Paul Christiansen

Orchestrating Public Opinion

How Music Persuades in Television Political Ads for US Presidential Campaigns, 1952-2016

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Amsterdam University Press

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 188 1
e-ISBN 978 90 4853 167 7
DOI 10.5117/9789462981881
NUR 670

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Acknowledgments

The list of people to thank for their contributions to this project seems to grow daily. To start, I would like to thank acquisitions editor Jeroen Sondervan, my first editor at Amsterdam University Press, for seeing promise in my proposal and offering me a contract. His flexibility in allowing me more time to finish the book—when the 2016 election was still very much up in the air—was greatly appreciated. Following Jeroen's decision to leave AUP, acquisitions editor Maryse Elliott took up the reins and has my gratitude for helping make the process of creating a cover image and assessing figures go smoothly, among her other valuable contributions. Thanks go likewise to editor Kristi Prins in gatekeeping and editor Nanko van Egmond for cover text. Head of desk editing and production Chantal Nicolaes has been absolutely heroic in her efforts to move the book across the finish line, and I am grateful for her patience with my seemingly unending barrage of questions. Copy editor Asaf Lahat is a paragon of the judicious editor; I cannot thank him enough for the astoundingly painstaking effort he put into this book, which is much better due to his involvement. The whole production team at AUP has been excellent.

The list of people responsible for the successful production of this book stretches beyond AUP; for her indexing superpowers, Joanne Sprott deserves special mention, and I would like to express my profound gratitude to the two anonymous readers of my manuscript for their careful attention to and thoughtful suggestions for my work.

I am grateful to Jura Avizienis for reading and commenting on several chapters of this book. Her sharp eye for detail and her frequent exhortations for me always to keep my audience in mind proved invaluable. Matthew Killmeier, with whom I collaborated on a journal article about the 2004 Bush ad "Wolves" and who contributed to my early thinking about music in political ads, deserves recognition for his insights as I began more seriously to think about this topic.

The American Musicological Society awarded me the 2015 Janet Levy Award, for which I am thankful; it allowed me a research trip to numerous presidential libraries. Archivists whom I met during my trip and who all offered valuable assistance are reference archivist Kevin M. Bailey and audiovisual archivist Kathy Struss at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home in Abilene, Kansas; digital archivist Liza Talbot at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas; archives technician Rachael C. Medders at the George Bush Presidential

Library in College Station, Texas; and archives technician Alison Wheelock at the George W. Bush Presidential Library in Dallas, Texas. In addition, I would like to acknowledge those research specialists with whom I corresponded electronically: audiovisual archivist Laurie Austin at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; archivist Carla Braswell at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum; archives technician Brittany Gerke at the William J. Clinton Presidential Library; and archivist Jenny Mandel at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. I offer sincere thanks to all.

Derek Matravers earned my gratitude for his patience in explaining to me the philosophical arguments surrounding the arousal theory of music. I thank Mark Brill for giving me detailed insights for my introduction and offering additional valuable information for my discussion of Lyndon Johnson's ad "Poverty." Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Scott Harris, who offered his thoughts on music in two Dole ads from the 1996 campaign. Peter Martin has my thanks for his suggestions regarding my 2012 "Morning in America" paper, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society. Scholars of Russian music whom I consulted regarding Nixon's "Russia" include Olga Manulkina, Marina Frolova-Walker, Dmitri N. Smirnov, John Riley, Pauline Fairclough, Gerard McBurney, and Richard Taruskin; I thank them for their willingness to answer my inquiries. My interview subjects Jim Cole and Matthew Nicholl gave freely of their time, and I believe that their comments as practitioners in the field will contribute significantly to readers' understanding of this topic.

Work on this book has taken place over the course of a decade, and the research I did also found its way into my teaching. In this regard, I would like to thank the undergraduate and graduate students in my Music in Television Commercials seminars, given at the University of Southern Maine in 2006 and 2009. Their enthusiasm for the material was an inspiration, and their spirit infuses some of the ideas found herein.

Furthermore, I am deeply grateful to my valued colleagues and students at Seton Hall University for their support and encouragement. Specifically, I would like to thank the following people for facilitating a course release for me with which I was able to complete final revisions: Larry Robinson, Greg Burton, Deirdre Yates, Tom Rondinella, Christine Krus, Dena Levine, Dag Gabrielsen, Gloria Thurmond, and Jason Tramm. Courtney Starrett deserves acknowledgment for helping me assemble the elements that comprise the cover image. For the inspiration of their work in media studies and the stimulating conversations we had as I was finishing the book, I thank Jon Kraszewski and Chris Sharrett. For special appreciation I would

like to mention Jordan Green, undergraduate student at Seton Hall, for his assistance in setting the music examples.

Sandy Wachholz has my heartfelt gratitude for her constancy as a friend during the entire time I wrote this book.

For his encouragement and confidence in me as well as the best piece of advice I ever received about writing a book, I am indebted to Michael Beckerman.

Finally, my wife Šárka deserves deep gratitude for her love, support, wisdom, and patience during the years I was researching and writing. I could not have written the book without her in my corner. My children Stefan and Sophia have been troopers and are owed some extra attention, which I am starting to give them as I (with relief) submit this manuscript.

Introduction

Democratic candidate John Kerry was stunned when he realized that he would have to concede the US presidential election on November 3, 2004. Throughout the summer, his polling numbers had showed him leading Republican candidate George W. Bush. Several factors working against Bush—his failure to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, two protracted expensive wars, a sluggish economy—forced the Republican campaign into crisis mode. Although ad blitzes in battleground states had tightened the gap as Election Day approached, exit polls seemed to indicate Kerry's eventual victory.

Bush won, however, with a razor-thin 51% to 49% margin in Ohio, the deciding state in the Electoral College. Given such a modest victory, any single factor could have made the difference.[1] Could political ads run in September and October by the Bush campaign and certain 527 organizations (tax-exempt political advocacy groups) have really made the difference in a photo-finish election? In the pages that follow, I hope to show this to be a distinct possibility.

