

Spring 2005

Activism Through Music

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Citation Details

Muhanji, Cherry & Straton, Jack C. (2005). 'Activism through music', *Inventio—Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching* 7(1), (Spring 2005)

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Introduction

Portland State University has been engaged in a 10-year revolution in general education (Journal of General Education, 1999) that has inculcated activist education as central to instruction. In addition to the Critical Thinking and Communication instruction that any general education program must provide, Portland State's University Studies Program promotes Social Responsibility and Diversity as central goals of its efforts. Students start with year-long Freshman Inquiry courses taught by interdisciplinary teams of three to five faculty with a corresponding number of Peer Mentors. The latter are Junior or Senior students who teach three small-group sessions, each for two hours per week. This is designed to parallel and enhance the learning that takes place in the twice-weekly 75-minute full-classroom sessions of about 36 students.

Each team teaches to the above four goals within a framework or theme that challenges students to integrate disparate areas of learning. Currently we offer the following courses:

- Chaos & Community
- Columbia Basin
- The Constructed Self
- Cyborg Millennium
- Design & Society
- Forbidden Knowledge
- Meaning & Madness at the Margins
- Pathways to Sustainability & Justice
- Sex, Mind & the Mask: Magic Myth

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Origins and Emphasis

Though we teach on different teams — Jack on Pathways to Sustainability & Justice and Cherry on Sex, Mind & The Mask — our emphasis on extensive diversity training linked to social responsibility is quite similar. Jack teaches a 40-hour diversity curriculum that includes helping White ¹ students to address the guilt that fixes them in inaction (Nile & Straton, 2003) and showing the movie *The Color of Fear* in which nine men of various ethnicities talk about their own experiences of race relations. Also included is "A Stand-up Exercise for Whites" (Kivel, 1992, p. 207-210) that puts them in touch with both the negative impact of White racism and the palpable reality of its prevalence. This course also explores the biological invalidity and the sociological reality of the concept of "race," and the need to move beyond a focus on interpersonal bigotry in an examination of race to challenging the institutions that remain the main obstacles to progress today by perpetuating discriminatory practices. Jack's particular challenge as a European-American teacher is crafting ways to use authentic voices to teach Students of Color how to cope with the daily indignities they face. Music is one key avenue for this.

Cherry's particular challenge as an African-American, mother, lesbian, working class teacher is dealing with "Portland Erasure": the invisibility of Students of Color, their "acceptance," and in general their failure to engage assertively with their White colleagues. Additionally challenging is the nearly unquestioned assumption among Whites in Portland that racism was fixed years ago, and their consequent lack of knowledge of "Racism 101." Her approach is to continually address Interlocking Oppressions, ²—which include race, gender, class, sexuality, age, size, etc., as a means of stimulating meaningful student dialog. In some cases seeing these parallel forms of bigotry helps them come to terms with and voice what institutional oppression is really about. Music plays a central part in reaching this understanding.

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Music and the Activist Impulse

Our curricula are typical of any year-long Freshman Inquiry courses in that they balance critical self-examination with critical societal analysis and sharpening the tools with which one may make change; all in a content focus that differs from theme to theme. The activist expression of self-knowledge may be enhanced by having students read an autobiography by an activist such as Mary Crow Dog (1994) or Malcolm X (1987) as they write about their own struggles in life. Empathy for those who have gone before, and those such as Assata Shakur (1987) who are wrongly accused and still fight their oppressor, is a key ingredient in motivating activists and fending off burnout.

The second emphasis includes critical analysis of political and sociological systems, as well as attending to the embedded structures of bigotry inherent in literature, art, and plays (e.g., gender oppression in the play *Lysistrata*). Those who wish to push for change need to know, for example, the historical roots of oppression in order to see that process as a continuum. It needs to be understood as a system of control used by those in power to exploit. The idea is to increase student awareness of how they are exploited individually and as a group. That way they can feel it both on an individual level as well as on a collective level. In turn, that opens up both an internal and external motivation to push for change.

Students also need to develop the tools necessary for becoming effective community change agents and gain practice in that role through Community Based Learning projects. Citizens who can write persuasively will be more effective in their activism, as are those who can speak clearly to legislatures and corporate decision-makers.

