

2021

Trail Trax 2.020: Tracking the Electoral Soundscape

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Faculty Grant Report

Project Title: **Trail Trax 2.020: Tracking the Electoral Soundscape**

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Department: Music

Job Title: Associate Professor of Music

Awarded funding: \$2,960.00

I. Project Abstract (250 words or fewer)

Trax on the Trail is a Georgia College-sponsored website devoted to the study of American presidential campaign music. The interdisciplinary team that I assembled for this project includes students as well as academic experts from the fields of political science, musicology, sociology, history, media studies, and ethnomusicology, across the U.S. and Canada. Committed to the ethos of public history, the *Trax on the Trail* team develops accessible scholarship on the subject of music and elections.

I have supervised the publication of over forty essays and podcasts, collaborated with the [Rock & Roll Hall of Fame](#) and the [Clinton Presidential Library](#) to create open-access resources for educators, and developed innovative research tools for journalists and scholars. Equally committed to advancing scholarly inquiry into the function of sound in electioneering, I have presented my work in classrooms, community centers, and colleges around the country, as well as published my research in scholarly journals, including [Music & Politics](#), [American Music](#) and the [Journal of Popular Music Studies](#). *Trax on the Trail* has been cited by the [BBC](#), [The Guardian](#), [Slate](#), [The Boston Herald](#), [Pacific Standard](#), and [Elite Daily](#).

In order to efficiently conduct research on the 2020 soundscape and build the content for our campaign music database ([Trail Trax 2.020](#)), I allocated the Faculty Research Grant to fund two research assistants, Haley Strassburger and Sarah Griffin. The resource that we created has been valuable to scholars researching campaign music, as well as to journalists, students, educators, and others who wish to learn more about the role sound plays in shaping our opinion of presidential candidates.

II. Project Description

Specific Aims/Objectives (350 words or fewer)

Provide a detailed description of your work, including how/why you approached the research question(s).

The cornerstone of the *Trax on the Trail* website is [Trail Trax](#), a database where our team tracks and catalogues music on the campaign trail. Trail Trax 2016 represents the *first* attempt to document, analyze, and catalogue the soundscape of a single presidential campaign. With over 8000 entries, this database allows the user to track candidate music strategies as well as musical responses to candidates generated by the populace.

A far more powerful research tool than its predecessor, Trail Trax 2.020 includes sophisticated GIS mapping and timeline functions. Embedded links in each individual record allow media on Spotify, YouTube, or SoundCloud to be accessed from each entry's main page. Additionally, the new database features improved search functions and enhanced visual displays which make for faster and more fluid engagement with the data.

Digital Humanities is a field of study that merges computational tools with humanities-based disciplines. In combining these dual modes of academic inquiry, the Trail Trax 2.020 database reorients the established scholarly discourses on campaign music both literally and metaphorically as spatiality, transmission, and reception of the genre provide a more deeply contextual understanding of how music can function in campaign contexts. Georgia College students collected, catalogued, and analyzed the data, and as such they were key players in an interdisciplinary project that stands on the vanguard of musicology research.

We designed the database with these goals in mind:

1. Provide educators with the requisite knowledge, educational resources, and research tools needed to bring the study of campaign music into their classrooms, fostering the development of media literacy as it pertains to messages communicated through music and sound more broadly.
2. Formulate research that analyzes the role sound plays in branding and marketing 2020 presidential candidates and shaping public opinion.
3. Create a resource that will stimulate research on the topic of campaign music among scholars in diverse fields and generate general public interest in the subject.
4. Establish opportunities for collaboration both within and outside of Georgia College, especially with students and faculty in GIS, computer science, political science, and history.

Research Methodology (250 words or fewer)

Describe your research methodology being sure to describe the materials and methods used.

