

Spring 4-28-2022

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The Musical Rhetoric of Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone and the Civil Rights Movement

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A project report in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
Master's Plan II in the
School of Media and Communication
Bowling Green State University

May 2022

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Abstract

Acclaimed artists such as Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone were able to use their music as a way to communicate change during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Through their public platforms they became powerful influencers who were able to spread awareness for social justice and create an image of strong Black womanhood for listeners. By using the Illusion of Life theory, this project examines how the listener is brought into a rhetorical moment that the artist creates through song. Black Feminist Thought allows inclusion of the artists' life experiences to the analysis of the rhetorical power of Franklin and Simone.

Keywords: rhetoric, popular music, illusion of life theory, Black Feminist Thought

Introduction

This project seeks to understand how a listener is invited by the artist and their music into a rhetorical moment that can lead to a focus on social justice issues and a commitment to activism. I want to identify the rhetorical goals of the artist which include fighting for African American women's rights and drawing attention to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The intent in the music is to inspire audiences to take a stand for change and to spread the message of social justice through the musical styles of jazz and soul. In order to analyze the rhetorical potential of the music, different aspects of songs will be examined, including the lyrics, performance by the artist, instrumentation, and rhythm. Reviewing past rhetorical studies of music and using the Illusion of Life theory (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001), gains an understanding of the important role these songs played during the Civil Rights Era. These two artists created music with lyrics that foregrounded the Civil Rights Movement and the treatment of women during this time with the goal to spread awareness, inspire the listener to take action, and to work for change.

In this project, I argue that artists such as Nina Simone and Aretha Franklin use the songs of their careers to influence the Civil Rights Movement and women's rights activism during the 1960s and 1970s. By studying the artists through the perspective of Black Feminist Thought and the Illusion of Life rhetoric I will explain how their music played an important role in influencing their listeners during this time. To analyze the music of Franklin and Simone within the context of their personal lives and in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, I draw from several different literatures and critical frameworks.

Studying music through a rhetorical perspective such as Illusion of Life allows the critic to describe how the listener briefly lives in the world of the singer through an environment of

sound. Central aspects of this theory are virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music) (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). This is also shown through the concept of congruency. Sellnow & Sellnow (2001) describe a song as congruent or incongruent to identify the relationship between artist-created meaning and how the listener may be affected by the message. If a song is congruent it means that the song expresses the overall message clearly, but the listener may still derive their own interpretation although this typically is not the case since the artist's intentions are clear. An example of a congruent popular song is Bob Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind." The song has a guitar playing softly and the twang of the harmonica as the lyrics depict the cruelty of the war. The rhythm and instrumentation matches the lyrics in a congruent way that allows for the listener to feel how cruel and sad the war was. If a song is incongruent it means the overall message is different from what the lyrics are stating which leaves room for the listener to misinterpret. An example of a song that would be incongruent is "Bad Romance," by Lady Gaga. The upbeat style of the song creates a sense of happiness, but the lyrics depict the loneliness and terrible choices made by the singer in her personal relationships. Congruency can be examined within Franklin and Simone's songs as their songs feature lyrics that send a message to the listener regarding the need for change during this time of social unrest.

Another perspective that this project draws on is examining the discourse of African women through Black Feminist Thought or BFT. BFT holds that by studying identity markers of race and gender it can be determined that no one should be seen as inferior or superior based on these factors (Patterson, et al., 2016). BFT also holds that the experiences of Black women in the U.S. are unique and impactful and should be considered when analyzing the rhetoric of Black women (Patterson, et al., 2016). BFT includes an understanding of the background of the artist and their intersecting struggles of race and gender during a time when they were fighting for

their rights not only as women but as African Americans. This was a time where identities of Black women faced harsh oppression and the artists used their music to speak out on justice and equity issues.

In this paper, first I provide a rationale for the study and review research on rhetoric and popular music. Next, I provide information on the background into the artist's personal lives and their struggles. Third, I will identify their most popular songs during the movement, and finally, I draw from the Illusion of Life rhetoric and Black Feminist Thought and rhetoric to identify the meaning of the significance of their music during the 1960s and 70s to explain its significance to the Civil Rights Movement.