An example should illustrate my point. The most powerful emotional appeal of the 2004 US presidential campaign, and perhaps one of the most effective TV political ads ever, was Bush-Cheney's "Wolves."[2] In a campaign in which ads with music were ever-present, "Wolves" stood out. I will briefly discuss this ad here in order to describe its impact, though I return to it later in this study. The transcript of "Wolves" is as follows:

> NARRATOR VOICE-OVER
> In an increasingly dangerous world, even after the first terrorist attack on America, John Kerry and the liberals in Congress voted to slash America's intelligence operations by six billion dollars.

1 This argument leaves aside widespread allegations of misconduct and intentional voter suppression in the state (and elsewhere) during the 2004 election. For more information, see for example Steven F. Freeman, Joel Bleifuss, and John Conyers, Jr., *Was the 2004 Presidential Election Stolen?: Exit Polls, Election Fraud, and the Official Count* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006) and Mark Crispin Miller, *Fooled Again: How the Right Stole the 2004 Election and Why They'll Steal the Next One Too* (*Unless We Stop Them*) (New York: Basic, 2005).

2 The interpretation here is adapted from an article I wrote with Matthew Killmeier, "Wolves at the Door: Musical Persuasion in a 2004 Bush-Cheney Campaign Ad," *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research* 50 (2011): 157-77.

WRITTEN TEXT
Kerry and liberals in Congress: intelligence cuts $6 billion, CQ Vote #39, '94
NARRATOR VOICE-OVER
Cuts so deep they would have weakened America's defenses. And weakness attracts those who are waiting to do America harm.
BUSH DISCLAIMER
I'm George W. Bush and I approve this message.

The visual narrative of "Wolves" is of an unidentified subject (apparently the viewer), disoriented and frightened in a dark and foreboding forest, gradually realizing that a wolf is present. In the final scene, a pack of six wolves is revealed, just as they scatter in different directions. The metaphor of wolves as terrorists is unmistakable. Although the imagery and voice-over lend meaning to the ad, they are only handmaidens to the music, which conveys most of the emotional affect. And it is not just any music—it is music that one might find in a horror film: a low, rumbling drone, primal drums, shrill dissonance, uncanny timbres, and more. It grows increasingly dissonant until the final chord, which slides down in a nauseating way.

Music in the ad creates fear and panic, and it relies on the audience's participation for its effectiveness. It is thus the music, rather than any rational argument, that elicits fear from an unsuspecting audience. How does the music convey fear? The opening sequence presents a low F drone in a flutelike timbre, combined with an explosive, attention-getting drumbeat, followed by a softer drumbeat. Setting the tone for what is to follow, this music immediately evokes fear and unease. By the end, an F minor scale is constructed. Taken with the intense and hushed voice-over by a female narrator[3] and the confusing, mysterious images of out-of-focus trees, connected by jump cuts with fleeting flashes of a wolf, the music chills the viewer to the bone.

It is only through music that we perceive the wolves as the collective threat that the advertisement's creators want us to perceive. Without a musical element, the ad would be simply a series of confusing images of the forest and of one wolf and subsequently six wolves, along with the voice-over, and it could strike audiences as absurd and nonsensical. Every

3 In his analysis of campaign advertisements from the year 2000, Ted Brader found that female narrators were used in fear advertisements by a two-to-one margin (*Campaigning for Hearts and Minds* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006], 163).

other element of the ad hearkens to the music; pictures and words dance to the music's tune, not the other way around. So, far from mere innocuous accompaniment to the operational rhetorical argument, music is the *lynchpin* for the entire ad.

Music in "Wolves" is meant to be felt rather than heard—let alone analyzed. Electronically generated sounds distance the music from attempts at analysis, and the overall effect is surreptitious. In the ad proper, the last line is "And weakness attracts those who are waiting to do America harm." The climax at the word "waiting" brings the advertisement together, where the music is loudest and most suspenseful. "Waiting" is punctuated by a loud, dissonant chord followed by silence that primes the audience for the chilling four-word tagline: **to do America harm.** The narrator's ominous tone and the images of scattering wolves that ensue together create a powerful call to arms that we are compelled to heed. In Chapter 14, "Mourning in America," I discuss this ad in more detail, including its reference to popular mythology of the wolf.

"Wolves" was just one of many 2004 ads that trafficked in fear, but post-election surveys found "Wolves" to be one of the most effective and influential advertisements of the campaign.[4] Of all the advertisements aired in battleground states, "Wolves" was the only one to have high, unaided recall,[5] and it was also ranked the third-most influential advertisement in battleground states by Public Opinion Strategies.[6] This ad made an indelible impact on voters in 2004. It is conceivable that political ad music alone could have tipped the balance in Bush's favor—music that we hear in "Wolves," and many other Bush ads that ran that year including "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," "Whatever It Takes," and "Windsurfing." With so much music used in such clever and devious ways, it would seem counterintuitive to imagine that none of it affected viewers enough to make them vote one particular way. Attempts such as these to orchestrate public opinion with music in political ads are the subject of this book.

4 Lynda Lee Kaid, "Videostyle in the 2004 Presidential Advertising," in R.E. Denton Jr., ed., *The 2004 Presidential Campaign* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 296.

5 L. Patrick Devlin, "Contrasts in presidential campaign commercials of 2004," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (2005): 279-313 (287).

6 Jeffrey H. Birnbaum and Thomas B. Edsall, "At the end, pro-GOP 527s outspent their counterparts," *The Washington Post* (November 6, 2004). Consulted on February 24, 2011, Proquest Newspapers database.

Orchestrating Public Opinion

The title *Orchestrating Public Opinion* bears explanation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "orchestrate" as follows:

1. To combine harmoniously, like instruments in an orchestra; to arrange or direct (now often surreptitiously) to produce a desired effect. Also with *into*.
2. To compose or arrange for an orchestra; to score for orchestral performance.[7]

The second, more literal definition is straightforward enough, but most important for this book is the first, figurative meaning, especially the clause following the semicolon: "to arrange or direct (now often surreptitiously) to produce a desired effect." Ad creators hope through their arranging and directing to produce a specific effect, and their means are often surreptitious.