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Promoting Activist Sensibilities

Lastly, the content focus for a given theme may be activist focused, as in the case of Pathways to Sustainability & Justice, which explores Eco-footprints ([Wackernagel & Rees, 1996](#)) as a means to assess environmental impact, critical social issues (such as homelessness, deforestation, food ([Schlosser, 2001](#)), and the sentencing of minors), and innovative developments such as green buildings, the concept that in nature waste = food,³ and voluntary simplicity ([Robin, 2002, pp. 79-92](#)). In *Sex, Mind and the Mask: Magic Myth* the emphasis is on identity politics. For example, what do Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* ([1959](#)) and Sandra Cisneros' *House On Mango Street* ([1984](#)) teach students about gender, race, religion, sexuality — all areas that exploit and control behavior? Class activities, written assignments⁴ as well as oral presentations diversify the learning about these very diverse writers. They offer an approach to communicating across difference⁵ that demonstrates to students the need to embrace difference, not fear it.

In the present paper, we wish to provide a detailed look at one tool for promoting activist sensibilities in students, a tool often overlooked in higher education. We will examine the diversity-related lessons that music can teach, the use of music as a means to show the promise of social action, and the ameliorating effects music can have on activist burnout.

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Music as Activist Education

In the Northwest, racism is no less prevalent than in the Northeast or South, but it often either lies beneath a veneer of "acceptance" or lies fallow for lack of contact with People of Color in this fairly homogeneous region. In part because of this, our students come to us woefully ignorant about the racial history of our country and region. Music is one of the fastest ways to clue students in to the meaning and history of racism, sexism, and the dire effects of heterosexism on gays and lesbians.

For example Cherry uses Billie Holiday's 1939 song "Strange Fruit" to examine the history of lynching of Blacks by Whites in this country:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burnin' 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
Here is a strange and bitter crop

Even when she is singing a Jazz standard, the pain of an entire race of people is echoed through the lyrics, and Holiday's minimalist presentation of the song works as a call to arms, a social commentary, a truth. [To hear Billie Holiday sing "Strange Fruit," visit the PBS web site for the [Strange Fruit](#) documentary]

The 1960's brought Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln's recording of "Freedom Suite," which sent chills throughout the community with Lincoln's scream that harkened back to the Middle Passage and all the injustices that were currently in vogue. Cherry remembers a southern senator asking, "What do you people want? You got televisions and refrigerators." [To hear clips of Abbey Lincoln's screams from "Freedom Suite, and hear her talk about the recording, go to National Public Radio's [profile of Abbey Lincoln](#), and scroll down to the ninth segment of the profile]

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"Four Women": Interplay of Race and Gender

Another song from the 1960's is Nina Simone's "Four Women," which lends itself to a discussion of the interplay of race and gender:

My skin is black
My arms are long
My hair is wooly
My back is strong
Strong enough to take the pain
It's been inflicted again and again
What do they call me
My name is Aunt Sarah
My name is Aunt Sarah

My skin is yellow
My hair is long
Between two worlds
I do belong
My father was rich and white
He forced my mother late one night
What do they call me
My name is Siffronia
My name is Siffronia

My skin is tan
My hair's alright, it's fine
My hips invite you
And my lips are like wine
Whose little girl am i?
Well yours if you have some money to buy
What do they call me
My name is Sweet Thing
My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown
And my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see
Cos my life has been too rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
Because my parents were slaves
What do they call me
My Name Is Peaches

[To hear a clip of Nina Simone singing "Four Women," go to disc 3 of the [Amazon page](#) devoted to the CD set, "Four Women."]

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"Prove It On Me Blues": Lesbian Sexuality

Ma Rainey's 1928 song "Prove It On Me Blues" is one of the earliest that featured lesbian sexuality:

Went out last night, and a great big fight
Everything seemed to go on wrong
I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone

Where she went, I don't know
I mean to follow everywhere she goes
Folks say I'm crooked, I didn't know
where she took it
I want the whole world to know

They said I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me
Went out last night with a crowd of
my friends
They must've been women, 'cause I don't
like no men

It's true I wear collar and a tie
Make the wind blow all the while
'Cause they say I do it, ain't
nobody caught me
They sure got to prove it on me

Wear my clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man
'Cause they say I do it, ain't
nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.