Rationale

The 1950s and 60s were a time of social change and civil rights activism especially for and by women and African Americans. The fight for equality was not only something that was done through various forms of protest, it also was expressed through song. Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone are two artists that used their platform to express what women and African Americans were feeling at a time when they weren't receiving social justice. It is important to understand how the artists were able to contribute their voices and lyrics to the Civil Rights Movement. It is also important to gain a fuller understanding of how their personal struggles created an identification with the listeners. Listeners became inspired by the messages that the artists created through music which drew many others to fight for the cause as well.

Rhetorical Studies of Popular Music

In this section I will describe how rhetorical scholars have examined popular music and I will describe the perspective of Black Feminist Thought. I will focus specifically on the Illusion of Life theory to frame and analyze the songs within the next section beginning with research

within the history of the theory and how it has developed. I will use these theories as a framework for describing and analyzing how Franklin and Simone wrote specific songs that contributed to the Civil Rights Movement.

Music can communicate cultural identity (e.g., Francesconi, 1986). The 1950s and 1960s were decades of development and awareness regarding African American cultural heritage. It's important to identify that cultural identity can be seen during this time and that this rhetoric focuses not on judgment but concern for a new frame for advancing what were at the time unfamiliar perceptions and values (Gregg, McCormack, & Pederson, 1969, p. 152). That is to say that this justice rhetoric attempted a "redefinition of black American self-image from an American minority to part of a world majority suffering at the hands of colonial powers (Francesconi, 1986). The article, *Free Jazz and Black Nationalism* by Robert Francesconi explores the reconstruction and redefinition that came from African identity. Although jazz music will not be analyzed in this project it's important to explore this time as a re-identification that is seen not only within jazz but within the Civil Rights Movement. Music played a role in the establishment of a new Black American community.

Francesconi recognizes that the rhetorical power of music comes from rhythm along with lyrics and that without words there can be a more open interpretation (Francesconi, 1986, p. 37). Although the lyrics are important, Sellnow & Sellnow later noted that the musical aspect can cause a feeling of emotion as well (2001). The focus of this essay will be on how songs are shared in a social setting through symbols that are "understood only through the meaning of the whole through their relations within the total structure," (Langer, 1948, p. 89). These symbols reveal a style that can create an emotional experience for those who listen.

In analyzing the Free Jazz Movement and the music as rhetoric it is important to be able to understand that there was a European-African dialectic. Understanding the two different locations generates the insight that when the two are applied to style they are dialectic in nature which “provides the contextual background setting the stage for rhetorical uses of style,” (Francesconi, 1986, p. 39). Jazz came from cultural traditions in the American South influenced by African remembrance, but in New Orleans it was ‘Europeanized,’ to give background and be more entertaining. Bebop was developed and the “stylistic revolution represented the first self-conscious attempt to impart artistic legitimacy to black music on its own terms,” (Francesconi, 2014, pp. 39). African culture had a means of being presented within bebop and was planning on spreading culture on its own terms. This became known as ‘re-Africanization,’ within jazz which happened during the 1950s where bebop was presented through forms of blues and gospel music and through free jazz. This was a radical development, “As black nationalist rhetoric defined the black American community in terms apart from the white world, free jazz adopted this stance in musical terms by associating the unfamiliar stylistic elements of their music with non-European musical practices,” (Francesconi, 1986, pp. 40). In other words, the jazz musicians were reclaiming the African remembrance.

It’s important to understand that the musical communicative transaction is made through performer, performance, listener, and context to grasp meaning. Messages are sent by the performer and new associations are made by the listener to understand the importance of unfamiliar elements of songs (Irvine & Kirkpatrick, 1972). This creates purpose within the artist’s work through its meaning within lyrics and music. This is achieved through harmony and melody, the nature of the instrumental source, and rhythm. Harmony and melody allowed African artists to break away from European chords and allowed for songs to align with African

musical concepts to create African dialect within the music (Francesconi, 1986, p. 41). The nature of the instrumental source refers to what instruments are used and their quality. The rhetorical possibilities from songs can be significant since, “the sound produced in a musical experience can be a very powerful force in producing images and associations to extra-musical objects,” (Coker, 1972, 0. 183). This gives the listeners a sense of the artist’s experience and allows for the creation of imagery through music. Frances Bebey (1975) noted that African musicians are concerned with playing the instrument in many different ways instead of the traditional technique that is used to play it (p. 132). Instrumentation is also important to an African artist such as when to use a flute, soprano saxophone, or piano. Rhythm became what was known by Africans through “drum music” which Bebey (1975) described as “the instrument that best expresses the inner feelings of black Africa,” (pp. 92). Expression was free through the emotional content within the melody and many chorus members created their own style within the rhythm.