Producers of political ads strive to generate strong emotional reactions in viewers, strong enough to impel them to action. Intentionality is crucial—even the tiniest gesture is planned to achieve maximum effect. These emotional appeals must be carefully calibrated, though, as ads perceived to be unjustly negative, offensive, or tasteless can backfire. Like a composer sketching themes for a symphony, ad creators begin by deciding on a few policy ideas that they want to emphasize (for example, universal health care together with the right to choose).[8] Often, these ideas are presented in counterpoint to each other, developed, and recapitulated over the course of a campaign. In a well-conceived campaign—like that of President Reagan in 1984—the ads taken as a whole can seem carefully coordinated, like movements in a symphony. Campaign ads have a harmonious cumulative effect, each part contributing to the overall impact of several months of coordinated political efforts and targeted ad buys. In other words, they are orchestrated.

Finally, the conceit *Orchestrating Public Opinion* is meant to provoke and stimulate thought.[9] Who is the actor of this participial phrase? It could be

7 "Orchestrate," v. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition (2004); online version June 2012. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132291. Accessed August 1, 2012.

8 Research has shown that campaigns that introduce too many issues into their agenda risk confusing voters (Darrell M. West, *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-2008*. 5th ed. [Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010], 26).

9 The title also pays homage to *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2011, reprint from 1923) by Edward L. Bernays, who also wrote *Propaganda*. Stuart Ewen, in his introduction to the book, writes, "For Bernays, 'crystallizing public opinion' was about taking

a politician, campaign manager, an ad agency executive. In this metaphor, the "ad orchestrator" influences public opinion much as an orchestrator marshals the various sections of the orchestra, directing them to play to achieve a particular emotional effect such as sorrow or exultation. An orchestrator shapes music according to a predetermined design. This conceit further implies that people are being manipulated without their knowledge. Some might object to a characterization of the public as unwittingly influenced by emotional appeals contained in music, but the fact is that millions of campaign dollars are funneled into political ads because they work. I hope to show that they owe their effectiveness at least as much to music as to any other single element.

Ringing "Pavlov's Bell"

A 1984 article in the *Wall Street Journal* detailed how one corporation was turning to a nineteenth-century Russian scientist in order to sell more beverages through classical conditioning. Joel S. Dubow, in charge of communications research for Coca-Cola, said in the article, "We nominate Pavlov as the father of modern advertising." "Pavlov took a neutral object and, by associating it with a meaningful object, made it a symbol of something else; he imbued it with imagery, he gave it added value."[10] Dubow's quote tells us how corporations and their advertising agencies view consumers. The Coca-Cola communications research manager unabashedly tells the world that his company is working hard to find out how to produce in consumers a mechanical reflex, rather than present a rational choice based on reasoned decision-making factors such as taste or nutrition. Of course, music is hardly a neutral element.

Not surprisingly, political campaigns aim to achieve the same result with their ads. They join positive images, music, and sounds to their candidates and negative ones with their opponents. They hope for mechanical and visceral reactions in the viewer. Political ads appeal to our most basic feelings—fear, pride, anger, greed. Most powerful can be a response generated in the amygdala, the area of the brain responsible for processing emotions and memory.

an 'ill-defined, mercurial and changeable group of individual judgments' and transforming them into a cohesive and manageable form," 3. This is akin to what campaigns aim to do with their ads.

10 John Koten, "Coca-Cola Turns to Pavlov," *Wall Street Journal* (January 19, 1984), 34. Daniel Todes has pointed out that Pavlov never actually used a bell to make a dog salivate; see Daniel Todes, *Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). I thank an anonymous AUP reviewer for suggesting this source to me.

The amygdala receives signals directly from the auditory thalamus, and it is through the amygdala that music directly influences our emotions. Thus, ads whose music elicits fear achieve their effect without initially engaging the reasoning part of our brain, the cerebral cortex. Joseph LeDoux gives an example of how the cortex determines ex post facto whether we should react to a stimulus or not:

> Imagine walking in the woods. A crackling sound occurs. It goes straight to the amygdala through the thalamic pathway. The sound also goes from the thalamus to the cortex, which recognizes the sound to be a dry twig that snapped under the weight of your boot, or that of a rattlesnake shaking its tail. But by the time the cortex has figured this out, the amygdala is already starting to defend against the snake. The information received from the thalamus is unfiltered and biased toward evoking responses.[11]

A fight-or-flight response is the kind of powerful reaction that campaigns seek to generate in negative ads. Campaign managers want to reach these fundamental impulses, side-stepping the reasoning process completely. In fact, it is not mere emotion that ads hope to stimulate, but rather emotions that *impel us to action*. After seeing a political ad exploiting fear, viewers want to move to safer ground, to protect themselves and those for whom they are responsible. To coin a pun, one could almost speak of a *tele-kinetic* aspect to such ads. Watching "Wolves" has this effect on a viewer.

Political ads generating fear form a category unto themselves. Political scientist Ted Brader's empirical research found music to be an effective element in campaign advertisements that appeal to fear.[12] Fear appeals contributed to the likelihood of political novices withdrawing from political participation, while they inspired the politically initiated to act. Overall, "fear ads [elicit] the highest level of anxiety," and "menacing music and imagery [strengthen] reactions of fear and anxiety to the negative message."[13] In a similar vein, Carol Krumhansl's experimental research found that subjects could identify fear within particular pieces of music.[14] While listen-

11 Quoted in Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 50.

12 Ted Brader, *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds: How Emotional Appeals in Political Ads Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

13 Brader, *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds,* 86.

14 Carol L. Krumhansl, "An Exploratory Study of Musical Emotions and Psychophysiology," *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 51 (1997): 336-52.

ing to excerpts identified as "fearful music," subjects experienced significant changes in pulse rate and heart rate variability.[15]

It might seem odd to discuss Pavlov in connection with political commercials. But if aural stimulus can condition viewers by repeated exposure to associate an opponent with negative aural stimuli, then it bears mention. A strong fight-or-flight response successfully connected to an opponent can be powerful. Once a negative aural association about an opponent takes root in a viewer's mind, that connection can be reinforced through prolonged exposure.[16] What is wrong with using emotion in making political decisions? After all, recent research shows that emotion is crucial in making decisions.[17] Another study, though, shows that we are incapable of using logical and empathetic/emotional ways of thinking simultaneously. That is, when we are attending to the emotional, we must abandon the rational.[18]

Going Negative

Ads generating fear are generally characterized as negative ads. They evoke primal emotions. Critiques of negativity in political advertising abound, but some scholars argue strongly in favor of negative political advertising—at least for their effectiveness, if not for any salubrious impact they might have

15 Additional explanation for how fear is processed in the brain can be found in Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 47-52, and Laurel J. Trainor and Louis A. Schmidt, "Processing Emotions Induced by Music," in *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music*, edited by Isabelle Peretz and Robert J. Zatorre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 310-24.

