying, okay, this is new to me. I don't know this. I'm curious. I'm really interested. I'd like to learn more. And that would be being a good tourist, you know, not a bad one. And if you're a good tourist and very open to things, if you're a good tourist long enough, eventually you'll really be welcomed by that culture as a guest. And I think that interaction of respect and curiosity is one of the things that we really need in the arts. We can't just create art and write about ourselves, I think, if we want a society that's connected and communicates to each other. And in that way, I would argue that Paul Simon was a very good tourist when he interacted with artists in South Africa, when he then brought them over to the US, when they recorded together, when he gave them full credit for their work, when he paid them well, and then their careers were launched. And 20 years later, Nelson Mandela invited Paul Simon back. And, you know, they kind of did this. They welcomed him back as a guest. So that, I think, for me, was happily a surprising story I discovered because I'd always loved Graceland.

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And I didn't want to feel guilty about loving that music. And I've realized I shouldn't have because I try to tell that story in that

chapter. Wow, that was a very comprehensive answer. You went from everything from the value of cultural boycotts to appropriation and back. And I think these two issues are still very alive and well. And certainly there have been some very recent discussions and conversations about cultural boycotts and the difference between saying that they're protected by the First Amendment being separate from the issue of whether or not they actually are helpful or a hindrance to creative writers or speakers or musicians. So you've shared examples about how music has affected public policy, and now I kind of want to flip it and talk about how public policy and legislation has affected music. So, you know, in your chapter on George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, you talk about how copyright law and the 1998 Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act delayed the work's entry into the public domain by 20 years, which is a really long time, right? Following lobbying by the Gershwin Family Trust. And later in Chapter 10, you examine debates over censorship through the 1985 Senate hearings prompted by Parents Music Resource Center, which ultimately led the recording industry to adopt the notorious parental advisory labels on albums. It's just, I'm going to age myself. I remember when that happened. As we currently grapple with AI, digital media, ownership of creative works, are there lessons we can draw from these earlier policy debates about music and sort of who has the rights to own it, to access it, to share it?

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Yeah, I think we definitely can. And one of them is to be aware of our own biases, maybe unconscious biases, when we are suddenly exposed to a genre of music that maybe we haven't heard before, or that we don't know that we really like or not, and then make assumptions about it. So another issue that comes up in that chapter is the way that the court system works really caused the hip-hop, the act of sampling, which was a major feature in the creation of hip-hop music from its origins up until the early 90s, and by calling it theft and really taking an element, a creative element of that music and shutting down the way that music, mean, you just don't see as many samples

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in this music anymore. It changed the way people composed that music and recorded it. Another example is you get this consolidation that kind of went through the back door where it used to be there was a limit on how many radio stations as a single entity could control.

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And that got in a big legislative bill, it was sort of slipped in that we'll get rid of that cap. And that has meant that there's this huge monopoly of the radio now.

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And even in the same way, there is the threat it's going to happen with streaming as well because of net neutrality or the lack of net neutrality. So all of this is to say it is our responsibility as lovers of music or any other art forms to pay attention to legislation, not just federal legislation, but local legislation. So, for example, if your city decides to stop public transportation 1030 at night, it is going to impact every music venue in that city.

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because a lot of music venues make the most of their money by selling drinks. And so suddenly there's no safe way for people to get home at ten thirty night So we maybe haven't thought about this, but things like noise ordinances, things like I talked about with transportation, education as music gets cut from schools, this sort of thing. We recently did a census of the music communities in D.C. and in Baltimore,

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And we found that the majority of the city's professional musicians in both cities said it was public education that kind of started, launched them on their music careers. And then if you look at

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What public schools still have those music programs? Most of them don't. So we can see coming up in 15 years, it's going to be a very different thing. And that's because of legislation. I guess the lesson to learn from all of this is we need to pay attention to local and state and federal legislation and make sure that changes that we make in something that might not seem to address the arts, we really think about what impact is it going to have on the way people... can come together, can congregate, can share with one another.

