I want to talk about two artists today, Beyoncé and ANOHNI, whose work resonates with Dr. King’s message for justice, for peace, and (most importantly) for action. They also explore the frustrations of the modern world we’ve inherited: the promises unkept, the battles still fought, and the disappointments and frustrations going forward. I speak to you all today as a musicologist and dance historian, here to bring my own disciplinary tools to the critical evaluation of our times and to ask the question posed by musicologist, Suzanne Cusick, Professor of Music at NYU, in 2011:

How can we best prepare future generations of musical creators, scholars, teachers, and citizens to respond to the educational, musical, and ethical needs of the United States’ post-imperial moment, a moment we know is coming as surely as we know that global warming and the end of the world’s petroleum reserves are.

That moment that Suzanne imagined six years ago is neigh.

To prepare these music citizens we need to think about how we listen in times of trouble. We must first acknowledge that music is special (OK, I’m a little biased here, but it is). It is unlike poetry, or writing, or a scholarly article. Its rules are different. We sing when speaking fails. We can say the words, “We Shall Overcome,” but during the Civil Rights Era, those words carried greater power when set to rhythm and melody and sung together, amplified by other resonating bodies. Sung on campuses like ours, at rallies, sitting, lunch counters, behind bars in jail, and marches it was powerful because it was sung. “We Shall Overcome” is simple enough. It has one melody sung strophically (that is with different lyrics each time to the same tune) that is fairly repetitive and moves by steps, no large leaps that are hard to sing.

Now let’s take a look at it. Its first idea, here in red, has an arch shape and is repeated. The next idea is just an extension of the first idea. Then we get a new musical idea a downward motive and that is repeated at a lower pitch before we get the final idea, which combines elements of the A and B idea – it has the opening part of A but the rhythm of B. Its form exhibits that idea of overcoming. We shall overcome, repeat, and extended when we hope for

*We Shall Overcome* notation from Dorf’s presentation.
"one day." When we look inward to our belief that this will happen a new motive emerges repeated, but changed and then the last line: "We shall overcome someday" is a synthesis of the two ideas, the two messages of hope and faith merged. Song explains things differently than speech. When we sing it breaks the narrative, it allows us to step out of our regular communication. When we have something meaningful to get across, we sing instead of talk; we dance instead of walk. And so, we need to look at music and dance a little differently than other forms of speech.

**Beyoncé, "Freedom"**

Let's turn to Beyoncé's 2016 visual-album _Lemonade_. We obviously don't have time for the whole album, I could—maybe I should—teach a whole course on it. Today, I want to look at one song featured on the album: as well as Beyoncé's June 2016 performance of it at the televised BET Awards ceremony. "Freedom," the tenth track, is a turning point in the album from redemption to hope. The lyrics make reference to Black Lives Matter, civil rights era and abolitionist era movements. The visual portions of the song on the visual-album use images of ballerinas, long tables of black women in antebellum clothing, sharing a meal including the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner and Michael Brown and others.

The song includes three samples as well. One is from a 1969 psychedelic funk album and the other two were recorded by famed ethnomusicologist, Alan Lomax. One is a preacher and a hymn from 1959 and the other a work song recorded in a Mississippi prison from 1947. The cut from the album ends with audio of Jay-Z's grandmother's spoken text on when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. The track opens with the drum lick over an electric organ sample from the 60's funk chart and the Lomax sample of the preacher over that. This is the opening many of us are familiar with. However, Beyoncé's performance at last year's BET award show had a markedly different opening. The BET performances open with the same drum rhythm as heard on the album, but it is not from the sample. It is a crescendo, harrier, more militaristic. The acoustics of the space—a large theater—mimic the sound of a drum line rather than a funk riff and the organ is now gone, too. To this beat, women march in waving between each other, continually breaking formation (hint hint), bodies painted. To this, Beyoncé and her team add M.I.A.'s famous words from his "I Have a Dream" speech. The promise of America's founding documents which he has come to Washington to make good on. "In a sense," he begins, "we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check" and continues "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as its citizens of color are concerned. [...] But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. [...] And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice."