16 And exposure is near constant in a tiny number of battleground states. Citing a post-election study by *The Washington Post*, Frank Bruni notes that over 50% of the $896 million spent on television advertising in the 2012 Obama-Romney matchup was spent in only three states: Virginia, Ohio, and Florida ("The Millions of Marginalized Americans," *New York Times*, July 25, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/opinion/sunday/frank-bruni-the-millions-of-marginalized-americans.html). Accessed July 30, 2015.

17 Ben Seymour and Ray Dolan, "Emotion, Decision Making, and the Amygdala," *Neuron* 58 (2008): 662-71. The first paragraph of their abstract lays out the conclusions of the study: "Clearly, there are several distinct mechanisms by which the amygdala plays a key role not just in simple conditioning but in complex decision making. Through Pavlovian learning, the amygdala can evoke conditioned responses that reflect an evolutionarily acquired action set capable of exerting a dominant effect on choice. Second, amygdala-based Pavlovian values are exploited by instrumental (habit-based and goal-directed) learning mechanisms in specific ways, through connectivity with other brain regions such as the striatum and prefrontal cortex."

18 "Empathy represses analytic thought, and vice versa: Brain physiology limits simultaneous use of both networks," press release from Case Western Reserve University, 30 October 2012, http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2012-10/cwru-era103012.php. Accessed March 18, 2015.

on society, though some claim negative ads are good for democracy. Noting that negative attacks have always been part of politics in the US, political scientist John G. Geer, in arguing in favor of negative advertising, concludes that "[N]egativity can advance and improve the prospects for democracy."[19] In support of his thesis, Geer quotes Alex Castellanos, media consultant and campaign strategist for Republican campaigns, who avers that negative ads "inform people about the consequences of the wrong choices."[20] Yet ads in which Castellanos had a hand did not so much inform as sensationalize and propagandize. For instance, "Wolves," which Castellanos produced, attacks with fear, presenting scarcely any rational evidence for its attack—fear is generated through horror music, sound effects, and jarring images.[21]

In the peroration of his introduction, Geer sums up arguments against negativity, arguments that he then belittles, claiming they show little faith in the public's ability to discern fact from fiction.[22] He has a point: negative ads so indeed focus attention and can offer more substantive arguments than their positive counterparts typically do. Yet even if we concede that negative ads typically present more factual evidence in support of their claims than positive ads, the standard remains low. Moreover, if negative ads tend to be more informative than positive ads, as Jamieson et al. and Geer contend, such ads are also sometimes misleading. (For example, Kerry's 1994 vote for "intelligence cuts," presented as evidence in "Wolves" for his disregard for homeland security, occurred seven years before the 9/11 attacks.) In essence, negative ads can be much worse than uninformative. But most importantly, by examining only rational appeals in negative *or* positive ads, we are missing the true thrust of political ads: appeal to emotion. Herein lies political ads' true power, and music unapologetically appeals to emotion.

In the literature review of their study "Eliminating the Negative? Categories of Analysis for Political Advertisements," Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Paul Waldman, and Susan Sherr deliver a withering critique of methodologies

19 John G. Geer, *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10.

20 Geer, *In Defense of Negativity*, 13.

21 Castellanos even resurrected a quote from the "Wolves" ad in an appearance on CNN during the Republican primary in March 2012 when he said about President Obama, "With this president there is doubt. [...] Politically there is doubt and weakness attracts [the] wolves" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqj_koCv1Mo. Castellanos was hoping to remind voters of negative feelings they had from the anti-Kerry ad from eight years earlier in an effort to present Obama in the same light.

22 Geer, *In Defense of Negativity*, 15.

of earlier research on content analysis of political ads, followed by a passionate argument for their own unit analysis and ad weighting, and finally providing their own example of a contrast advertisement.[23] In the same study, they claim that political ads are more informative than they are given credit for and that negative ads in particular give voters more information about issues than strict advocacy ads.[24]

It looks as though negative advertising is here to stay. Campaign advisers love "going negative," which they see as a powerful tool. Bill Clinton campaign adviser Mark Penn has said "Clever negative advertising works. That is reality. The tactic meets with media and pundit disapproval and spawns accusations of negativity, but the reality is that a clever negative ad can be devastatingly effective."[25] Although ads become more expensive by the year, it seems that negative ones will always be with us. And in them, music continues to figure prominently.

Tuning In

The "sonorous envelope," to use Didier Anzieu's term, of a contemporary political ad is often highly symbolic and rife with rich and contradictory meanings. And when we combine the sound with image, we are left with a complicated *objet d'art* potentially of historical, social, and cultural significance. As Cynthia B. Meyers remarks, "Advertising, driven by the profit motive, also produces cultural meanings and cultural artifacts; while its economic imperative may be its structuring force, effective advertising must articulate contemporary cultural tensions in order to communicate with audiences."[26]

Just as Meyers notes that advertising produces cultural artifacts, Ron Rodman reminds us that television music taps into a sort of collective

23 Kathleen Jamieson, Paul Waldman, and Susan Sherr, "Eliminating the Negative? Categories of Analysis for Political Advertisements," in James A. Thurber, Candice J. Nelson, and David Dulio, *Crowded Airwaves: Campaign Advertising in Elections* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 44-64. Geer echoes this sentiment.