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No, that makes a lot of sense. I think, especially now with how accessible music is through different apps and how people can, you know, listen to kind of whatever they want, whenever they want. It almost feels like people take for granted how that music is made, who's making it right, what's the behind the scenes, how is it that we're able to use it and sort of, you know, forget that the work you know behind it and how you know that happens. And like you said, I feel lucky. My kids go to a public school where they don't have a lot of things, but they happen to have a really good music program. And that's wonderful. But definitely that's one of the first things to get cut, which is really deeply sad.

37:43.00

If I can jump in one thing, it's thinking about AI and so the next thing. So, you know, there have been times when ever since recorded sound, you know ever since the early 20th century and people went, oh, my God, this new technology, it's going to kill live music. It's going to kill live musicians.

37:59.29

It won't because there is something special about sharing music with another person one on one in the same room. And making that music. And I'm finding that, you know, many of my students, if they are going to spend money on something, they would rather spend it on a live experience than the \$19 for some app, you know, that for that month. And so I do think that lived experience, especially since COVID, has become more and more important. to people and they're feeling that.

38:29.50

That said, the most recent fear is with AI, Spotify now has this thing where you can make your own covers. You know you can pay this fee and you can take your favorite song and you can make your own cover. And you know there are a lot of musicians that are going, oh my God, this is going to kill. No one's going to buy our music anymore. And I just, I don't think it's true. I think it's going to change things. And I think you know, when we went from records to CDs to streaming, the revenue streams change in a lot of different ways, the way musicians make money. So many of them make a lot of their money from merchandise and live concerts versus recordings. So but all of that is to say that that experience and the power of music will still be there if we care enough to pay attention to what's happening with legislations.

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I'm happy that you added that in because everybody's afraid that AI is going to wreck or change everything. So that's a little bit of a note of hope. Sort of back to the 10,000 foot view.

39:32.28

You know, in Chapter 9, you trace the role of songs like We Shall Overcome, Blowing in the Wind, Mississippi Goddamn, and What's Going On in Advancing the Civil Rights Movement and Challenging the Vietnam War in the 60s and 70s.

39:45.59

Today, social media, and we're talking a little bit about that, often spreads political messages faster than music potentially could. And I'm wondering if you believe songs, and I think you've touched on this, still have the power to shape public opinion and civic movements in the way that they have during the 20th century, or has that role changed?

40:06.49

I think they definitely do. I mean, one question that comes up is, well, where are all the protest songs? You know, there used to be all these protest songs. There are tons of protest songs being written all the time and recorded. And, you know, so kids are finding them. People are finding.

40:20.02

That hasn't changed. What has changed this is the way we get our music. Right. I'll go back to this idea. Radio in the 60s and 70s was regional. So you could have a really kind of in-your-face song like Mississippi Goddamn that Nina Simone wrote and sang.

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And it would get played in the North, and it would get performed in the mid Midwest. and so okay, the South doesn't like it. They're breaking the records and sending them back. But it still got played, right? You could still survive.

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Now that we've had this sort of you know monopoly unification through iHeartMedia of radio, if you write a song, it has to appeal to everybody. There is not like the fear is, you know, what about regional radio or

what about regional art forms? And so those still exist, but they exist live through live music, like hearing local bands and things. And they exist,

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through the internet if you kind of find your niche you know there's a lot of streaming radio and things like that the problem though with all especially with the internet is the gatekeepers and so first of all you say social media is moves faster than songs well a lot of people are sharing songs on social media but most almost all students I have are you know sending songs to each other through all these different apps all the time or performing works on TikTok and that sort of thing So I think the music is moving just as quickly in that way.

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The problem, though, is what is showing up in your feed. So there's a lot of protest music that I think is being sent out into the you know the world, but you or someone else might not be getting it given whatever algorithm exists.

42:09.14

However, you're listening to your music or doing your social media feeds it to you. And I think that is the gatekeepers are the thing that we should be worried about, I think, with social media. What gets fed into your stream?

42:21.17

And so that's another reason why net neutrality is incredibly important so that we don't sort of have the powerful and those who kind of can't have their voice heard. I'm sure that you saw this article, but there was an amazing article about Mississippi Goddamn and Nina Simone in the New York Times.