[To hear a clip of Ma Rainey's rendition of this song, scroll down to the Listen to Samples section of the "[Heroes of the Blues](#)" Amazon page]

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Race, Gender and Oppression

Jack engages the interplay of race and gender by having students read aloud a passage in the play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, by August Wilson ([1988, pp. 68-71](#)). One of the Black musicians tells a story of seeing White men rape his mother as a means to humiliate his father for being a better farmer than they. This provides an opening to a discussion of how after the Civil War "The Emancipation Proclamation" denied Whites free access to the Black workers' relatively higher skill level (as the people who actually built the U.S. Capitol Building, Monticello, and so on).

Asking why they attacked the mother if it was the father they wanted to humiliate leads nicely to a discussion of the common (then as now) relegation of women to object status, as conjugal property and even visual property ([Beneke, 1982, pp. 23-9](#)). To humiliate the Black male in this way served to support the notion that only White men can be men because they essentially own the system and have unfettered access to all women.

This also is a good lead into examining reversal as a tool of oppression: the myth that White women should fear rape by Black men. This, Cherry argues, was a tool set in motion by land-owning White men who could not police their women 24/7. This fear of Black male virility was introduced so that White women would police themselves out of their own fear. In general, it backfired because it served to titillate the American psyche and angered White men, who most often castrated the Black men they lynched. This myth still holds currency, though according to the U.S. Department of Justice, in "about 88% of forcible rapes, the victim and offender were of the same race" ([Greenfeld, 1997, p. 11](#)). But rape of women of African descent by the men of European descent who held them in bondage was commonplace.

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Music and Activism: Historical Effectiveness

It is important when examining music as a tool for activism (as we will in the next section) to also look at its history to see its effectiveness. Jazz was an early form of deracializing music, from Benny Goodman's inclusion of Teddy Wilson as his pianist in 1936, to Artie Shaw's brief inclusion of Billie Holiday in 1938 ([Burns, 2000](#)), to other White and Black men managing to integrate the music even while their sexism ostracized women to the margins.

White musicians are sometimes criticized for appropriating Black musical culture. Indeed, there are some obvious cases, such as Nick LaRocca of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band ([Burns, 2000](#)), of Whites playing music originated by Blacks and claiming or accepting credit for that music. Any number of White Jazz big band leaders did not acknowledge the sources of their style, and given the emphasis we place in school on always footnoting one's sources to avoid a charge of plagiarism, this is problematic.

Deeper reflection on the appropriation charge against someone like Elvis reveals that the Black musicians whose songs he was singing were stuck in "Race Music" record labels and radio frequencies. In his interviews in Martin Scorsese's Blues series, B. B. King talks about how he made the transition from 90% Black audiences to 95% White audiences in the late 1960's ([Pearce, 2003](#)). He attributes this to the White (mainly European) rock bands ([Pearce, 2003](#)) that played Blues and included Black musicians on their bills. "I noticed then that White America started paying attention to Blues. And so it started opening a lot of doors that had been closed to us" ([Figgis, 2003](#)).

It also seems that the sound of the music, even without the lyrics, resonates to eliminating oppression. For example, Rap is often sung in English by people who do not speak it. Cherry has polled students in what they think those who don't speak English hear in Rap. Students say "the beat," which in her mind translates to the beat of the mother, or heart beat which again takes all of us back to Mother Africa where we all began.

One may also delve into the history of activist music in Africa, which has been demonstrably central to promoting political change on the Swahili coast of East Africa ([Askew, 2003](#)), for instance, and in South Africa ([Hirsch, 2003](#)).

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Music and the Activist Impulse

Jack uses music daily as a bribe to encourage students to arrive five minutes early, and he plays a variety activist songs for those five minutes before class starts. He also uses music throughout the course in transition moments between learning styles. Nevertheless, there is one day devoted to activist music to help cement the diversity training they have completed, to broaden students' understanding of diversity to issues other than racism, and to demonstrate how effective music is in motivating change. This section outlines the thinking behind a typical sequence and the commentary one might include.