24 Thurber et al., *Crowded Airwaves,* 57.

25 Cited in Politico.com (August 11, 2008), as quoted in Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 3.

26 Cynthia B. Meyers, "From Sponsorship to Spots: Advertising and the Development of Electronic Media," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 70.

subconscious of cultural tropes in order to work its magic.[27] Originality is not the point—in fact, truly original music might defeat its purpose. Music in TV shows and ads must hew to viewers' cumulative knowledge and awareness. George Bush's 2004 "Windsurfing" ad, for instance, used Johann Strauss's Blue Danube waltz to devastating effect by inviting audiences to associate the piece's musical call-and-response structure with images of John Kerry windsurfing juxtaposed against their mirror images. In tandem with the flipped images, the music made Kerry a clear flip-flopper. ("Windsurfing" will be analyzed in Chapter 14.)

According to a recent study's finding that the Dunning Kruger Effect can help describe, people tend to think of others as more susceptible to harm from political attack ads than themselves.[28] In a fallacy known commonly as the "third-person effect," people typically impute naïveté with regard to advertising to others, while imagining that they themselves are immune to such persuasion.[29] In his book *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter*, Roderick P. Hart observes that people experience politics emotionally rather than rationally; TV really does charm and seduce, rather than inform or educate.[30] Such an assertion seems so self-evident as to hardly need stating. Yet the ability of political ads to short-circuit logical thought is often underestimated. For example, a poor working-class voter might vote against his family's economic interest in electing a candidate from the party that says that it opposes same-sex marriage, even though this issue does not directly affect him, or he may favor the party that opposes restrictions on firearms that he cannot afford to purchase anyway. Ads can be effective in persuading viewers to vote even against their own political interests.

Hart posits that American TV viewers fancy themselves politically savvy, when in reality most are woefully uninformed or misinformed.[31] He cites studies that indicate that TV messages do not inform viewers much.[32] In one study, people who claimed that they paid close attention to Senate campaigns were at a loss when asked to state candidates' issue

27 Ronald W. Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14-15.

28 Ran Wei and Ven-Hwei Lo, "The Third-Person Effects of Political Attack Ads in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," *Media Psychology* 9/2 (2007): 367-88.

29 West, *Air Wars*, 17.

30 Roderick P. Hart, *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter,* revised edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

31 Hart, *Seducing America*, 12-13.

32 Hart, *Seducing America*, 55-56.

stands.[33] Two other studies indicated that viewers shown dramatic news segments focusing on concrete examples could not induce the general from the specific.[34] Thus, American TV viewers' ill-placed confidence in their imperviousness primes them to be influenced by political ads, including ads' least understood element, music.

Music's Ineffability

Why are music's effects so difficult to understand? For one thing, it would be difficult to determine exactly what assertion or accusation is being made. Music uses a semiotic system that operates on a plane distinct from verbal language. A candidate can hardly criticize an opponent for using music that shows the candidate in an unflattering light. There is no "argument" to rebut. If an ad's narrator asserts that the opponent voted two years ago to cut defense spending by five percent or that her husband's chairmanship of the board of a company whose fate is being decided by Congress is a clear conflict of interest, those claims are easily verified or disproven. But if an ad uses, say, circus music in conjunction with silly pictures of the opponent to make her look like a buffoon, how can the candidate counter? There are no "truth-in-advertising" dictates for music used in television commercials or political ads. Music deftly sidesteps attempts to assess its effects in rhetorical terms.

Regulating political ads to insure that claims are truthful and fair would be considered by many a violation of freedom of speech protections under the US Constitution. But rhetorical appeals can at least be parsed for content. Arguments can be identified and we can determine whether they are supported by evidence or not. Music, on the other hand, does not play by the same rules and does not offer up its secrets to traditional rhetorical analysis. What exactly does a deceptive cadence mean in the context of a political ad? Or a Picardy third? Or a bass clarinet ostinato? What do these things mean in connection with the images and voice-over? And how can a candidate argue against any of it?

33 Steven A. Peterson, *Political Behavior: Patterns in Everyday Life* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 230.

34 Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Public Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 42, and Michael A. Milburn and Anne B. McGrail, "The Dramatic Presentation of News and its Effects on Cognitive Complexity," paper presented at the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, August 1990, both references as cited in Hart, *Seducing America*, 55-56.

It is not as though music has little to say, though—on the contrary. To quote German Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn:

> There is so much talk about music, and yet so little is said. For my part, I believe that words do not suffice for such a purpose, and if I found they did suffice I would finally have nothing more to do with music. People often complain that music is too ambiguous, that what they should be thinking as they hear it is unclear, whereas everyone understands words. With me it is exactly the reverse, and not only with regard to an entire speech but also with individual words. These, too, seem to me so ambiguous, so vague, so easily misunderstood in comparison to genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words. The thoughts that are expressed to me by music that I love are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary, too definite.[35]

Mendelssohn tidily sums up music's ineffability, its outsider status in the realm of language—or rather, its insider status in the realm of emotion. Expressing in words music's impact—let alone articulating precisely how candidates can bolster their own candidacies or lay siege to their opponents through means that many people see only as an art associated with pleasure—is a precarious enterprise at best. Yet it is only with imperfect language that we can try to tease out how music can shape political outcomes through emotional appeal.

Persuading Voters

Television ads tend to be more effective when run just before an election. A recent study of voter preferences for a gubernatorial election in 2006 indicates that television political ads have brief but powerful effects on choice of candidate.[36] Whether ads actually significantly increase voter turnout is an open question,[37] but they do appear to be effective in convinc-

35 Felix Mendelssohn, from a letter of 15 October 1842 to Marc-Andre Souchay, in Josiah Fisk, ed., *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 84.

36 Alan S. Gerber, James Gimpel, Donald P. Green, and Daron R. Shaw, "How Large and Long-lasting Are the Persuasive Effects of Televised Campaign Ads? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 105/1 (2011): 135-50.

