

tained, criticizing the tendency to dismiss prejudice as superstition.

On questions of educational reform, Kirk and Frost called themselves “radicals.” They deplored the replacement of the traditional college curriculum based in the classics and humanities with mere vocational training. Both detested the progressive educational theories of John Dewey, which, Frost believed, undermined the discipline and sense of tradition essential to effective instruction, and rendered students’ minds into empty vessels to be filled with their instructor’s ideological preferences. They believed that colleges offered little of value to the truly talented mind.

Despite these similarities between Kirk and Frost’s conservatism, I can find little evidence of mutual influence. Frost’s ideas were fully formed decades before Kirk began his active writing. During my long association with Kirk, I don’t recall him ever mentioning Frost. Although he quotes Frost’s poetry once in *The Conservative Mind*, he was not deeply read in it. In his memoirs, *The Sword of Imagination* (1994), Kirk mentions Frost only three times, and then only in passing. He praised the poet for remaining a man of letters rather than venturing into politics. Moreover, he noted that Frost “exercised a subtle influence for political sound sense that will endure” while in *The Conservative Mind* he declared that Frost’s “political conservatism is undeniable.”

Stanlis’s magnificent and admiring study of his teacher corrects Thompson’s distorted image of Frost as a “moral monster.” Like Edmund Burke, T.S. Eliot, and Kirk, Frost embraced the “permanent things” in an age of ideology. He was, as Stanlis has demonstrated in this impressively documented examination of Frost’s philosophy, one of the principal champions of the moral imagination in 20th-century American letters. ■

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## MUSIC

# Stuffing the Jukebox

By A.G. Gancarski

ACCORDING TO THE *New York Post*, “As [Barack] Obama and his wife, Michelle, strolled triumphantly into his victory party in Des Moines, Iowa, on Jan. 3, Jay-Z’s ‘99 Problems’ was blaring. In it, Jay raps, ‘I got 99 problems, but a b-tch ain’t one.’” Obama’s campaign denied the dig, but took care to maintain their candidate’s coolness quotient: “I’m sort of hip to the younger stuff,” Obama told CNN. “You know, like Beyoncé’s ‘Crazy in Love.’ That’s a good song to dance to.” The same can’t be said of Pearl Jam’s painful recycling attempt, “Rock Around Barack.” It’s as brutal and artless as the title suggests.

From the early days of the Republic, the right stump music has been essential for aspiring presidential candidates. At first, campaigns simply adapted well-known melodies to fit their slogans. But by the time ditties such as 1912’s “We’re Ready For Teddy Again” surfaced, political operators were originating jingles as slick as the popular songs of the time.

Then campaigns reverted to the old practice of borrowing familiar tunes. Truman’s “I’m Just Wild About Harry” was an update of a song written for the 1921 musical “Shuffle Along.” Frank Sinatra’s “High Hopes,” so strongly associated with Jack Kennedy’s campaign of 1960, was a knock-off of the crooner’s chart single from the year before. Same song, different lyrics: an apt metaphor for the American political process.

In recent decades, campaign music has declined even further. With a few exceptions, the current fashion is uninspiring, amiable pop. Most candidates employ music cynically. They divest

the form of power and turn it into something comparable to their speeches: bland pabulum for the credulous masses.

During the 1988 cycle, the Bush/Quayle operation employed Lee Greenwood’s execrable “God Bless the U.S.A.”—an apt expression of the Southern strategy of the campaign: ersatz patriotism over a soporific background of New Country schmaltz. Conservatives of later campaigns, observing that Greenwood’s slush had worked for Bush, used it again and again at GOP rallies, long after the song had first topped the charts.

Candidates continue to search for the sonic Holy Grail to encompass the vision, atmosphere, and values of their campaigns. Sometimes they strike the right note, as when the Clinton campaign of 1992 adopted Fleetwood Mac’s “Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow.” The fact that members of the group, such as John McVie, were by then Republicans didn’t matter. The major chords and the unabashed optimism of the chorus suggested, at least for ’70s nostalgia-junkies, that “yesterday’s gone” and the Clintonian world would be “better than before.” It’s easy to heap opprobrium on this soundtrack choice, but it played well enough with voters.

Most candidates don’t get that lucky. Many rely on tracks already used by casualties of earlier campaigns. Mitt Romney walked out to the Junkie XL remix of Elvis Presley’s “A Little Less Conversation,” which had been used in the last presidential election by Howard Dean. The song was a dancefloor stormer in a certain type of club a few years back, yet its undeniable energy obviously failed to translate into electoral success.