Music is one of the richest veins of activist art, in styles ranging from folk to rap. Any 75 minute tour is bound to leave great music out, so one must mix some of the more influential songs or sentiments that spring onto the public stage with other songs that students have likely not been exposed to. (Indeed, one could expand this session from one day to weeks by presenting sequences from Mary Ellison (1989) catalogic book on activist music by Black performers singing in English.) A content-rich class session leaves less time for student input than most of our classes, but it is important to pause periodically to ask for any reactions to the songs.

Jack's one criterion is that the music be really listenable. Thus he shifts high intensity songs like the Dead Kennedys' "Holiday In Cambodia" or Propagandhi's "War Is Peace" to the pre-class sessions if he uses them at all. Given his background as a professional Jazz drummer some 30 years ago, his prejudice in favor of melody and harmony over raw angst flavors his choice of what to focus on.

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African-American Roots

Cherry's background is in the golden era of Jazz, having grown up in the Motor City listening to that era's music and how the community out of which the music arose responded to it. For example, Miles Davis is reported to have said, "It was either a trumpet or a gun for me." In teaching Miles as an innovative musician, Cherry also points to how his music reflects that sentiment.

The session can begin in the era of protest in the 60's with a soul screed against *War*, sung by Edwin Starr and performed by The Funk Brothers.

As with most American music, activist music has its roots in African-American culture. Indeed, the Vietnam protest followed on the heels of the Civil Rights movement that began in the 50's, with Rosa Parks' civil disobedience in Montgomery Alabama starting the avalanche.

The 1989 song *Sister Rosa*, by the Neville Brothers, hearkens back to that beginning.

During the 60's, there was a huge gulf between the American power structure and young people. John Lennon's hard rock commentary "Power To The People" speaks to that.

In 1967 Aretha Franklin recorded a Soul song by

Otis Redding, named *Respect*.⁶ The lyrics of the song, combined with Aretha's incredible delivery, spoke a universal language. "It could be a racial situation, it could be a political [or gendered] situation, it could be a man-woman situation," says Tom Dowd. "Anybody could identify with it. It cut a lot of ground."

"Aretha added another dimension to the song," Jerry Wexler claims. "This was almost a feminist clarion. Whenever women heard the record, it was like a wave of sororal unity. 'A little respect when you come home' doesn't only connote respect in the sense of having a concern for another's position; there's also a little [sexual innuendo] lubricity in there — *respect* acquires a notion of being able to perform conjugally in optimum fashion. It was just a very interesting mix: an intuitive feminist outcry, a sexual statement, and an announcement of dignity [from a woman of color]. And a minority person making a statement of pride without sloganeering" ([Bego, 1990, p. 88-89](#)).

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Lesbian-Affirmative and Profeminist Activism

In the 70's and 80's there was a huge upwelling of feminist and lesbian-affirmative music. There was and is an urgent undercurrent to women's demand for equality, that racial or class freedom cannot exist when women are besieged by male violence. In 1988 Tracy Chapman burst into popular awareness with her songs literally of revolution (1982). Not since Bob Dylan had a folk singer so enthralled our culture. It is incredible to note how much more powerful is her single voice on "Behind the Wall" (1983) than is John Lennon's entire band on "Power to the People."

There have been activist men who believed in, and worked for, women's equality since the founding of our country. These early profeminists include Thomas Paine writing in 1775 (Kimmel & Mosmiller, 1992, p. 63), and Frederick Douglass, the emancipated slave and abolitionist who also worked on behalf of women's suffrage in 1848 (Kimmel & Mosmiller, 1992, p. 211). But the modern profeminist men's movement began in about 1975 (NOMAS, 2004), focusing in equal measures on ending men's violence, ending oppression of gay men and lesbians, and finding richer, more fulfilling male roles.

One could play a number of profeminist anti-violence or gay-affirmative songs but Portland's rap recording group, Consolidated, is the epitome of the activist strain of music. They set aside time in the middle of their concerts for local activists to appear on stage and tell the audience about opportunities for activism.