37 Jonathan Krasno and Donald Green, "Do Televised Presidential Ads Increase Voter Turnout? Evidence from a Natural Experiment," *Journal of Politics* 70/1 (2008).

ing undecided and unaffiliated voters—one study by Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber suggests that targeted ad buys can increase voter turnout in statistically significant ways.[38] Other scholars demur. Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz, among others, argue generally for a very modest effect of political advertising on voter preferences and turnout. Yet they concede, "Overall, television ads can influence voting choice and evaluations of candidates," continuing, "But because the effects are most often and most strongly felt in close races in which marginal effects can often change the dynamics of a race, it is likely true that the aggregate impact of ad exposure is central to the distribution of election outcomes. Put simply, in a political environment in which outcomes turn on a few thousand or even hundreds of votes, *advertising may make the difference between winning and losing*."[39] Since the electorate in the US is so evenly divided, independent, undecided, and low-involvement voters can hand an election to George W. Bush or Barack Obama. This seems to be the situation for at least the near future. Thus we are interested in the potential of music in political ads to influence these swing voters.

Ridout and Franz, in focusing on overt arguments, miss the mark. Even their language assumes that ads persuade through informative rational appeals: "All told, though, seeing a high quantity of political ads gave voters *additional information with which to evaluate* the two candidates."[40] *Providing information* is not the primary function of ads and *evaluating* is most certainly not what campaign managers would have voters do, evaluation implying a disinterested, dispassionate assessment of a candidate's record and policies. The authors too confidently attribute the result to voters' analyses and careful consideration of records and claims, rather than to emotional reactions to irrational appeals made by nonverbal means.

Just as they assert that TV ads are still the primary way in which politicians reach out to voters,[41] Ridout and Franz do not recognize a causal problem in televised political advertising: "We simply believe that ads are less harmful to the electoral process than the conventional wisdom would suggest. Whatever ails American politics, we are convinced that television ads are not the cause."[42] The reader will by now have intuited

38 Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2008), 131-33.

39 Travis N. Ridout and Michael M. Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 71-73 [my emphasis].

40 Ridout and Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising,* 57 [my emphasis].

41 Ridout and Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising,* 7.

42 Ridout and Franz, *The Persuasive Power of Campaign Advertising,* 16.

my qualified disagreement with this broad claim. Scholarship about nonverbal emotional appeals in ads is still in its nascent stage, so there is much that we just do not know.[43] This study is an attempt to address that deficit.

Previous Scholarship on Political Ads

Music in ads has evolved over the course of sixty years that political ads have been aired on TV. In the early years of television political advertising, music, where it appeared, was a novelty, a mere accompaniment to the actors or voice-overs. In fact, entire campaigns ran TV ads with little or no music (Adlai Stevenson in 1956, Richard Nixon in 1960, George McGovern in 1972, John Anderson in 1980). Political campaigns and the media companies that have created for them have grown more sophisticated in their use of music as they have gradually understood music's power to surreptitiously persuade. Thus the center of gravity in this book is firmly in the second half of the TV political ad's chronology.

Scholars writing about political advertisements almost invariably privilege images and language above music. When music is mentioned at all, it is in an off-hand way, in subordination to analyses of rhetorical arguments and discussions of text and images. Reading these studies, one gets the impression that music in an ad is something of an afterthought, an innocuous accompaniment to visual and textual elements. In this book I take an oposing view, arguing that music is a key element in an ad's construction. In some cases, it can even be *determinative*: that is, all other elements in an ad—images, voice-over, sound effects, written text, and so on—can be circumscribed by the music and interpreted in relation to it.

No systematic study exists, or even any significant literature from political science, mass communication, or related fields treating music in political ads.[44] One might expect this lacuna to be at least partly addressed by Roderick Hart's book *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern*

43 Criticism of political advertising is not limited to the scholarly sphere, nor is it only done in all seriousness. The fourth season episode from the *Mr. Show with Bob and David* entitled "McHutchence vs Greeley III" is an incisive commentary on contemporary political ads. Striking is the sketch's accurate portrayal of how political ads present candidates and their opponents. The smarmy grins, the family gathered around, even the music is spot on. In fact, the music resembles real political ad music in virtually every particular.

44 Benjamin S. Schoening and Eric T. Kasper do devote three chapters of their recent book to TV political advertising (Benjamin S. Schoening and Eric T. Kasper, *Don't Stop Thinking About the*

Voter. After all, music in political ads can do many things, but nothing if not *seduce* and *charm*. Yet throughout the book music receives virtually no discussion, and the word "music" (along with variations on the word) is conspicuously absent from the book's index.[45] In a comprehensive history of US political ads on television from 1952 to 2008, numbering 240 pages, "music and sounds" (as we find music listed in the index) receive roughly one half a page of treatment.[46] Even *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds: How Emotional Appeals in Political Ads Work*, Ted Brader's compelling and overdue corrective to the scholarly neglect of emotional appeals in political ads, addresses music only obliquely. Such pretermissions vividly illustrate a general lack of interest—or perhaps awareness—among political scientists, sociologists, and communication scholars in music's role in political ads.

How Music Functions in Ads

Perhaps not surprisingly, attempts to rectify this state of affairs have come chiefly from musicologists. Some preliminary and tentative studies have recently been conducted on the role of music in advertising. A recent foray into this area is Nicolai J. Graakjær's 2011 article on musical meaning in television commercials, as exemplified in a spot for Riberhus cheese. In the article, Graakjær describes the complexities and potential problems of using pre-existing music to advertise products, and he points out the strong need for more research into the use of music in television advertising.[47] In 1989 David Huron suggested that music can be used to target certain demographic, psychographic, and political groups, tapping already established articulations between musical genres, styles, and social collectives.[48] Similarly, it can facilitate the establishment of authority, the determination of a character's ethos. Here music is used as "a very effective nonverbal identifier" that connects the target audience with the appropriate group

Music: The Politics of Songs and Musicians in Presidential Campaigns [Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012]).

45 Roderick P. Hart, *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter,* revised edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

46 West, *Air Wars*.

47 Nicolai J. Graakjær, (2006). "Musical Meaning in TV-commercials: A Case of Cheesy Music," *Popular Musicology Online*, 5 (2006), http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/05/nicolai-01.html. Accessed March 18 2015.