Free jazz developed around the same time as the Civil Rights Movement which reinforces how Black cultural expressions and the fight for justice operated on multiple tracks. Jazz was a musical genre that expressed African and African American perspectives during this time.

Illusion of Life Theory

The Illusion of Life theory explains the experience of a person who temporarily enters the world of the artist when they hear a song or watch a performance. This experience is an “illusion of life” because in that specific moment the artist’s life and sentiments can be imagined by the listener through the song. This theory identifies the way that an artist brings the listeners into a rhetorical moment using elements such as lyrics, melody, instrumentation, and rhythm. Scholars

such as Sellnow & Sellnow were able to identify the rhetorical potential through virtual time (music) and virtual experience (lyrics) and through an assessment of congruent and incongruent messages in song. Drawing from American philosopher Susanne Langer, the Sellnows further identified how the messages stir emotion within the listener, which in the case of protest and political songs, can create motivation toward social action.

The Sellnows observe that rhetorical critics have examined how slaves in the U.S. South used songs to escape the owners and go to the underground railroad. Other examples they cite include the 1930s with folk songs for labor unions, the 1960s with political activists, and rap music which discusses resistance to oppressive law enforcement (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). The Illusion of Life theory is a rhetorical framework which explains how music and lyrics to communicate and persuade listeners as initially posed by Irvine and Kirkpatrick (1972). By diving into Langer's (1953, 1957) theory of aesthetic symbolism the Illusion of Life rhetorical perspective can be used to analyze musical recordings and performances. Langer (1953) articulates the idea that humankind uses symbols to show experiences and that these symbol systems are interwoven within life experiences and are discursive and non-discursive. The essay states that "unlike discursive symbol systems, music communicates through the aesthetic symbol system, which is non discursive in nature," (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). This is to say that music is 'not as a symbol in the ordinary sense, but as a significant form...which...is felt as a quality rather than recognized as a function,' (Langer, 1953, pg. 32). Understanding that music sounds 'the way feelings feel' (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 397) can help identify that music can take over what words can't as it is an expressive element which shows what emotions can sound like (Daves, 1980, p. 86). Its rhythmic patterns cause feelings within the human through patterns that create an experience of intensity and release. Intensity patterns are 'the shocks and instabilities,'

and release patterns are considered moments of ‘resolutions’ in human living (Dewey, 1934, p. 236). Intensity and release patterns can activate human emotions (Langer, 1953, p. 94). This will be discussed within the music of Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone as they use the intensity of their voices to create music that releases their personal experiences and emotion through civil rights.

The essay defines rhetorical significance within the music as the degree to which congruity or incongruity exists within the music and lyrics. When a message is congruent it would make a meaning more prominent but also affect the listener as they may not have the same appeal. Incongruent messages will change the message making interpretation different from the original intention of the message that is within the lyrics which can cause misinterpretation (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001).

An example of congruent messages can be found within a symphony by John Corigliano which features a virtual time of instrumentation that honors those who contracted AIDS (Bergman, 2013). The piece features a congruent rhythm of instruments playing together in different clashes and volumes to show the tragedy behind it. Many of the listeners told Corigliano after the performance that they also related to the piece just from the message it conveyed. Making the inferences between how listeners understand music through Illusion of Life will only expand the ideas of communication through music further.

The Illusion of Life theory is based on experience since it’s influenced by a specific artist’s perspective. That is to say that the lyrics may mean one thing but may mean another to a listener based on their different experience. The artist may approximate a listener’s perspective by the flow of the lyrics and how a song is sung. Their specific experience can be brought out through imagery and slowed down to make sure the listener pays attention to these specific

details or speed up so that the listener knows the change in mood. These incongruent aspects as discussed before can change the meaning within the song through virtual time and how it interacts through the patterns to shape the music's rhetorical form (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 399).

The study of music as rhetorical communication using the Illusion of Life directs attention to an argument that is created by both lyrics and music, which play various important roles depending on the song. This is stated within the essay by saying " lyrics and music work together to offer messages comprised of both conceptual and emotional content through the constructs of virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)," (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). Even without lyrics, music can find other ways to have emotional content such as through the way the instruments sound or what instruments are used which is known through virtual time.