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Analyzing Historical Perspectives

Early in the year students read a paper by Jane Tompkins entitled "Indians: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History" (1986, pp. 101-119), that confronts students, generally for the first time, with the notion that the perspectives we bring to an exploration of history are part of the history that we discover. Her cyclical analysis of her journey of inquiry takes the shape of a spiral of some nine turns, coming back to similar themes at deeper analytical levels. This approach to analysis is echoed in the rich complexity — several layers of critical analysis — that Consolidated's lead singer and guitarist Adam Sherburne puts in his song "No Answer for a Dancer":

it was after the show and i'm loading out the van
it could've been anywhere but in this case atlanta
a woman walks up while i'm packing
she says have you got a minute i say yeah just a second
how are you did you enjoy the show
she said i did but i still have a question though
'cuz some of your remarks were confusing
especially the ones about pornography and prostitution
now let me understand this
that for women and children this is violence
well i appreciate the messages you're giving
but i happen to dance for a living
and i want to know why you want to be my voice
try to take away that which should be my choice
to seek some meaningful and gainful employment
even if it means giving dirty old men enjoyment
now exploitation of anyone is wrong i agree
but this doesn't apply to me
i've never been harassed while i work and my bottom line's phat
now sir can you deal with that

"No Answer for a Dancer"

"No Answer for a Dancer"

you could already call the situation
i wasn't even speculating about her occupation
but this debate's insane
and i was on the spot so i had to try to explain
her points were intelligent and simple
and i'm already feeling like mr. guilty white liberal
just try to be sensitive
don't act like i have any advice to give
let me make it clear i support you
in a man's world a woman does what she's got to
if this is your profession
your sexual expression
your internalized oppression
hey i won't doubt you
my only problem is with a society
that forces women into sexual commodity
where a third of all women are known
to be sexually abused before they're grown
the most raped most homeless and addicted
if this job were described to you would you have picked it

average age fourteen
hell yes obscene
made to look aroused by pain
children being raped with guns and knives
that ain't speech but the taking of innocent's lives
if you happen to be the exception that's cool
but let's consider the overwhelming rule

we parted ways with no resolution
you could go back and forth and never find a solution
the only point i wanted to make to her
is while all the liberals and pornographers
decide where the line between porn and erotica is
this is what prostitution really is
a question of censorship alright
of women's and children's basic rights
and there's no first amendment protection
for those unable to raise an objection
if they weren't silenced they'd sound an alarm
and we'd all know the difference between speech and harm
you want to mutilate yourself on film that's your choice but
can we protect those without a voice
i'd never get in your face
i just don't want you to end up like linda lovelace

the bottom line is i'm a man
and i listen to you because i could never understand
and i haven't got shit to say
but if i don't say anything
well how long will it be this way

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Music: On Homophobia and Abuse

Homophobia is a major tool for persuading men to disidentify with women so that men can more easily mistreat them. One can use Boot camp, militias, and gang rape as examples. Indeed, the Center for Democratic Renewal began tracking hate crimes against gay men and lesbians because they found that the same men were committing these crimes as well as racist and anti-Semitic crimes (Mab & Zeskind 1991). Thus, ending men's violence and racism also requires that the oppression of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people be stopped. So that one sees activism across stylistic lines, a good choice is a 1980 Country & Western activist song addressing how "[Homophobia](#)" limits straight men's lives. It was written by Geof Morgan, who has been one of the primary musicians involved in the antisexist men's movement:

Back when I was very young,
I was a curious boy.
One day my daddy caught me alone and said,
Son, you know that ain't no toy.
You keep playing with yourself,
You'll never learn the social rules
My son's gonna be a football hero,
Not one of those sissy fools.

CHORUS

*Now it's homophobia
in the locker room when I took gym.
Homophobia,
It keeps me from touching my friends.*

don't remember who told me exactly,
or when I first heard.
But I could tell by the tone in the voice,
the meaning of the words.
The women teachers who lived alone,
Everybody knew were weird.
And some strange man giving me a ride
was something my mother always feared.

CHORUS

First I learned it was evil,
Then I got liberated and learned it was sick.
And now I see things differently,
But that early training just won't quit.
Sometimes it feels just like a wall,
or a river in me that froze.

But though I can't really touch it,
It keeps me from getting too close.

