

Project Proposal

Analysis of Popular Music In Relation to Current Events

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Domain

It is often said that music is a form of art and expression. Throughout the years there have been strong links between popular music and current events as a form of political expression and protest. Prominent examples would include Edwin Starr's song "War", a song that protested the Vietnam War, as well as "We Didn't Start The Fire" by Billy Joel, a song that explicitly listed off current events and political turmoil as a form of expression. However, most of the evidence behind this relationship is largely anecdotal, and trying to find a purely data-driven study exploring it is surprisingly difficult. Thus, for this project, I wanted to see if it was possible to quantify that relationship and see if the most popular songs at the time would discuss topics that correlated strongly to current events.

An **MVP** would, at the bare minimum, be able to take any given song and derive from it the main topics and focal points of the song. In other words, it should be able to analyze the lyrics and come up with a single theme that the song is addressing, such as falling in love, or gang warfare, or the cycle of poverty. Having this much in place would be a strong launching point to applying it across all songs and comparing it to major current events.

Data

The data in this case will be collected via the Billboard top 100 songs chart. The chart publishes on a weekly basis every week, starting in 1958. Though the chart formula has changed over the years to account for new innovations in how consumers intake music (primarily to account for streaming and digital downloads), in general it is probably the most accurate source for song popularity at any given instance in time. I will have to scrape data on a week by week basis and that should build up a database of several thousand songs which will be enough for an appropriate analysis. In addition, I will also utilize <https://www.infoplease.com/yearbyyear> for information on current events. Scraping events on a year by year basis will allow me to create a timeline and relate major topics from the songs of that instance to each era on the timeline. I anticipate that I will compare topics by decade as that should encompass all of the events that might be approached from a musical standpoint.