To understand the virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music) a critic will analyze the lyrics to understand the message, examine musical score to understand affect through intensity and release, and explore the relationship between lyrics and music (Langer, 1957, p. 218). Through the comic and tragic rhythm of sacrifice and struggles of the artist, emotion can be understood through the combination of lyrics and music. The comic frame is positive and hopeful whereas the tragic frame is final and rhetors are aware of their fate and must discover how to deal with it (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, pp. 401).

The music, instrumentation, and structure of the music offers an emotional outlet to the artist and its listeners. Virtual time works with a pattern of intensity and release to incorporate emotions such as having a fast tempo may come with a slow release to have a dramatic mood. This causes feelings of tension within the intensity and the release offers an outlet to diffuse that

tension. By studying each area for these elements relative patterns can be described and understood.

When studying the artist's work, it's also important to note the political side that can be revealed using the Illusion of Life theory. The project by Lottie Elizabeth Johnson, Scott Haden Church, and Quint Randle (2021) discusses this side that can be identified when applying the Illusion of Life theory. "The implication here is that music is communications, meaning the songs candidates choose for their platforms can reveal attitudes and beliefs that may not necessarily emerge from speeches or other forms of campaigning," (Johnson, Church, & Randle, 2021 pp. 770). This can also be seen when choosing the songs that the artists decide to perform which is a rhetorical act in which the artist is planning to use the song to persuade the listener and communicate a message.

Their project examines congruities and incongruities found within the lyrics in campaign songs and other political activity. It describes the Illusion of Life as a "beneficial methodological approach because it increases understanding about how discursive linguistic symbols and non-discursive esthetic symbols work together to communicate and persuade in music," (Johnson, Church, & Randle, 2021, p. 771). This is applied to understand how the musical form of the song and the lyrics interact to communicate, persuade, and/or transform (Sellnow, 1999). Their study finds incongruity in the use of Bruce Springsteen's hit song, "Born in the U.S.A". The Reagan administration used it as a "message of hope," (Johnson, Church, & Randle, 2021, p. 774) even though it was a song of "despair" despite its cheerful rhythm. This makes the song incongruent as the lyrics depict the hardships that Vietnam veterans faced postwar even though the music is uplifting with drums, guitar bass that do not conform to what would be assumed as a tragic song. On the other hand, the essay discusses Neil Diamond's song "America," used by Democrat

Michael Dukakis. The song was used to create an image of an immigrant's journey to America towards a “new and shiny place,” (Johnson, Church, & Randle, 2021, pp. 776). Unlike the other song, the arrangement of instruments matches the symbolism of pride. Although it wasn't used during the campaign to discuss immigration, it related to Dukaki's background of being born to Greek parents.

This analysis allowed insight into campaign songs through “Illusion of Life,” to explain how the lyrics and music play a role in the interpretation. It shows how these songs are selected and how they are used for more than their original meaning.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

It is important to identify the critical methodology behind Black Feminist Thought since Franklin and Simone were African American women who lived during a time when they were fighting for their rights. The careers of Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone are based on their identity markers such as race and gender which were and remain important factors. They were able to use their voice to advocate for the rights of those who couldn't speak for themselves and spread the word for the need for change.

Marginalization of African American women can be seen within identity perspectives such as the obvious; race and gender, but also sexuality, class, religion, etc. In other words, marginalization and oppression are intersectional. When focusing specifically on race and gender these identifications can “both influence black women's standpoints, how we view the world, and how we experience our various truths,” (Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, & Howard, 2016, p. 56). Seventeen African American women shared their stories and experiences in this essay to embody the idea and support Black feminist methodology through critical and qualitative methods. The essay uses Collin's view of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to connect

the women's narratives and provide certain examples of the methodological value derived from the lives of African American women. The interviews with the seventeen African American women revealed a constant effort by the dominant society to break people down and prevent such things as self-love and making deeper connections with others.

When understanding the theoretical background of BFT, it's important to notice that African American women are oppressed due to identity markers as described above and therefore deserve a space within society to be able to discuss these issues of oppression that they experienced. This makes BFT necessary to make sure that no group has higher power and renders inferior any another group. BFT holds that "black women's knowledge is acquired through our various experiences living, surviving, and thriving within multiple forms of oppression," (Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, & Howard, 2016, p. 58). This is to say that within these lived experiences knowledge can be represented to generate a standpoint epistemology meaning that the experiences of Black women can produce new insights in the examination of political discourses. Collin's belief is that "for individual women, the particular experiences that accrue to living as a black woman in the United States can stimulate a distinctive consciousness concerning our own experiences and society overall," (Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, & Howard, 2016, p. 58). This is to say also that Collins uses the interconnectedness or shared quality of Black women's experiences to validate and empower other women. BFT is a "critical social theory as US Black women's experiences as well as those of women of African descent across the diaspora have been routinely distorted within or exploded from what counts as knowledge," (Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, & Howard, 2016, p. 59). BFT allows a critical understanding of how African American women are both challenged and valued through experience and knowledge.