We define “campaign music” as any type of music (vocal or instrumental/preexisting or newly composed) that is used in association with a presidential campaign. Campaign music can be created or disseminated by the official campaign, celebrity endorsers, political organizations, parties, or the public through sites such as Spotify, SoundCloud, and YouTube. These are some of the types of campaign music tracked by the research team:

- campaign theme song(s)
- playlists offered online or at rallies, events, or conventions (by either candidates or the public)
- parody videos on sites such as YouTube and CollegeHumor
- underscoring used in television or Internet advertisements
- candidate performances of music
- artist performances at fundraising events that benefit candidates

The research assistants relied on online databases (Factiva, LexisNexis, and ProQuest), user-generated video websites (YouTube), music streaming platforms (Spotify), candidate websites, and other digital research tools (Google Alerts, Hootsuite) to locate data. A series of targeted searches on these platforms allowed student researchers to create a detailed and thorough record of the campaign soundscape.

After the data was collected, each song was analyzed and tagged according to a predetermined set of parameters (e.g., song title, performance context, genre, performer, type of usage, musical style, and location, where applicable), and placed into a holding grid where I reviewed it. Once approved, individual song entries were created (Fig. 1a). A set of filters available to end-users allows them to refine searches according to these parameters (Fig. 1b).


Note: This database is still under construction. Content and functionality may change without warning.	
Love Is Bigger Than Anything In Its Way	
Music Title ?	Love Is Bigger Than Anything In Its Way
Performer / Composer ?	U2
Genre ?	pop/rock
Type of Music ?	preexisting, underscore
Title of Event/Media	TULSI GABBARD 2020 A CAMPAIGN WE THE PEOPLE CAN BELIEVE IN PART 38
Type of Event/Media ?	online media
Date	2019-12-28
Campaign	2020 Campaign
Candidates ?	 Tulsi Gabbard ^D
Notes ?	Uploaded to YouTube by Calvin Wiseman on December 28, 2019. Video features images and clips of Tulsi Gabbard on the campaign trail.
YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjO5g1_gUU8&featur...

Fig. 1a Individual song entry on Trail Trax 2.020

Trail Trax Login

Genre: pop/rock x Type of Music: preexisting x Campaign: 2020 Campaign x [Clear all filters](#) 543 results found Newest Table Map

Note: This database is still under construction. Content and functionality may change without warning.

Title	Performer/Composer	Candidates	Title of Event/Media	Date
Faradenza	Ljubim Khomchuk, Little Big, Ilya Prusikin	Bernie Sanders ^D	Comrade Bernie Sanders is Revered in his Mother Russia	2020-01-06
Middle Fingers	Dwight A. Baker, David Butler, MISSIO, Matthew Brue	Donald Trump ^R	Fuck Donald Trump	2020-01-05
Birthday Suit	Cosmo Sheldrake	Donald Trump ^R	What it's like, when people say Donald Trump is "still your president."	2020-01-05
Señorita	Camila Cabello, Shawn Mendes	Donald Trump ^R	Donald trump sing seniorita	2020-01-05
Dance Monkey	Tones and I	Donald Trump ^R	Tones and I singing by donald trump	2020-01-05
Truth Hurts	Lizzo	Donald Trump ^R	Donald trump starts ww3 with lizzo	2020-01-05
Summertime Sadness	Rick Nowels, Lana Del Rey	Donald Trump ^R	Donald Trump sings Lana Del Rey	2020-01-04
Dance Monkey	Tones and I	Donald Trump ^R	Dance Monkey _ Donald Trump	2020-01-04
Little Blue World	Jeremy Messersmith	Amy Klobuchar ^D	AMY KLOBUCHAR—THE EARLY YEARS	2020-01-03
Dance Monkey	Tones and I	Donald Trump ^R	Donald Trump singing song	2020-01-03
Señorita	Camila Cabello, Shawn Mendes	Donald Trump ^R	Señorita song by donald trump(croop songs)	2020-01-03
Barbie Girl	Aqua	Donald Trump ^R	Donald trump remix i am a barbie girl version //BY imagine phantom	2020-01-03
The Phoenix	Fall Out Boy	Tulsi Gabbard ^D	TULSI GABBARD: PHOENIX (Release the Dove!)	2020-01-02
The Lion Sleeps Tonight	The Tokens	Andrew Yang ^D	Andrew Yang For President 2020	2020-01-01
At This Table	Idina Menzel, Jonas Myrin	Pete Buttigieg ^D	Everyone is Welcome on Team Pete 2020	2019-12-29