48 David Huron, "Music in Advertising: An Analytic Paradigm," *Musical Quarterly* 73 (1989): 557-574.

(i.e., race, sex, age, and socioeconomic class/status).[49] Melodies, timbres, rhythms, and so forth target audiences through an established network of historical connotations.[50]

In his 2001 book *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Nicholas Cook claims that music ascribes attributes to products, but that it is also affected by other signifiers (verbal, aural, and visual).[51] "If the music gives meaning to the images, then equally the images give meaning to the music."[52] Working on a "subverbal, almost subliminal" level, music helps to connect a product with signification from outside and can make absurd arguments seem plausible.[53] We will see evidence of this claim later in this book.

Virtually all studies of music in political ads, even recent ones, address music at merely a rudimentary level. In one instance, journalism scholars Glenn Hubbard and Elizabeth Crawford conducted an experimental study where subjects self-identified as Republicans or Democrats were asked their opinions about radio ads with music and without music.[54] The authors applied the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, concluding that music in political ads does not "translate into a statistically significant preference for the candidate." In a section of their article entitled "Limitations," Hubbard and Crawford admit two limitations of the study that affected sample size and composition. But the authors neglected to admit their greatest limitation: they do not engage the music at all from a theoretical or analytical perspective. As a result, the authors apply an inappropriate binary quantification to music in political ads—"has music" or "lacks music"—as if all genres and styles of music had the same effect on listeners. In order to assess the validity of their claims, one would need at a minimum to know the general character of the music, whether it is congruent or incongruent with the images and voice-over, and so on. Yet the authors never elaborate on the music used to test their hypotheses more than to say "background music" or "instrumental music." They are not alone. Scholars from fields such as journalism, political science, or media studies often make sweeping pronouncements about music's effectiveness in persuasion without the requisite skills or knowledge, thus distorting our understanding of music's

49 Huron, "Music in Advertising," 568.

50 Huron, "Music in Advertising," 571.

51 Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

52 Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 8.

53 Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 20.

54 Glenn T. Hubbard and Elizabeth Crisp Crawford, "Music in Political Advertisements: Music to the Ears or Background Noise? A Study of Music's Influence on Message Relevant Thinking," *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* (2008): 164-81.

role in persuasion. Much of the most up-to-date scholarship on music in political ads is woefully lacking in musico-theoretical sophistication.

In a recent book, two scholars posit a decreasingly important role for music in television political advertisements. Since theirs is the only book that discusses music in television political ads in any detail, their assertions deserve some scrutiny here. Benjamin S. Schoening and Eric T. Kasper, authors of *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music: The Politics of Songs and Musicians in Presidential Campaigns*, write: "Later campaigns would take a route similar to Nixon's advertisements of 1968, *relegating music on television advertisements to the background*."[55] Actually, this claim is not supported by the facts. It is not that music receded into the background; rather, campaigns only gradually came to learn how to harness its power as a surreptitious agent. In fact, Nixon's 1968 ads broke new ground with regard to using music effectively in political advertisements. There is nothing "background" about music in "First Civil Right" or "Convention"—on the contrary, these ads set a new standard for dissonant music and disturbing imagery in negative political advertising. While it is true that music was used only in limited ways in ads for the 1972, 1976, and 1980 elections, this is only because it took time before campaigns began to realize the full potential for emotional manipulation of voters through music. Starting in 1984, we see ads where music is not only an important element of an ad, it is the crucial element, the central appeal.

Even the title of an entire chapter section of *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music* misstates the case: "Music Recedes on the Campaign Trail and in the Television Ad."[56] In this chapter section, Schoening and Kasper dismiss "Nixon Now," which from a musical point of view brilliantly tapped into the current commercial campaign of Coca-Cola, as "a rather cheesy rendition of a song."[57] Similarly, they downplay the music in "McGovern Defense," because it consisted of a lone snare drum.[58] Not only is this assertion false ("Hail to the Chief" is played toward the end of the ad), it also underestimates the power of the single snare playing military cadences while the narrator attacks McGovern's record on defense spending.

Even ads that completely transformed the landscape of political advertising in television, such as Reagan's "Morning in America" and Bush's "Wolves"

55 Benjamin S. Schoening and Eric T. Kasper, *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music: The Politics of Songs and Musicians in Presidential Campaigns* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 135 [my emphasis].

56 Schoening and Kasper, *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music*, 134-137.

57 Schoening and Kasper, *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music*, 135.

58 Ibid.

receive only grudging acknowledgment by Schoening and Kasper: "All of these 1984 and 2004 examples involve music staying somewhat relevant on television, but also music that is no longer the most important part of the ad."[59] Later in the same paragraph, they assert, "The music continues to serve as an important function [sic] in this form of communication, but not nearly as important on television as was the case when commercials played full campaign songs without a voice-over coming in and cutting away from the music."[60] Such a position can only be embraced when one disregards how music actually works in ads. Most often, the music that calls the least attention to itself is the most powerful. Jingles and campaign songs of the 1950s, for instance, while often catchy and easily memorable, do not have the immediate and inescapable impact of the underscoring of the patriotic paean "Morning in America" or the horror-film-inspired "Wolves."

For too long, music's role in political persuasion—seemingly well understood by campaign professionals—has remained largely terra incognita, underexplored and misunderstood in the scholarly sphere and public square. With this volume, I examine numerous ads since the advent of the television political ad in 1952 up to the present day, employing musical analysis as well as textual and rhetorical analysis to illuminate music's often hidden methods of persuasion. I will argue that 1968, 1984, and 2004 mark the most important milestones in the history of music in political ads. Several of Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign ads use music in inventive ways for negative ads. The series of "feel good" positive ads in 1984 for Ronald Reagan, with "Morning in America" at its center, used music for the first time cinematically.[61] Drawing on American hysteria following the September 11 Al Qaeda attacks, George W. Bush's 2004 campaign used music inspired by horror film soundtracks in devastatingly effective ways to argue that John Kerry was unable to address the threat of terrorism. So "Wolves" opens the cinematic scope started by "Morning in America" to include the horror genre.[62] Each of these watersheds influenced political ad music to follow.