Patricia Hill Collins poses two questions in a reflection on the impact of BFT. First, is Black Feminist Thought still oppositional and if so, in what ways in today's world? Two, what will it take for Black Feminist Thought to remain oppositional under current social and political conditions that appear inclusionary (Collins, 2016, pp. 133-134)? The idea of BFT started as a challenge to the status of Black women's knowing but isn't just for survival or opportunities for African American women. It goes further to "new responses to the latest perceived insult," (Collins, 2016, p. 134). This means that being oppositional is doing hard work to break down unjust structures such as oppressive political or intellectual systems. The power dynamics fuel the practices and oppressions surrounding age, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender to produce strategies of resistance that are aware of the history of oppression in the U.S. The first observation is that Black feminists are analyzing socially unjust practices and the limitations of canonical understanding for the purpose of applying new insights and identifying new practices within the social world (Collins, 2016, p. 135). This can be something as simple as deciding to capitalize the letter "b" when discussing Black Feminist Thought or as big as discussing transnational women's rights. "Black feminist thought can build upon existing intellectual and political coalitions with groups who have similar histories of struggle, and develop new alliances with those facing similar challenges," (Collins, 2016, p. 138). Having those who have an understanding of those struggles on the same political side can create an even stronger change. The essay also says that "Black feminist thought does not lie in the product-in this case, the contours of the theory and/or method-but rather in the interconnectedness of production, consumption, and power," (Collins, 2016, p. 140). This means that even though there might be an accomplished goal, it doesn't guarantee long-term success or change unless others are listening, doing something about it, and sharing the power.

So, will it remain oppositional? The growth of BFT is quite dramatic as the years go on. More alliances have been made and there's more people fighting to keep what's already been promised alive and what change still needs to be made toward equality. This can't happen unless there are clear goals and coalitions of identities to sustain action. The idea of Black Feminist Thought as oppositional knowledge will rise or fall depending on the allies and networks that fight for justice.

Music and Personal Challenges

When discussing the artist's lives, it's important to acknowledge how their most popular songs came to be, that is, to not only dive into their career and how others received the songs but understand how the music affected them personally. Later on, the same songs will be analyzed through their lyrical content and musical rhythm through the Illusion of Life theory. The artists' personal experiences are what shaped their careers and music which is why it's important to include briefly here. The background information is drawn from a variety of sources including published biographies and Franklin's autobiography, interviews, and documentary films which allows for us to examine important aspects within their lives.

Aretha Louise Franklin was born March 25th, 1942 in Memphis Tennessee to C.L. Franklin and Barbara Siggers Franklin and she would become well known for her soul music in the 1960s. Franklin's mother was a gospel singer and pianist while her father was a minister at the New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan.

While she lived with her father, she had a strong connection to her mother who came to visit between tours. Her parents had separated when she turned six and she had stayed in Detroit performing gospel programs with her father. As depicted in the recent film, *Respect*, Franklin's father would often wake her up at night and have her perform at gatherings.

The film *Respect Her Voice Changed Everything*, depicts how Barbara Franklin's passing affected her deeply. She stopped singing and even speaking for weeks as a response to the trauma she faced after losing her mother. It wasn't until her father forced her to work with her singing instructor and told her that she would perform at church that she finally started singing again.

The film also depicts a time when a young man comes into her room during one of her father's parties and although it doesn't directly state so, it's to be assumed that something troubling takes place. These interactions with her strict father and the young man start to shape her relationships with men in the future and influence the songs she records that fight for women's rights.

The book *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin*, (2015) by David Ritz goes into detail about her life moving away from her father and the direction of her career. At the age of 18 she moved to New York City where she was signed by Columbia Records and released her first song "Today I Sing the Blues," in 1960. It wasn't until 1966 when she finally was able to establish her musical identity. Her first million-seller was "I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Love You)," in 1967 which was a song that was a mixture of blues and gospel. Franklin's cover of "Respect," that same year was a song by Otis Redding in which he spoke of demanding respect from his women. Franklin turned it into a song demanding the opposite which reached racial, sexual, and personal themes. This song became her anthem as Franklin had spent most of her life listening to men such as her father and her husband, Theodore White who managed her in a very controlling way. The music industry crowned Franklin the "Queen of Soul," and she became an influence on women and the Civil Rights Movement.