As unsuccessful Romney’s campaign was, at least his team was able to make a decision about what tunes to play, which is more than can be said about Hillary Clinton’s advisers. Gearing up for her campaign, Senator Clinton posted a blog on her website asking the public to help her pick a song. The exercise showed exactly what is wrong with

American democracy: the public makes ineffably awful choices. If the nightmarish playlist put forward by Clinton fans is any indication of Hillary's actual musical taste, the soundtrack to Hell would be on random shuffle on her iPod.

The choices included the phony inspiration of U2's "Beautiful Day" and "City of Blinding Lights," as well as the horrifying strains of "I'm A Believer" by Smashmouth and "Right Here, Right Now" by Jesus Jones. The winning song: "You And I," a 1990s Disney ballad-style number by French-Canadian chanteuse Celine Dion. One critic rightly described it as an "uplifting but soulless choice."

Not surprisingly, Celine Dion isn't in great demand, but Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down" has been used by would-be standard-bearers in both parties over the last two election cycles. Petty probably isn't getting royalties from the numerous times candidates have walked into some provincial hall to his accompaniment, but he deserves them, for the candidates, to borrow a phrase from Illinois's junior senator, have

games. The song itself is warmed-over Woody Guthrie, three minutes and three chords of counterfeit exploitation: the perfect counterpoint to Edwards' cornpone Mayberry twang and his cheap, lurid stories about the lowest of the low.

And then, of course, there are the candidates who play their own music. Following the example of Bill Clinton, who garnered useful publicity for a slightly-above-pedestrian sax performance during his 1992 campaign, Mike Huckabee regularly strapped on his bass guitar and played a few songs with cover bands at campaign stops. The Elks Lodge in Cedar Rapids, Iowa heard "Blue Suede Shoes." A rally in Henniker, New Hampshire got a long set of tired standards—"Mustang Sally," "Midnight Hour" and "Put a Little Love in Your Heart"—with local rockers Mama Kicks. Huckabee's bassline was buried in the drum-heavy mix.

The good reverend seems to be that most noxious of southern stereotypes: the "cool" Baptist preacher using lame approximations of youth culture to try to get in with the kids. It might work

is already a huge draw with blacks and understands that to win the presidency, he has to run to the center. He chooses his music accordingly. No 50 Cent or Three-Six Mafia—and apparently no Jay-Z. The vast majority of his soundtrack seems to have been selected to project inclusiveness. He often closes with a new-country twanger.

It is possible for politicians to go too far in trying to use the contemporary aesthetic to their advantage. When Hillary Clinton appeared on the "Tyra Banks" show recently, the former supermodel asked, "What type of dancing do you do? Do you do hip-hop? Can you do the Soulja Boy or the Spongebob dance?" Clinton's response was somewhat implausible: "I have heard of those. I think that is a variation of what I did like 30 or 40 years ago." If only Bob Dole had had the foresight to make the same claim about rave dancing in 1996, he might have limited Hillary's husband to only one term in the White House.

Of course, the man Dole endorsed, Republican frontrunner John McCain, is arguably the candidate most hamstrung by the politics of song selection. McCain has used songs by both the aforementioned Tom Petty and John Mellencamp—and both artists objected. To avoid further embarrassments of this type, perhaps the senior senator would be better off sticking with dead musicians—Kurt Cobain, Jeff Buckley, Nick Drake, maybe that guy from Milli Vanilli.

In the two George W. Bush campaigns, musical choice was limited by the so-called Rove Rule, which dictated, "If Karl hasn't heard it, we don't use it." No doubt similar rules exist in every political operation, ensuring that—despite Obama's brave efforts and Hillary's apparent familiarity with Soulja Boy—campaign music will continue to underwhelm. Just as we can expect empty stump rhetoric from the frontrunners of each party, we can rely on them to score it with inoffensive, middle-of-the-road music. ■

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**COUGAR HIMSELF MAY HAVE BEEN A HIGH-PROFILE EDWARDS SUPPORTER, USING A SONG WITH THE CHORUS "THIS IS OUR COUNTRY" IN A DEMOCRATIC CONTEST DOMINATED BY A WOMAN AND A BLACK MAN WAS A PROFOUNDLY BAD IDEA.**

"boiled all the hope out of" the once enjoyable song. If their intention is to project an aura of gritty, steely-eyed resolution, they'll need more than a record.

John Edwards, the noted soundbite populist, inadvertently exposed how weak his campaign was when he settled on John Cougar Mellencamp's "Our Country." While Cougar himself may have been a high-profile Edwards supporter, using a song with the chorus "this is our country" in a Democratic contest dominated by a woman and a black man was a profoundly bad idea.