42:38.04

I don't know if you saw it. I will send it to you. It was about exactly what you were talking about. It's still July. So, it's still the month of you know the nation's 250th birthday.

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And I'm interested in your reflecting on sort of themes that you've seen or threads that you can pull through from the last 250 years.

43:00.21

Are they consistent? Are the threads different? And sort of when you look ahead, do you feel like we're going to be pulling on some of those same threads or we're going to be potentially moving in different directions? And feel free to consult your magic eight ball for that question. Yeah Well, to begin, I'll talk a bit about the threads. You know are there any threads that I see through this 250 years? And I think one is right from the beginning of our nation, all the way through the current day and all of these celebrations of the 250th.

43:33.37

A clear acknowledgement that this country was established on a set of ideals that we have yet to accomplish. This kind of idea of always a work in progress and that, you know, hoping to reach an era that is more fair and more just, that that sort of thing. I think that we see in a lot of works.

43:57.43

And I think part of that is the pieces that are really powerful are the ones that help us contemplate our place in the world, where we've come from and where we might be going or where we'd like to go. I think a lot of times the music we choose to listen to or share with others, yes, sometimes it's just because it has a great beat and makes you feel good.

44:17.37

But even something that makes you feel good can make you grateful to be living now and in this moment and in finding the good. And scholars, as music scholars, a lot of us, and we're sort of trained this way, you know, we'll look at a piece of music as a document from the past.

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And we kind of go into critique mode and say, oh, well, it didn't do this and it didn't do that it doesn't. And I think sometimes we have to look at music as something that also enables us to flourish, even when times are really dark and really hard.

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And so I think that it's also helpful. And I try to do this in the book in that I will call out when, you know, the biases that are in some of these pieces the choices that are made of what to include in a composition and what to cut and what that says about the time and moment.

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But I also try to focus on what was the hope or driving force that led someone to create that piece. And so if we were to go back to Mississippi Goddamn, you know, it's an incredibly powerful song.

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The way she first presented it, she's really kind of slap in the face of, you know, a lot of folks, a lot of white people that were at Carnegie Hall listening to her and thinking she was going to just do a fun song. And she, you know, called out all these racial injustices. But at the same time, when she tells the story of when she wrote that piece, she was so full of anger of what was happening in the world around her and the deaths of young children and her first reaction was, I just want to lash out physically. I want to violently respond.

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And then she was able to take that anger and fear and put it in an artwork that would be much more effective in changing people's minds and was much more effective in changing people's minds. I see that as instead of just her reacting to the injustices of the world around her, taking the moment to use art as a way to really create a powerful message that can connect with people that she did not agree with, but it enabled her

to connect with them in a way that they saw the world just a little bit differently.

46:31.51

I think anytime anyone is engaging in protest and dissent, and this is something I talk about when I do workshops with students, is, you know, what is your goal?

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And then what are the different ways to achieve the goal, right? And the way that you might initially want to achieve the goal might not be the most effective. I think that's very interesting. And that article I referenced talked to all about what they were expecting at Carnegie Hall and what they got. Yeah, what they got. Yeah, I talk about that.

47:00.18

It was pretty great the way they kind of painted that situation. I feel like we're coming to the end of our time. And we usually end by offering our listeners something tangible to reflect on or act upon. And you're welcome to make suggestions. One of the things I was hoping is that You could send people off with some suggestions of what to listen to. And I was thinking maybe you could pick a couple of songs that you discuss in On the Record that you would recommend and maybe say a little bit about why you hope people listen to them and carry them with them as we move into our two hundred and fifty first year.

47:39.83

Yeah, so the first, I'll do two. The first is the song Under African Skies. It's on the Graceland album by Paul Simon, although the version I'm recommending is instead to hear the live performance that Paul Simon did with the South African singer Miriam Makeba when he took the Graceland tour to Zimbabwe in 1986. And it's on the playlist that I have. And they sing this song Under African Skies.

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And there is a really powerful line about the roots of rhythm remain and they help us remember. And that song does, and that performance especially of the two of them,

48:22.04

finding this connection. They're from these very different worlds, but there's the roots of rhythm remain. That's what links us as humans. It's an incredibly powerful performance.

