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Protest Songs: Music as a Universal Political Flag

TOPICS: Cro-Magnons Cutty Wren Hundred-Years War
 Jeff Hobbs King Richard II Music Neanderthals
 Political Science Politics Protest Song Woody Guthrie



POSTED BY: MANUEL BLÁUAB JULY 22, 2016

Protest songs migrate and change throughout the years. They are adopted by different societies as their own, evolving in terms of language, words and political intention. The purposes for protest songs are many; engage with the population, spread *the word of what's happening* and define common goals and enemies.

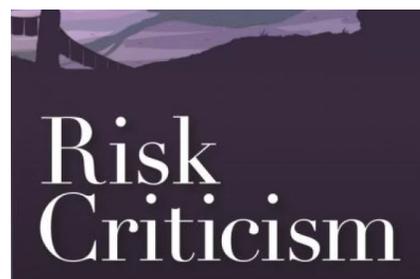
Origins: Birth of the Protest Song

Art related works used in a form of protest by different groups have been somewhat common. There is archaeological evidence of a significant struggle between the **Neanderthals** and the **Cro-Magnons**,

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We Shall Not Be Moved/No
 nos moverán by David Spener

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POSTED BY: LISA MATTHIAS MAY
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PaperHive Conversations: Molly Wallace

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several centuries before the rise of Egypt around 3100 BC, which is supposed to have meant the end for the first, less evolved subspecies. Would it be accurate to assume that the quarrel between these species was accompanied by chants, (protest songs) or related art form in order to translate their anger?

As of yet, there is no scientific evidence to support such a claim. At this point it's more of an ad-hoc theory that requires further examination. Since primitive forms of art are more instinctive, it would be fair to assume that every oppressed group in world's ancient history might have come up with types of songs, drawings and even poems in order to indulge and transform those feelings into metaphors, raising them as flags for their causes. This would be fair but neither accurate nor based upon any other solid proof.

Cutty Wren is generally considered to be the first protest song but the exact year of its composition and first use is yet to be determined. Author, A.L. Lloyd opens the debate in his 1944 book *The Singing Englishman*, in which he finds its birth around the year 1381 during the English peasants' revolt, which – according to **Jeff Hobbs** – was one of the most dramatic events in English history. Peasants from Essex, Kent, and mostly South East England, rose up against King Richard II and his tax policy, which resulted from the Hundred Years' War against France. One of the interpretations for *Cutty Wren* is the proclaim by the peasants who want to kill the King and feed him to the poor.

It was in 1776 that *Cutty Wren* appeared as *The Hunting Of The Wren*, as a solstice ritual song in which a wren would be sacrifice. Author A.L. Lloyd relates the killing of the wren directly to the peasants' intention to kill King Richard II.

The Hunting of the Wren or *Cutty Wren* song became a traditional English folk song that has also been used as a protest song during the following centuries.

Protest Songs in Modern Times

and symplokē. Her most recent work, *Risk Criticism*,...

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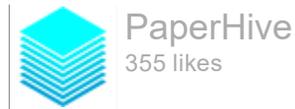
Many protest songs remain part of contemporary pop culture. France's anthem *La Marseillaise* was composed by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle in 1792 after the declaration of war by France against the Austrian Empire. Up until today it is one of the most well-known protest songs in western civilization. The English sang it prior to the friendly football match in London against France after the terrorist attacks in Paris, not only as a form of friendship and solidarity but also in opposition to world terrorism.

During the Rock n' Roll era, modern composers such as Bob Dylan, (*The Times They Are a-Changin*, *Hurricane*, *Maggie's Farm*), and Bruce Springsteen, (*How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?*, *American Skin*, *Born in the U.S.A.*) spent most of their career as popular plaintiffs.

Folk legend Johnny Cash undoubtedly felt weighed down by social oppression. Many of his songs have become universal hymns across the world without regard of nationality or native tongue. Cash certainly knew how to capitalize on the feelings of the mistreated with original music and covers of songs from other times and places. Songs like *We Shall Not Be Moved*, (by an unknown author) have been traveling the world, being passed on from one generation to the next by many voices like Joan Baez, The Seekers and Mavis Staples, among others.

Maybe in the future, these songs will remain the same or forever change into new ones or even meet their cousins from other countries. What will never change are the passions of some who will rise up for a change in their lives and despite the outcome, what is left are the splinters in music-form, letting others protesters know that they are neither the first nor alone.

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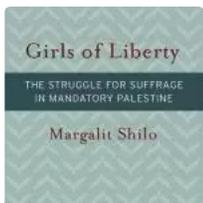
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