Nina Simone was born Eunice Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina in 1933 to John Divine Waymon and Mary Kate Waymon. Her mother was a preacher at a local Methodist church. Her father worked for in the entertainment industry all his life which helped to provide Simone's early opportunities. Simone would often accompany her mother at sermons on the piano or in the choir. At the age of six, two women convinced her mother to get formal piano lessons for her daughter with a woman named Mrs. Muriel Mazzanovich who organized a fund for her to save money for training after high school. During a recital to support those who had donated to the fund at the age of 11, her parents were forced to give up their seats at the front. Simone wouldn't play until her parents were seated at the front. This was her first real experience with segregation and what sparked her civil rights career.

Simone moved to New York City in 1950 with plans to attend a program at Julliard however she didn't receive scholarships allegedly due to her race. She ended up performing at a bar in Atlantic City where she officially changed her name so that her parents wouldn't know the type of music she was performing.

During this time, it wasn't uncommon for women to be abused, controlled within, or stigmatized by their relationships with men. This was a personal challenge that the artists faced personally and within their career which can be seen within the documentaries and the biographical literature. As shown in *Respect Her Voice Changed Everything*, Franklin's father and husband made most of her decisions and became her manager at one point. Her father would disapprove of the music that she was creating and would stop her from doing a recording. When she met her husband, it seemed as if she could break free of her father's hold only for her husband to take over and be the same way. They both used the word "demon" to describe times when she would do things such as miss rehearsal or drink alcohol excessively. From today's

perspective, this may have been her way of trying to break free in an act of rebellion but then it was stigmatized as Franklin having mental health issues.

Simone was also stigmatized at a young age by not fitting in with any of the children at school. Simone struggled with self-identity due to her race and identity when her goal of becoming the first African American classical artist was unsuccessful. The documentary, “*What Happened Miss Simone?*” suggests that on-stage Simone found purpose in performing music that helped fight for women’s rights and the Civil Rights Movement often having her shows turn into protests, but off-stage Simone was Eunice Waymon who struggled with her identity of not being a classical pianist (Flannagan, 2021).

These women were seen in the public eye as role models, as strong independent women, who fought the battles for everyday people and yet research into their lives shows that they were not only taking the weight of the world’s battles but also their own.

The Rhetorical Roles of Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone

By examining the artists and their songs through the rhetorical perspective of the “Illusion of Life,” we can identify how the music of these two artists affected the world around them and had appeal for the Civil Rights Movement. As stated in the literature review, Sellnow and Sellnow state that “lyrics and music work together to offer messages of both conceptual and emotional content through the constructs of virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music),” (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001, p. 395). In this section, I will analyze the performances and musical aspects such as instrumentation and lyrics to connect rhetorically and critically to the Illusion of Life and Black Feminist Thought.

Aretha Franklin’s first song “Today I Sing the Blues,” in 1960 wasn’t a best seller but was a hit back in the day. The lyrics seem to turn the blues into a person as the lyrics are given

human abilities such as “walked in this mornin’,” and “without a word of warnin’.” As most songs during this time period, the lyrics describe heartbreak except this song leads to singing the blues after being left by someone they loved. This love is left unexpectedly in a way that leaves the listener saddened by the loss.

Just as the lyrics depict sadness and loss, so do the rhythm and music. The song starts off with a piano playing softly and as the song goes on to feature the drums also playing softly along with horns and string instruments. The singing follows the tune as Franklin sings slowly.

Franklin’s cover of “Respect,” hit number one of the *Rolling Stone’s* 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. *Rolling Stone* (Lynch & Wire, 2021) states that the song “catalyzed rock & roll, gospel, and blues to create the model for soul music that artists still look to today.” The cover was a bold transformation of the original Otis Redding song. Her cover instantly connected with everyday people and women who were resisting racism and seeking a feminist voice. This song also became an anthem to others as well. In her 1999 memoir, Franklin stated that the song showed “the need of the average man and women in the street, the businessman, the mother, the fireman, the teach-everyone wanted respect. We still do.” This shows the intentions of Franklin’s message behind the song and how the listeners also perceived it (Lynch & Wire, 2021).