Date Range

From:

To:

Genre

- pop/rock 543
- r&b 139
- country 105
- rap 92
- stage & screen 55
- electronic 42
- international 29
- folk 20
- latin 19
- patriotic 15

[View all](#)

Type of Music

- preexisting 543
- newly composed 66
- underscore 56
- songify 46
- parody 41

[View all](#)

Campaign

- 2016 Campaign 1340
- 2020 Campaign 543

Candidate

- Donald Trump 249
- Tulsi Gabbard 56
- Bernie Sanders 40
- Pete Buttigieg 40
- Joe Biden 36

[View all](#)

Fig. 1b. Filtered search on Trail Trax 2.020

Impact of Project (200 words or fewer)

Please tell us what you accomplished and the impacts of the project. How did the results of your research help the advancement of the discipline, your professional development, and/or course curriculum?

The critical insight, educational materials, and arsenal of resources curated by *Trax on the Trail* staff and contributors, including Trail Trax, play a small role in the cultivation of a critical ear and support efforts to build bridges across academic disciplines and liaise with publics adjacent or beyond the walls of academia. Whether a [public lecture](#), a [scholarly article](#), a [live blog](#), a [lesson plan](#), or a [digital video](#), my work would not be possible without research tools such as the Trail Trax database. Not only has this resource enriched my research, led to new paths of inquiry, and expanded the audience for my work, it has also similarly impacted the work of other scholars who are researching the topic, educators who are in need of teaching materials, journalists who write stories on the topic, and campaign workers and industry professionals who develop music strategies for candidates. Like its predecessor, Trail Trax 2.020 has been a vital resource in developing the proposal for my monograph, *Sounding Race, Inventing Authority: Pop Music, Identity, and the U.S. Presidency*. While Trail Trax has certainly increased my professional visibility, it has also afforded publicity to Georgia College, an institution that prioritizes interdisciplinary inquiry, faculty-student research, and community outreach.

III. Next Steps

Dissemination of Results (100 words or fewer)

Describe how you have or plan to share the results of your project, within and/or outside of the GC community.

The Trail Trax Database is publicly available on the Trax on the Trail website: www.traxonthetrail.com. Between April 1, 2020 and November 1, 2020, the student research assistants expanded the database by 2000 entries. This content is available to anyone who wishes to study campaign music, including scholars, journalists, educators, and the public. The student research assistants and I have also disseminated our work in the form of publications, presentations, concerts, podcasts, and educational materials.

**If you are open to reading above the word count, please see Appendix I below, which includes the work of myself and the student research assistants.

Efforts of project leading to outside funding

Indicate outside sources from whom funding has been requested for future development or expansion of this project. If none, please describe steps you will take to request additional funding for your project.

I received one of the Faculty Support Grants for summer 2021, and I will use this time to finish the draft of my monograph. I also plan to apply for subvention grants from the American Musicological Society and the Society for American Music in order to purchase the copyrights needed for my book. I am thinking about applying for an NEH Grant in summer 2022 in order to make some modifications to the database and website before the 2024 presidential election.

Appendix I

Publications/Presentations (Gorzelany-Mostak)

- Gorzelany-Mostak, Dana. *Sounding Race, Inventing Authority: Pop Music, Identity, and the U.S. Presidency* (book manuscript, forthcoming)
- _____. "Kamala Harris Rap Genius? To be presented at the Society for American Music Conference, June 20, 2021 (Virtual).
- _____. Black and White on the Campaign Trail. Presented at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, January 14, 2021 (Virtual).
- _____. Music on the U.S. Campaign Trail. Great American Songbook Foundation Digital Lecture and Video, October 22, 2020.

Guest Lectures (Gorzelany-Mostak)

- St. Norbert College, De Pere WI, November 2, 2020
- Westminster Choir College of Rider University, Princeton, NJ, October 29, 2020.
- Georgia Washington University, Washington, DC, October 15, 2020

Media

We know several news outlets made use of this resource as they reached out to us as they were composing stories on music and the 2020 election.

