

Jordan, Matt, Penn State University, United States

Obama's iPod and the *We Are One* Concert: The Perils of "Postpolitical" Aesthetic Populism

In the build-up to Barack Obama's election, much was made of his taste in music. Media accounts of the contents of his iPod and of his (first-ever) campaign soundtrack claimed that his taste in progressive music indexed a political sensibility that made him the perfect leader for these trying times. An analysis of the function of music in the Obama campaign and a close reading of the *We Are One* inaugural concert shows how music was used to affectively link Obama to the populist music of earlier political movements. Yet a closer look at the star-studded spectacle also reveals the problems of contemporary aesthetic populism. Instead of using music to unite a people around an enemy or *polemos*, the traditional populist rhetorical strategy, Obama's brand of "postpolitical" populism aims to unite the people around nonspecific hypostatized content that is "all about you," engendering a radically subjectivized and ultimately unsustainable political collective.