For millions of sports fans, "Our Country" will always be irritatingly associated with Chevrolet commercials shown during pivotal moments of NFL

with charitable evangelicals, but for conservatives of every other stripe the whole shtick is anathema.

The candidate best playing music to his advantage this election cycle is Illinois hopemonger Barack Obama. His use of soul classics such as Stevie Wonder's paean to organized labor "Signed, Sealed, Delivered [I'm Yours]"—also used by McCain in Michigan—and Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Up" has provided a refreshing contrast to the turgid choices of his rivals.

The senator has spoken of the "artistry" of hip-hop, while simultaneously decrying the nihilism of its "message"—a classic example of a politician taking both sides of an issue. But Obama

# The Marathoner's Race

NORFOLK, VA.—I think it's safe to say that the Republican establishment doesn't want Mike Huckabee to be the GOP nominee. Good. The blessing of party

panjandrums seems to be a kiss of political death.

Consider: Just a little while ago, the Republican establishment candidate was John McCain. Then last spring, McCain's campaign cratered, in large part because the Arizonan redoubled his bet on a key establishment priority, "comprehensive immigration reform." In a head-to-head contest between the establishment and a fully informed electorate, the electorate always wins.

Since then, the establishment split up in various ways. Rudy Giuliani, for example, picked up some big-state governors, such as Rick Perry of Texas, who was attracted to Giuliani's advocacy of a "virtual fence" along the Mexican border as opposed to a real fence. And of course, Giuliani won leading neoconservatives to his side, such as Norman Podhoretz and David Frum.

Meanwhile, Mitt Romney made a play for social and economic conservatives, bagging quite a few big shots, including Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, and *National Review*. In addition, Romney gained a quasi-endorsement from George H.W. Bush, who invited the former Massachusetts governor to deliver his "important" religion-in-American-life speech last December at the Bush Library; at that event, "41" offered an effusive introduction. If things didn't work out for Romney, it wasn't for lack of trying.

And of course, if there were any not-nailed-down establishmentarians floating around last year, Fred Thompson picked them up. During his lazy cam-

paign, Thompson roused himself sufficiently to embrace *avant-garde* Republicanism, including a Bush 43-style partial privatization of Social Security. Such ideologizing made Thompson the darling of the D.C. think-tank set—but got him nowhere with voters.

Well, gee. Now Giuliani, Romney, and Thompson are all out of the race. To be sure, McCain is back, in a big way, but only after disavowing his previous "amnesty first" stance on immigration and shedding his big-budget inside-the-Beltway campaign in favor of a low-spending, straight-talk-expressing candidacy that returned him to his maverick roots. Now a resurgent McCain, having won a bunch of primaries, is being embraced by big-state governors and big-time operatives, from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Karl Rove.

Huckabee, of course, is almost entirely unburdened by establishmentarian support. Oh, he has a few big names in his camp, but upon close inspection, those endorsers are revealed to be outside the K Street mainstream. For example, Huckabee has the support of Rep. Duncan Hunter of San Diego, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee. That's an insider job, to be sure, but Hunter's prickly position on building a border-security wall—he has led the fight to build a no-bull double fence all along the U.S.-Mexico border—puts him well outside the establishment fold.

Huckabee is fully aware of his situation. "I have been an underdog all my life," says the son of a fireman, who

made ends meet back in Hope, Arkansas by working a second job as a mechanic. Huckabee is still an underdog, but he's an underdog with a distinct appeal to other underdogs—which is to say, the vast bulk of Americans. As he put it recently, his key constituency is "the invisible America"—the American middle class, the folks not rich enough to worry about polar bears and not poor enough to qualify for welfare. That is, those who work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules—which is to say, folks who live far outside of D.C.

Thus the obvious question: will the establishment's embrace help or hinder the Republican nominee this year? Would it help the Republican Party's prospects this November to tighten up its links to, say, the incumbent White House? Should the GOP nominee be closer to Congressional earmarkers? How about snuggling up to those K Street lobbyists?

I'm not so sure. I suspect the Republican Party would be better off, November-wise, nominating someone who is independent of the status quo, someone who has not been part of Republican Washington these past eight years. Just a hunch. And in fact, Huckabee comes from a different place, not Washington. He often quotes the Book of Isaiah: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." That's the real Huckabee, who served as a governor for more than a decade but whose heart and soul dwell far outside the Beltway.

That's a big selling point to the country, and so that's a good thing for Republicans. If the GOP wants to win the election this year, it will need someone new. ■