- Pritchard, Will. "Go f--- yourselves, the lot of you!: The Dicey, Embarrassing History of Pop Music and Politicians." *The Telegraph*, October 28, 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/go-f-lot-dicey-embarrassing-history-pop-music-politicians/>.
- Arellano, Gustavo. "The Corrido of 'Amigo' Biden: How the Presidential Candidate Finally Got His Mexican Ballad." *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-10-18/corrido-amigo-biden-mexican-election-ballad>.
- Pound, Gil. "GC professor's Website Tracks Candidates' Music Choices on Campaign Trail." *Union Recorder*, October 17, 2020. https://www.unionrecorder.com/news/gc-professor-s-website-tracks-candidates-music-choices-on-campaign-trail/article_651d039c-10e0-11eb-a3f1-c33a94573116.html.
- "Georgia College Website Focuses on Music of Political Campaigns, *Albany Herald*, October 12, 2020. https://www.albanyherald.com/entertainment/music/georgia-college-website-focuses-on-music-of-political-campaigns/article_d04c7a52-0c9f-11eb-8a96-37d49a6e9fd7.html.
- "Research Website Devoted to Music in Electoral Politics" *GC Connection*, June 1, 2020.

Student Research Assistant/Faculty Collaborations

- Gorzelany-Mostak, Dana, Sarah Griffin, and Haley Strassburger, *Trail Tunes: From Tippecanoe to Trump and Biden Too*. Georgia College Alumni Weekend Lecture. Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, November 3, 2020 (Virtual).
- Griffin, Sarah, Haley Strassburger, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Erin Lamb, Sophia Clark, Richard Guyton, Nathan Whatley. *Delightful Tunes from U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1840–1964*. A Constitution Week Concert, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, September 17, 2020 (Virtual).
- Griffin, Sarah, Haley Strassburger, Naomi Graber, and Zach Sheffield, "Trax on the Trail: Researching Music on the U.S. Presidential Campaign Trail." GC Undergraduate Research Conference, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, April 20, 2020 (Virtual). https://kb.gcsu.edu/src/2020/research_in_progress/9/.

Student Research Assistant Presentations

- Strassburger, Haley. "The Noisy or Nice Dichotomy: Taylor Swift's Evolution from "Good Girl" to Activist Go-Getter in American Politics." National Council on Undergraduate Research (NCUR), April 13, 2021 (Virtual).
- _____. "Fearless Feminist: Taylor Swift's Evolving Activism and Authorship in American Politics and Pop Music." GC Student Research Conference, Georgia College, Milledgeville, GA, March 26, 2021 (Virtual).

Articles edited and published by Trax on the Trail (April 2020-present)

The following authors made use of the Trail Trax resource and published their work on the Trax on the Trail website.

- Patch, Justin. "Footloose: Political Transformations of a Song and Its Meaning." Trax on the Trail, October 25, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/10/25/footloose-political-transformations-of-a-song-and-its-meaning/>.
- Bomberger, Douglas E. "Music and Politics, 1917–1920." Trax on the Trail, September 23, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/09/23/music-and-politics-1917-1920/>.
- Truelove, Caitlan. "The Deep Cuts of a Randy Rainbow Song Parody." Trax on the Trail, September 12, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/09/12/the-deep-cuts-of-a-randy-rainbow-song-parody/>.
- Manabe, Noriko. "Refractions of a Rainbow: Randy Rainbow's Multi-Layered Parodies." Trax on the Trail, August 15, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/08/15/refractions-of-a-rainbow-randy-rainbows-multi-layered-parodies/>.