Beyoncé makes this performance another return of the promissory note: the demand for the collection of that debt. Her dancers tread through water: They stomp, kick and let the water fly creating visual reverberations of their words, their stomp, their actions. Illuminated by the red and gold lights behind them, the spray of water resembles glittering fireworks explosions. Beyoncé's song and her performance of it blends soul with gospel, hip-hop, funk and even adds a touch of old-timey country twang. The sampled funk organ recalls gospel organs when heard underneath Beyoncé's plaintive cries for freedom. Gospel infused R&B ornaments feature prominently especially in the pre-chorus tag line, "I'm telling these tears, 'Go and fall away, fall away,'" Blues vocal slides mark words like "chain" that connect this performance to a gospel tradition meant to evoke the abolitionists era and slave-era songs such as "Go Down Moses" and "Wade in the Water." Beyoncé even makes lyrical connections to the spiritual, "Wade in the Water"—a song associated with the underground railroad and the safe passage from slavery to freedom across the Ohio River. As they all dance they struggle against the weight of the water. Their legs work to free themselves to lift up, to kick up, to free themselves from the carceral pool of water the dancers find themselves in. Up until this point the performance only involves women. Right before the third verse we see male dancers enter the stage and all stomp in the water letting out loud shouts. Kendrick Lamar emerges right after, and the camera focuses on him and Beyoncé for the rest of the performance. It ends with more watery explosions as Beyoncé and
Lamar stamp and high kick their way forward urging each other on. But despite the sampling of King's words, Beyoncé's powerful anthem of survival is also a critique of the fact that those promises haven't been made good. The check cashed in the 60s bounced. The deaths of black men and women at the hands of the police does not sound like the kind of promise of justice and freedom King spoke about in 1963.

Oh yes, it is a powerful performance, it is a narrative of overcoming pain and disappointment, but overcoming. It is a rumination of what went wrong -- the broken promises of civil rights era leaders, of husbands (don't forget Becky with the good hair!), of family members. It looks backwards and not forwards. Now, that might be OK. But, as bell hooks wrote in her literary criticism of Beyoncé's commodification of black female suffering in Lemonade:

“ar truly be free, we must choose beyond simply surviving adversity, we must dare to create lives of sustained optimal well-being and joy. In that world, the making and drinking of lemonade will be a fresh and soulful delight, a real life mixture of the bitter and the sweet, and not a measure of our capacity to endure pain, but rather a celebration of our moving beyond pain.”

Beyoncé sings of freedom, but bell hooks faults her for basing that freedom on centuries of pain and making money off of it, for glamorizing violence in designer gowns with baseball bats. She criticizes her for sharing the pain without providing an answer for where to go from here. For allowing men to still inflict pain on women. Beyoncé though refuses to not credit her ability to endure pain, she displays both the disappointments and the desire to move forward at the same time. Lemonade does provide a way forward it is a call to get into formation, with a clear message that the black women and black youth will take it from here. They will inherit King's legacy of non-violent protest for the future. Music videos of swinging baseball bats and explosions are not prescriptions for justice, they are expressions of real feelings. Those two things should not be confused.

**ANOHNI**

In his letter from Birmingham jail of 1963 King laid out the four basic steps to any non-violent campaign: (1) Collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive. (2) Negotiation. (3) Self-purification and (4) Direct Action. The first two steps are pretty self-explanatory. Self-purification involves workshops on non-violence, asking the questions “Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?” “Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail” Direct action aims to open the door again to negotiations. It doesn’t come easily, and you seldom make friends. In the latter he also stresses the dangers of what he calls “white moderates” who he laments are devoted to “order” over justice. Those who, he writes, “prefer a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action.” Yes, the hardest thing to do is to question those things that we’ve already accepted as just the way things are.

In her first collection of songs under the name ANOHNI (formerly known as Anthony Hegarty) the British American singer has done just that, and in doing, has aptly named her album, HOPELESSNESS. But that hopelessness is not a final assessment of our situation. It is a starting point. It is where we begin, and where we go from here is up to us. What will we decide? What will we do? The album forces the listener to confront the price we pay for our comfort. What is the cost of our safety from terrorism? What is the cost of our comfortable air-conditioned homes in the sweltering heat of August?

I want to talk about two songs from this album. The first track, ”Drone Bomb Me” is a love song, a very disturbing and unconventional love song. “Drone bomb me” she croons. “Blow me from the mountains / And into the sea / Blow me from the side of the mountain / Blow my head off / Explode my crystal guts / Lay my purple on the grass.” The song delves into the cost of our safety, the unintended consequences of the war on terror. About the song ANOHNI says:

“It’s a feminine way of using an expression of con-founding vulnerability is to outwit a perpetra-tor that you can’t subdue. They often tell people to scream like crazy if they are being raped, because that can shake a perpetrator into a different per-spective about themselves and what they’re doing. For me, as a young person, one of my only means of defending myself was to find ways to confuse and disarm perpetrators. And I’ve often used vulnera- bility as both a platform to be witnessed and as a defensive mechanism.