“Respect,” opens with a guitar twang that resonates throughout the whole song. There’s also a saxophone that plays during the first break in a way that seems to mimic her voice. Franklin sings the song in an excited, urgent way as if demanding from everyone the need to be respected which matches the lyrics. The background singers repeat Franklin’s words adding commentary of “just a little bit,” and a bunch of musical “re, re, res” that make the song even more upbeat. It’s a very bright, catchy song that became an anthem and blew away the original artist’s version. According to Lyn Lewis, a professor at the University of Detroit, Mercy, “At this

time, African Americans — and African-American women in particular — were looking for something that could serve as their anthem for that kind of era. And Aretha sang 'Respect' in a way that really caused black people to want to wave their liberation flag and wave their freedom flag. It was just a song that penetrated all aspects of the lives of black women,” (Carter, 2018). This song expressed Black Feminist Thought by living through the experience of Aretha Franklin and although many listeners didn't know about the struggles she faced personally, they could relate with their own personal experiences. This was a time where people were fighting for freedom from discrimination and this song screamed the need for change for women to be treated better and demand their own respect. It gave African American women hope for change when seeing Aretha Franklin on stage singing this upbeat anthem. Obviously, the product is the song that rhetorically advances the conviction that a change needs to be happening which makes the song a success. It also helps if these same people have heard the Otis Redding version as they can realize the differences and the way Franklin's song is spreading a better message for not only African American women but women in general. Through a BFT lens of race and gender this song puts Otis Redding's original behind Aretha Franklin's version and speaks to all women to stand up for themselves.

Using the concepts from the Illusion of Life theory the song is congruent with the lyrics. The virtual time, namely the instrumentation and performance, is congruent with the demands expressed in the lyrics, or virtual experience. The song's repeated rhythm and repeated lyrics make the message even more important. The expressive language and the intensity of Franklin's voice create the desperate emotion of the need for change. The virtual experience allows the listener to step into Franklin's message and stand up for African American women's rights. This can also be seen during her live performances such as the one at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

(Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QQwVVSvmxA>), in which she yells for others to join in singing or at the MDA Telethon where she's full of energy on stage. (Aretha Franklin, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv_Zoa-j2Q).

Nina Simone created an anthem as well during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement known as "Young, Gifted and Black." This song was based off of a play with the same name written by Lorraine Hansberry which was published after her passing. Simone was a close friend to Hansberry and wrote the song in her honor. Simone's goal was to make lyrics that "will make black children all over the world feel good about themselves forever," (Wiser, n.d.) which is what she did.

The virtual experience created by the song reached out to African Americans as a lesson to bring up future generations with a positive message and to fight against the way African Americans were historically mistreated. The slow rhythm and drawn out part during the lyrics of "young and gifted" emphasize their importance and then the fast and forceful lyric of "black" creates a lyrical release to emphasize the importance of listening to others and creating social change. The slow rhythm and drawn out part during the lyrics "young and gifted," builds up tension and then is released with the lyric "black." This emphasizes the importance of being "young and gifted," and then by saying "black," quickly it shows listeners to understand that it's possible to be all three and be proud to be. This creates congruency by having the message correspond to the lyrics. Simone wanted the listeners to have a positive, uplifting message not just for African Americans now but for generations to come which is exactly how the lyrics and the beat of the song presented itself.

A BFT notes the hopefulness in the lyrics. Most anthems during this time that were about fighting for Civil Rights seemed to have lyrics that depicted the need for change and also amped

up listeners to fight for the cause. In its own way this song also does that but allows for the listener to be proud of their background. This song was also covered by Aretha Franklin in 1972 which also became the name of her album. which helped spread hope and pride among African American listeners.

Another popular song performed by Simone is “I Loves You Porgy,” in 1958 which was from a Gershwin opera. The song was about the romance of Porgy, a black disabled beggar, who falls in love with Bess, who was already in a relationship at the time. Before the play, it was a novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward in 1925 until George Gershwin turned it into an opera. The song describes the characters and their love in the lyrics.