CHORUS

("Homophobia" reproduced with the kind permission of Geof Morgan.)

Turning to child abuse one might play a 1987 song by 10,000 Maniacs entitled "The Matter Here?" (1987), for "Poverty" there is one from The Subdudes (1990), and Sweet Honey in the Rock's a cappella song "More Than a Paycheck" (1982) speaks to pollution and exploitation of workers. Their 1985 commentary, "Are My Hands Clean?," on what role our individual actions play in all of this is also very fine.

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Inspiration into Action

One of the dangers of playing a set-list of all that is wrong with society is that students will feel overwhelmed by the enormity of needed changes. This issue needs to be address quite directly, and Tracy Chapman again provides a great commentary on this issue in *Across the Lines* (1983):

Across the lines
Who would dare to go
Under the bridge
Over the tracks
That separates whites from blacks . . .

Since these students have had antiracist training over many months, they tend to respond positively to this dare. This compact can be sealed by ending the session with some uplifting music showing unity within diversity. Many Afro-Pop bands play songs that fit the bill, such as "Freedom Is Coming" from the film *Sarafina* (1992) or "Eyes on Tomorrow" by Miriam Makeba (1991). One of the finest choices is Terrence Simien's "There's Room For Us All" (1993) not only because of the activist lyrics and the fact that Zydeco music cannot be anything but uplifting, but his band is the very visual image of people of diverse sizes and ethnicities working together to create beauty.

Since students are quite attuned to music videos, there is benefit to ending the session with one or more concert video clips (as substitutions for the last few above or supplementing them). The ending theme of coming together is beautifully captured in singer Michelle Ndegeocello's interview in *Standing in the Shadows of Motown* of The Funk Brothers' White bassist Bob Babbitt. In the interview he talks about how the other members of this mostly Black band treated him and Joe Messina as family, even to the point of protecting them when the Detroit riots broke out after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.

The story may be made even more poignant by giving a synopsis of the band's history before showing this clip: total anonymity despite creating more #1 hits than the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Beach Boys, Elvis, and Earth, Wind, & Fire combined. All except the latter were White bands that borrowed heavily from their Black precursors and contemporaries. The clip fades into a 2002 performance by surviving members of the band — finally obtaining some deserved recognition, albeit 30 years late — of "What's Going On," "Marvin Gaye's anguished plea for sanity in a world gone mad" in 1972 ([Justman, 2002, From DVD Chapter 29 \(1:26:06\) to 1:33:53 in Chapter 30](#)).

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Typical Classroom Commentary

A final example of what real coming together means is provided by Sarah McLachlan's 1997 performance of "Ice Cream" at the Lilith Fair ([Childerhose & Jamison, 2002](#)). Typical commentary on this can be something like the following:

How many of the women in this room are willing to call themselves feminists? (Few raise their hands.) How many of the men in this room are willing to call themselves profeminists? (Few again.) A very interesting thing has happened in this world when the media have been able to paint a group of people working for the liberation of us all in so negative a light (that somehow they are anti-male) that young women can't relate. Michael Kimmel (Sociology Professor at S.U.N.Y. at Stony Brook) defines a feminist as someone who acknowledges the empirical observation that women in this country are not equal combined with the moral judgment that "That's not OK." How many of you would call yourselves feminists and profeminists if that was what the terms meant to you? So are you going to let the media tell you what to think?

The following video clip speaks to this issue. Note how clear Sarah McLachlan is about her feminism; her assertion that men and women are equal. Note also how clear she is about her agonic love and her carnal love for men. Look also at the image of these three male and female human beings of a variety of ethnicities creating music as magic with each other and with the audience. Pay special attention to the faces of men and women in the audience to see what the egalitarian message of feminism really means for us. ⁷

Students are usually inspired by this day to bring in their own favorite activist music, so we set aside a mentor session for that purpose.

