

HW4: Sustainability Songs

DUE: Tuesday Feb. 22, turn-in by email to jeffPSU@yahoo.com before class, 10 points
(Also be sure you have an electronic version available for use in mentor session.)

Overview: Music is one of the many ways to influence people's behaviors and beliefs. Social justice advocates, unions, environmentalists, and activists and revolutionaries of all stripes have used songs to inspire, recruit, and explain their positions. In this homework you will pick a song that you enjoy and that speaks to you concerning sustainability issues (social, environmental, or economic).

Assignment: You will then write a short essay (500-700 words) analyzing your chosen song, including the following:

- Explain specifically how your song connects to sustainability issues, and which aspects of sustainability it addresses.
- Describe some of the more indirect or subtle messages in your song. These might include how the music, word sounds, and word connotations help (or fail to help) support the message of the song. Is the music upbeat or somber? Is there a rhyming scheme and is it simple or complex, playful or serious? Are the chords majors or minors? Is the rhythm simple or complicated? How do particular word choices and their connotations help convey the song's meaning?
- For at least one phrase or line in your song, explore possible multiple interpretations. For example, in the Joni Mitchell song *Big Yellow Taxi* the line "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got 'till its gone" refers to 1) environmental destruction and 2) a romantic breakup. As another example: in the Keb Mo's song *Victims of Comfort* the line "No rockets going to fly that high" could mean 1) that we can't escape to space so we have to take care of the earth, or 2) it could metaphorically mean technology is not going to solve all our environmental problems (or other possible meanings).
- Be sure your essay has an introduction and conclusion. Don't assume the reader is familiar with the assignment—introduce your essay. Also follow formatting guidelines in the syllabus.
- If possible, include a link to your song (e.g. on youtube.com) in your introduction.

Links to songs mentioned above are here:

Big Yellow Taxi:

- Joni Mitchell version (1970): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgMEPk6fvpg>
- Counting Crows version: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLWUrKd6Zqg>

Victims of Comfort

- Keb Mo (with lyrics and ecological destruction photos):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRHWv2n-NXw>

Other examples:

Talking about a Revolution and *Why?* Tracy Chapman:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rZbvi6Tj6E&feature=fvst> (live concert)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4bBff9aBRw&feature=related>

I know my examples above are dated. I look forward to reading (hearing) newer examples!

We will share our choices and essays in mentor session. If you would be willing to perform your song, that would be great!