Interviews published by Trax on the Trail (April 2020-present)

- Fusco, Raphael, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, and Sarah Griffin. "He'll "Keep Yappin,'" but Don't Call Him an Activist: An Interview with Composer Raphael Fusco." Trax on the Trail, November 2, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/11/02/hell-keep-yappin-but-dont-call-him-an-activist-an-interview-with-composer-raphael-fusco/>.
- SongBird (pseud.), and Gorzelany-Mostak, Dana. "Just say "Song long to Kell" and that "Vlad Guy": An Interview with SongBird." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/10/15/just-say-song-long-to-kell-and-that-vlad-guy-an-interview-with-songbird/>.
- Deitrich, Daniel. "Singing a Song to the 81%: An Interview with Daniel Deitrich." Trax on the Trail, August 2, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/08/02/singing-a-song-to-the-81-an-interview-with-daniel-deitrich/>.
- Scotchie, Andrew, Andrew Fletcher, Tommy Oswalt, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, and Sarag Griffin. "Musicians. Organizers. Activists. An interview with Andrew Scotchie and Andrew Fletcher, Organizers of the Feel the Beat! Feel the Bern! Fundraiser, Asheville, NC." Trax on the Trail, July 13, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/07/13/musicians-organizers-activists-an-interview-with-andrew-scotchie-and-andrew-fletcher-organizers-of-the-feel-the-beat-feel-the-bern-fundraiser-asheville-nc/>.
- Oswalt, Tommy, Dnaa Gorzelany-Mostak, and Sarah Griffin. "Tommy Oswalt Weighs in on Pop Culture and the American Presidency." Trax on the Trail, May 24, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/05/24/tommy-oswalt-weighs-in-on-pop-culture-and-the-american-presidency/>.

Podcasts (April 2020-present)

- Trax on the Trail, Pt. 9, Andrew Fletcher and Andrew Scotchie on Music's Place in Progressive Politics, featuring Naomi Graber, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Andrew Fletcher, and Andrew Scotchie WRGC 88.3FM (aired October 27, 2020). <https://soundcloud.com/wrgc/trax-on-the-trail-2020-andrew-fletcher-andrew-scotchie-on-musics-place-in-progressive-politics/s-eYGv43QKRzH>.
- Trax on the Trail, Pt. 8, Eric Kasper and Benjamin Schoening on Pop Music in the 2016 and 2020 Elections, featuring Naomi Graber, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Benjamin Schoening, and Eric Kasper WRGC 88.3FM (aired August 7, 2020). <https://soundcloud.com/wrgc/trax-on-the-trail-2020-eric-kasper-benjamin-schoening-on-the-politics-of-music-in-elections>.

Loren Kajikawa Podcast Series (April 2020-present)

Students at George Washington University and their professor, Dr. Loren Kajikawa, used the Trail Trax database to research music on the 2020 campaign trail. This research formed the basis for the students' podcasts on election music topic. The student research assistants and I served as reviewers.

- Schor, Nick. "Anatomy of an Ad: Joe Biden and the Blind Pig." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5s1fjvqvbmki61/Anatomy%20of%20an%20Ad%20Joe%20Biden%20and%20the%20Blind%20Pig.wav?dl=0>.

- Gonzalez, Silvia Popoca. "Bernie Sanders, Brooklyn, and Jay Z." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/xt1gpem71lljneq/Bernie%20Sanders%2C%20Brooklyn%2C%20and%20Jay%20Z.mp3?dl=0>.
- Louis, Jolien. "Kanye West 2020." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/tojf699006178yx/Kanye%20West%202020.mp3?dl=0>.
- Rafter, Maureen. "Obama, Clinton, and the Power of Campaign Music." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/zkcc81db5qpkbuh/Obama%2C%20Clinton%2C%20and%20the%20Power%20of%20Campaign%20Music.mp4?dl=0>.

Educational materials created and curated by Trax on the Trail

- Gorzelay-Mostak, Dana. "Analyzing and Creating Playlists," Trax on the Trail, April 2, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/04/02/analyzing-and-creating-playlists/>.
- Thiel, Cameron. "Taylor Swift's Alignment with the Democratic Party and its Effect on the 2020 Presidential Election." Trax on the Trail, October 15, 2020. <https://www.traxonthetrail.com/2020/11/18/taylor-swifts-alignment-with-the-democratic-party-and-its-effect-on-the-2020-presidential-election/>.