When listening to the instrumentation behind the song the piano is soft and slow at the beginning as Simone draws out the lyrics describing their love and the tragic events behind it. The lyrics speak of love that Bess has for Porgy and how she doesn’t want to be taken away from him (Laws, 2021). Porgy is a black disabled beggar and other characters are drug dealers and criminals, which shows the commonplace stereotyping of African Americans. Bess is a prostitute and cocaine addict who wants out of the lifestyle with Porgy. The way the instruments are played is congruent to the tragedy behind the message. Emotion also plays a role as Simone wanted the audience to feel saddened by this story which is also important to the theory. Overall, this song intends to put the listener in the love triangle to really feel how Porgy and Bess were feeling and this can be understood through the congruency of the song. There is more than enough tension within the song as it’s all about Bess asking Porgy for protection from the violence, addiction, and prostitution that she was involved in before meeting him. This tension doesn’t necessarily go away at the end as it’s still a cry for help from Bess but is a semi-release as she asks if Porgy can help that she’d stay with him forever.

BFT is reflected in this piece to reveal the nature of the stereotyping that happened during the time. A common stereotype of African Americans was that they are often criminals and unsuccessful. The pain from the stereotypes was a painful everyday experience. While the song might reinforce stereotypes for some, it also exposes the stereotype and the harm that is caused by it.

A final song by Nina Simone that is vital to discuss is “Mississippi Goddam,” which was a song discussing different states such as Alabama, Tennessee, and of course, Mississippi and the acts of repression that took place there. This song depicted the horrid events that took place against Blacks by law enforcement and southern politicians, such as Georgia Gov. George Wallace. Nina Simone created this song after many non-violent protesters were attacked by dogs throughout the South, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Alabama, and the murder of Medgar Evers that occurred in Mississippi (The New York Public Library, n.d.). The song became an iconic protest song and it identified the price these innocent people faced fighting for Civil Rights and it also expressed collective rage.

The song is written in a show tune style with an upbeat piano tempo and background singers that echo with “do it slow,” following the main lyrics “me and my people just about due/they keep on sayin’ go slow.” The background vocals mock the notion that because of how slow it has taken to receive justice, they too will do things slowly to rebel. The song creates tension from the start as the singer lists acts of violence and injustice that have taken place across the South. Each verse ends in a release of tension as the singer cries out “And Mississippi goddam!” Regarding the instrumentation compared to the lyrics the song is incongruent as the intensity of the lyrics isn’t congruent to the show tune style it was written in. On the other hand, the message portrayed to the listeners is clear and congruent that there are unjust actions going

on in the world and it needs to change. There are no metaphors here, this song directly names the violence that occurred to try to stop protests from continuing. The lyrics through the Illusion of Life lens allow for listeners to feel the anger of the singer from the events that took place and to want to start protesting as well. It's an anthem that Simone created to paint the picture of the wrongdoings in hopes to open people's eyes.

The perspective of BFT allows listeners to be educated on the events that occurred and to feel exactly how wrong they were. Some may hear the song and be able to relate with the protests that they've been to, personally know someone who's been affected by similar events, or have been through the events themselves. It helps others understand in hopes of preventing these injustices from occurring again.

At Simone's live show in 1976 at Montreux, she speaks to the crowd before the performance by telling them about how she left for a while due to her personal struggles. Simone speaks to the crowd as if having a one-on-one conversation with someone by catching up on her life and relating to them before beginning her performance. This was common for her during her performances and sometimes she would even stop and begin speaking to the crowd as if they were at a protest for Civil Rights. Often times her concerts would leave the listener feeling as though they had been to a protest instead of a concert.

During this performance, she performs a song by Janis Ean called Stars but stops before she even begins when someone in the crowd is standing up. Simone stops performing and yells for the person to sit down and it shows her mood change. Finally, she dives into the song which to no surprise is slow and sad. (Montreux Jazz Festival, 2014,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i3leUoSdIY>).

Conclusion

Artists such as Franklin and Simone helped spread the word during the Civil Rights Movement. Not only did their music deliver a message, but they also created anthems for those who needed inspiration and motivation. The Illusion of Life theory helps to explain the power of the songs through congruent and incongruent messages that can be conveyed through virtual experience and virtual time. Although the exact intentions of the artist cannot be assumed and the way the listeners interpret songs is variable, the main message was to spread the word about the need for change from the perspective of an African American woman. The critical methodology of Black Feminist Thought also helps us understand the struggles that women had during this time. By including the artist's lived experiences, BFT allows us to understand the music as the struggle for agency, autonomy, and justice. The rhetorical analysis of these songs expands an understanding of the relationship between personal experience, the creation of music, and the character of justice movements of the 1960s.

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