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Conclusion: Dancing at the Revolution

We have not attempted to quantify the ways in which music has affected students' motivation, in general and toward activism in particular, but suspect it to be substantial. There is some evidence to indicate this. Last year Jack gave his students total freedom to decide what to do for their Spring Community Based Learning project. Though many people translate "Community Based Learning" as "Community Service" (which is not necessarily a non-activist enterprise), 57% of the students chose explicitly activist enterprises, such as starting a Mercy Corps chapter, helping with the Big Mountain fight in Arizona, or working on voter registration. Indeed, one pair of students founded an Oregon chapter of an organization called *Students Against Land Mines*. They raised over \$1,000 via a concert held in Richmond, VA, and two in Portland. One of the students wrote activist songs and sang and played guitar at the latter two concerts.

Thus, the learning acquired through activist music lessons can be enlightening, motivating, and at times lead to direct action for change. [For a brief introduction to activist music, and to listen to clips, many of them quite rare, visit the [Protest Music](#) section of the "Strange Fruit" documentary web site.]

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Author's Notes

1. We will capitalize political-social categories like White and Black that have no basis in biology. This is beautifully illustrated in the video *Race - The Power Of An Illusion* (2003).
2. The exercise is in part a way for students' to begin the year-long process of learning to communicate across difference. See [Appendix #1](#)
3. William McDonough & Michael Braungart's work as portrayed in the film, *The Next Industrial Revolution*.
4. See [Appendix #2](#)
5. Teaching students to communicate across difference is at the crux of Cherry's teaching and it also helps them to fulfill another University Studies goal, communication.
6. One should note to students that the line "Take out T C B" includes an abbreviation for *Taking Care of Business*, a late-'60s expression so powerful even Elvis put it on his jumpsuit.
7. This message is realized by creating a montage: paste her introduction to the Lilith Fair, from 9:38 to 10:15, onto the performance of *Ice Cream*, 38:49 to 41:33 on a VHS tape, or play Chapter 4 on the DVD and then skip forward to play Chapter 15.

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Appendix #1

Interlocking oppressions

1. Get in circle, standing
2. Rules: silence, no talking

The facilitator will make some statements and ask people to go into the middle of the circle if they identify with those statements, where they will stay for just a moment.

ONLY self-identification allowed...no calling out your friends.

Those of you who come in the middle are then encouraged to see one another and to see those on the outside.

3. Confidentiality: what we learn here, stays here. Are you willing to agree to that?
4. The sequence:
 - Those who identify as **non-Christian** please come into the center
 - Those who identify as being first generation college students
 - Those who identify as being female
 - Those who identify as non-white or Caucasian
 - Those who identify as being in a significant relationship with someone from a different race
 - Those who identify as non-heterosexual
 - Those who identify as speaking with an accent or dialect
 - Those who identify as having a hidden disability
 - Those who identify as being overweight
5. Interlocking oppressions - the number of times you went into the center suggests the amount of societal oppression you are subject to. The amount you stayed on the outside is a gauge of societal privilege.
6. Power ∞ Bias = Oppression or isms (this is societal power/instructional not personal power)

Appendix #2

In attempting to teach religion/spirituality to students who see religion as a taboo subject, Cherry argues that it is a valid subject because it can govern behavior that is often racist, sexist, and heterosexist. To help students to see that she introduces the concept she calls "*association of images*." Both Jack Kerouac and Sandra Cisneros use effective imagery in their narratives that when looked at carefully often reveal a subtext that aids students in fulfilling the critical analysis learning goal of University Studies. When these are juxtaposed, there is even more revealed.

For example, Kerouac's "Buddhist beginnings" begin early in his most famous work (*On the Road*) through the "spiritual imagery" as he treks across America, but so does his racism, sexism, and paternalism. How do these "isms" work in a narrative that is so filled with spiritual imagery? The attempt here is to show the complexity of Kerouac's narratives especially when placed "against" Cisneros' text which has very little spiritual imagery. The juxtaposition also works well to highlight Kerouac's "isms." These are jarringly at odds with reality when projected onto Cisneros, who is Latina, female, and self-willed.

Cisneros' text reveals her confinement within her community, both by external "isms" and by internalized oppression. She wants to get out. Kerouac, on the other hand — by virtue of his ethnicity, gender, and class - has the privilege to travel all over the map. Through the association of images, students enter unfamiliar terrain because hers is a landscape that teaches how sexism, racism, and paternalism work from those who experience it.