

THE SOUNDS OF RED AND BLUE AMERICA: DISSECTING MUSICAL  
REFERENCES TO “RED STATE” AND “BLUE STATE” IDENTITY IN PRINT  
MEDIA DURING THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the print media used references to music to indicate “red state” and “blue state” identity during the 2004 presidential campaign. Through a textual analysis of more than 30 newspaper and magazine articles, it analyzes how print media employed sound representations—or references to music—to connote voter identity and regional culture.

Bringing together cultural theory, sound theory and visual theory, this thesis investigates how sound representations, like images, work to shape and reflect cultural ideologies in media. The primary investigation is how *references to sound in print media* work to construct and reconstitute identity. Specifically, this research looks at the media’s employment of musical references to the “cultural divide” and how music became an extension of political beliefs. It explores how campaigns and media used rock and country music genres to represent geographic regions and cultural values. Further, it explains how both genres have become aligned with certain politics depending on historical and political moments.

By analyzing how print articles discussed campaigns, musical genres and musicians’ political actions, this research works to dissect the representations of red and blue America with which we have become so familiar.