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So, and you can even see the video of it. You can find it on you know YouTube or whatever, but incredibly powerful. The second is my favorite piece of all time. If I was deserted on an island and I could only have one piece of music, it would be this one.

48:46.30

And it is Duke Ellington's arrangement of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. He did this in 1963. And if you read the chapter about Rhapsody in Blue, you'll get the whole story behind it and why he did it. But, Duke

Ellington and Gershwin, really so kind of had this conversation back and forth musically.

49:06.54

Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, when it comes out in 1924, it just, everybody, like the critics were all saying, oh my God, he did it. This is the great American sound. He found it. And Duke Ellington as a young man had just come to New York and he's like, wait, what is everyone talking about? Like,

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ah You know, what is it that Gershwin has done that everyone thinks is so amazing? And he studies, you know, Gershwin scores and he composes a number of pieces that are kind of given a commentary on Rhapsody in Blue. And Rhapsody in Blue opens with that famous clarinet line. Diddle-dee, diddle-dee, diddle-dee, diddle-dee, diddle-dee.

49:40.73

And Ellington will quote that in various pieces. It's in Symphony in Black. It's in Creole Rhapsody. And he'll do it as a way of kind of saying, okay, now I'm going to I'm going to get your attention, get you to think of Gershwin, and now I'm going to play the blues that's really the blues, or I'm going to play jazz that's really jazz.

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And I see it as he was sort of trying to remind us all that it was jazz and African-American culture that really was the foundation for a lot of what, you know, Gershwin did to create his American sound.

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And so in 1963, when Duke Ellington does his arrangement of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, first, he doesn't open with a clarinet. He opens with ah a saxophone and it's very powerful. And then the piece is shorter. You don't really have much of a solo piano in it.

50:32.02

But at the end, at the very end, I will just let folks know the clarinet finally comes in and it does that. delay dttt It does that line. And then the saxophone responds in minor and then the piece ends, but it doesn't resolve harmonically. It just hangs there.

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And I see that as Ellington's way of telling us there is not the American sound. There is not one American sound that, we as a nation and as a world of music, we're constantly evolving and the sound is ever changing. And so he leaves the piece open at the end so the next person can take it to be their own.

51:12.79

Well, that certainly seems a fitting metaphor for where our country is and where we might go. Is there anything else that you want to add that we might not have had a moment to touch on before we close?

51:26.84

Yeah, the only thing I would touch on, and only because we didn't talk about any of them, is that the book, I purposely tried to cover lots of different genres. So there's anthems, there's classical music, there's jazz, there is you know hip hop, pop music,

51:43.13

all of these different genres in there. And that is something different from a lot of other books. I think we also tend to segregate our genres sometimes. And so, you know, if folks are coming to the book because they want to learn more about the pop music or musicals, the, you know, early chapters about classical music, they might go, but I hope they will You know, read it anyway, because I think a lot of times we tend to say to ourselves, well, I like this and I don't like that. And so it'll be like, you know, eat your eat your broccoli, although better than broccoli. But it's like give it a shot because it is one of our voices. Classical music is as much part of our American music tradition and political tradition.

52:24.31

as jazz is or as, you know, hop or musicals or anthems. And so, I think by us kind of skipping that chapter, we are also sort of saying, I'm not willing to listen to that person. And I think that is something we need to, we need to listen to folks.

52:44.47

I would agree. Keep listening. And I will just say, I like both classical music and broccoli. You have given, I have a lot of homework that I plan to do in terms of listening. And so I just want to thank you for joining us today and sort of opening a window to history and also to the future that I had never looked through using music. And it was a real gift.

53:09.02

Well, thanks so much for the opportunity. The conversation was just tons of fun. I'm glad I had fun too. Well, that's a wrap. Thanks again to Anna Harwell Celenza for joining us this month and sharing their expertise. Be sure to listen to Anna's playlist, which you can find in our episode resources. We all could use to lift our voices and sing.

53:29.71

Talk to you next time.