ANOHNI’s campaign of non-violence resonates with King’s strategies outlined in the Letter from Birmingham Jail, and like Beyoncé’s Lemonade offers vulnerability as an alternative. That’s not to say that violence does not lurk behind ANOHNI’s (or Beyoncé’s) album, it is around every corner, but the dominant narrative is vulnerability. In the videos
for HOPELESSNESS almost everyone features close-ups of crying bare-shouldered women lip-synching to ANOHNI’s voice, tears running down their cheeks and welling up in their eyes. “Drone Bomb Me,” goes on to plead for the bomb, to be chosen by the men and women half-way around the world manning joysticks and staring at computer screens, their fingers on the trigger. “Let me be the first / I’m not so innocent / Let me be the one / The one that you choose from above / After all, I’m partly to blame,” she sings. ANOHNI wants to take responsibility for her own comfort. Twinkling bell sounds and lyrical celestial chords accompany the pleas for death and annihilation, the chords shimmer around her wavering voice. ANOHNI ornaments her lines with vocal quavers, tiny false alto notes, dots that die out, that don’t ring, redoubled wails that seem to get eaten up in her throat as if they are stuck inside unlike Beyoncé’s glorious gospel cries and shouts given to her audience. ANOHNI owns her vulnerability.

The video features super-model Naomi Campbell mostly in close-up lip-synching to ANOHNI, and a phalanx of back-up black male dancers contorting, twisting, snarling, and raging at the camera.

They move like a boxer in constant motion, waiting for the bell to ring and the fight to start. At the end they lie dead on the ground, seemingly chosen while Naomi Campbell survives another day.

We are all to blame for our sense of safety and the violence that ensures draw tears from Naomi Campbell’s eyes. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” King wrote, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality: tied in a single garment of destiny.” As Van Jones has argued, these famous lines from his letter from Birmingham Jail pertain to environment justice just as much as other forms of racial and economic, and social justice.

And that garment of destiny is getting warmer. The World Bank issued a report in 2012 aimed to “shock us into action,” warning us that “we’re on track for a 4-degree Celsius warmer world marked by extreme heat waves, declining global food stocks, loss of ecosystems and biodiversity, and life-threatening sea level rise.” ANOHNI’s first single from the album, “4 Degrees” attempts to shake us into environmental action. “It’s only 4 degrees / I wanna see this world, I wanna see it cool / It’s only 4 degrees / […] I wanna see fish go belly-up in the sea / All those lemmings and all those tiny creatures / I wanna see them burn, it’s only 4 degrees.”

Here, instead of tinkling bells, ANOHNI provides a harsh yet lush orchestral sound. Heroic brass, thundering drums, and verdant strings reflect the abundance we are on the brink of destroying. Let’s listen. It is heart-wrenching, yet danceable like one of the closing images of Beyoncé’s Lemonade, the singer drowning on the back on a New Orleans police car. While the water only comes up to her ankles in the BET performance of “Freedom” it’s over her head at the end of “Formation.” How do we adjust to the reality of now? We do it by refusing the unjust or inevitable half-measures, accepting the suffering becomes an act of protest against the injustice. Speaking out against the Vietnam war in 1967, King said: “I am disappointed with America. And there can be no great disappointment where there is not great love. I am disappointed with our failure to deal positively and forthrightly with the triple evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism. We are presently moving down a dead-end road that can lead to national disaster. America has strayed to the far country of racism and militarism.”

Fifty years later we still need to deal with these issues. While bell hooks criticized Beyoncé for assuming that black women have to suffer, we’ve seen artist after artist insisting that we watch, that we don’t turn away, that we listen with eyes open. We also can’t deny that suffering. It is still part of the narrative because it is indelibly marked on the lives of so many who are victims of injustice. In that same speech on his opposition to Vietnam, King reminded us that “Good Friday comes after Easter. Before the crown we wear, there is the cross that we must bear. Let us bear it — bear it for truth, bear it for justice, and bear it for peace.”

In her interview with Pitchfork ANOHNI said: “Rage is a really fun place to dance from — expressions of anger sublimated into something beautiful are invigorating, especially if you feel like you’re telling the truth. […] I wanted to do something that was gonna go down fighting. Something more vigorous. Something that would compel people who are already in that mindset to take action.” Rage is indeed a wonderful place to dance from. As Dr. King taught us, violence does not belong in our streets, but I’d argue that it does have a place in our art. Without music it is safe. When you’re angry you aren’t allowed to put your fist through a wall, but you can sing at the top of your lungs, you can dance, you can cry.

Beyoncé’s Lemonade is not that different than HOPELESSNESS. Both seek to upset the status quo, to “wake” us, to show us disturbing images, uncomfortable truths. We are watching, listening, and dancing to Beyoncé and ANOHNI, because we are all looking for strength in our shared pains in our shared feelings of hopelessness, and freedom (that’s the human condition). Again, Hopelessness is not the beginning, and it’s not the end. Lemonade is what you make out of the lemons, and it too concludes with a new beginning, a call to mobilize, to get into formation, to sway. Together, like the form of “We Shall Overcome” itself, musical performances propel us forward taking the sounds and gestures of the past in new ways to lay out a message for the future.”