Chapters that follow discuss significant ads year by year. Nine case studies treat ads of particular interest for their music: "Ike for President"

59 Schoening and Kasper, *Don't Stop Thinking About the Music*, 136.

60 Ibid.

61 Walter Benjamin wrote of fascists aestheticizing politics (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rifkin and Michael Ryan [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 282-89), and "Morning in America" might seem an example par excellence of this process.

62 In the 1980s chapter I will argue that horror film music was actually first used in Mondale ads in 1984, but to much more limited effect.

(1952), "Kennedy-Jingle" (1960), "Mother and Child" (1968), "Nixon Now" (1972), "Morning in America" (1984), "Revolving Door" (1988), "Wolves" (2004), "Firms" (2012), and "America" (2016). With hundreds of ads to choose from, selecting representative ads posed a serious challenge. Some might dispute the selections I have made, and I accept that criticism. My hope is that shorter discussions of important ads in the decade chapters, combined with in-depth examinations of the case studies, will give the reader a fair representation of the myriad ways in which music has been and continues to be used in presidential campaigns. Later chapters include discussion of web ads, which have become an increasingly important political phenomenon. Finally, a Conclusion assesses the effects of music in ads on the democratic process and offers possible solutions and suggestions for new avenues of research. Rounding out the book are a glossary of musical terms and two appendices—interviews with practitioners who describe their experiences with writing music for political ads.

I make no claim to comprehensive coverage of six decades of presidential ads, and this book also limits itself to ads from general elections, ignoring primaries. With few exceptions, I have selected only ads lasting one minute or less. Longer ads, usually running about four minutes, are sui generis; they are typically biographical in nature. Only a couple are treated here as I have chosen to focus on the more typical thirty- and sixty-second ads. For the most part, chosen ads are accessible on the Living Room Candidate website of the Museum of the Moving Image (www.livingroomcandidate.org) so that readers may view them in order to follow my arguments. Music examples, tables, and stills from selected ads will help explain how political ads influence us.

This book presents my own point of view, which draws primarily on musicology and music analysis. Experimental psychologists would approach the phenomenon of political ad music from a different angle. Nevertheless, there is little in the way of hard, empirical evidence for conclusions about how ads influence people. With voice-over, sound effects, and music, such artifacts are tremendously complex from an aural standpoint and when the visual aspect is considered as well, the complexity is compounded. How can one element be completely isolated from the others to determine its effectiveness? Readers are encouraged to seek out work in psychology, political science, media studies, and other fields to inform their understanding of this complicated issue. Sources in the bibliography of this volume can be a good place to continue.

My purpose is not to analyze only those ads that have made a name for themselves for other reasons. Rather, I discuss ads where I find the use of

music particularly inventive and effective in communicating to viewers, especially where music is the argument *per se*. Sometimes ads that are effective from a musical point of view go nearly unnoticed by the media and political or social historians.

Savvy about advertising was not spread equally between the two parties. It should become apparent through the course of this book that one party has taken political ads and their music more seriously by pouring more money and energy into producing and airing them. Their music has in the main been more creative and innovative, and some of their ads remain in the public consciousness as cultural touchstones. As we will see in Chapter 1, one party was quick to embrace advertising's methods while the other hesitated. For this reason, both major parties are not covered equally in this book.

Not all ads are equally prominent or influential. Certain ones are discussed in the media, particularly if they are especially scandalous or controversial such as LBJ's "Daisy" ad or "Who Hasn't?" the racially provocative Republican National Committee viral ad against Harold Ford, Jr. in the 2006 Tennessee US Senate race.[63] Then they take on a life of their own, sometimes to the detriment of the candidate whose campaign ran the ad and sometimes to his benefit. Ads that are part of the culture—"I Like Ike," "Morning in America," "Willie Horton," and the like—are remembered today because of the impact they had at their time. Music played a central part in most of the ads that are known in popular culture. I hope that this study will contribute in a small way to a re-evaluation of how persuasion works in political ads.

The general trajectory of music in political ads is a transition over time from commercial jingles to complex minidramas with subtle underscoring. The most recent trend, over the past few general election cycles, has been toward music that calls attention to itself in clever ways, whether by a mash-up of the candidate's speech along with popular music singers and actors ("Yes, We Can," 2008) or by using an unfortunate performance of a patriotic song by an opponent against him ("Firms," 2012). Music has returned to being self-conscious, but often with a sardonic twist.

For 2012, about $7 billion was spent, whether by independent entities, PACs, or the candidates' campaigns.[64] Of this sum, estimates are that roughly

63 The incumbents behind both ads ultimately won re-election.

64 Tarini Parti, "$7 billion spent on 2012 campaign, FEC says," *Politico* <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/01/7-billion-spent-on-2012-campaign-fec-says-87051.html>. Accessed April 17, 2015.

2.1 billion was spent by outside political groups.[65] According to *Huffington Post*, a total of $690 million was spent on television and radio ads, with another $218.7 million on online ads.[66] Online political advertising, a significant and powerful phenomenon in the universe of political discourse, moved toward becoming a $1 billion industry for the 2016 election,[67] as political advertising has continued its shift from television to online platforms. So although it is a lot of money, it is spent gladly because political advertising is perceived as a necessary investment. With record amounts spent each general election cycle, particularly in the wake of the 2010 Citizens United Supreme Court ruling, there is no end in sight. This book will attempt to explain a bit about what campaigns are getting for their money and why it should interest us all.

65 Ibid.

66 Sam Stein and Paul Blumenthal, "Obama 2012 Campaign Spending Buried Romney On Airwaves and with Staff," *Huffington Post*, December 12, 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/obama-2012-campaign-spending_n_2287978.html>. Accessed April 17, 2015.

67 Robin Respaut and Lucas Iberico Lozada, "Digital Strategy Firms Could See Tripling of Political Ads," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, April 14, 2015 <http://www.reviewjournal.com/business/retail/digital-strategy-firms-could-see-tripling-political-ads>. Accessed April 17, 2015.