

**Collective Action: Saving the World Through Song**

Collective Action Essay

COM EM 797

Prof. Chris Wells

Cassandra Smith

November 26, 2019

Almost every day a tragic event happens somewhere in the world from domestic attacks to environmental disasters, disease, and famine. While of most of these worldly events come and go with sometimes little to no public aid or recognition, every once in a while a certain event or societal problem will warrant a response that only the most musically gifted celebrities can give. A collaboration aid relief song. Through the mobilization of celebrity talent and music media aid relief songs conjure the essence of collective and connective action and united solidarity within different communities to support and create awareness of tragic events.

The concept of aid relief songs have been around for the last few decades, with both solo artists and giant collaborations of artists coming together to sing a song, raise awareness, and hopefully raise money for a larger cause. In the 1980's some of the most popular relief songs were the '84 "Do They Know It's Christmas?" by the group composed of British talent called Band Aid, the '85 "We Are the World" by the group USA for Africa, and the '85 "Sun City" by the group Artists United Against Apartheid. While the groups were composed of different talent and the specific events they hoped to "combat" varied, their goal was the same, raise awareness, raise money, and unite a larger community under one purpose. This formula has remained the same since the 1980's all the way to the 2010's with new groups, new songs, and new events to collectively unite for. Recent projects included the '08 "Just Stand Up!" by the group Artists Stand Up to Cancer, the '10 remake of "We Are the World 25 for Haiti," and the '16 "What The World Needs Now is Love" by Broadway for Orlando.

According to W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg the logic behind collective action is, "Emphasize the problems of getting individuals to contribute to the collective endeavor that typically involves seeking some sort of public good that may be better attained through

forging a common cause” (Bennett, et al. 2012). This means that when collective action is taking place the notion behind the movement must consider how it draws in support and how their overall goal is beneficial to all. This is important to consider when looking at aid relief song models because they approach this concept in interesting ways. Supporters/consumers of the song are not required to subscribe to a lasting service or membership but instead a one time contribution to a hopefully larger effort. If enough people buy, download, or stream the song then enough awareness and money can be made to the collective public good. The public good being support for the song’s highlighted tragic event. Aid relief songs also adhere to the creation and support around a collective identity, a trait that Daniel Lundgaard and Liana Razmerita say is key towards fostering collective action (Lundgaard, et al. 2016). Aid relief songs are generally produced by a collection of musical talent who came specially together to serve a larger cause that the public could also serve. It is through the support for the collective identity that the songs find their efforts being met, whether that’s because individuals favor the talent that makes up the group or feel more connected to the effort/event they are trying to give aid to.

One of the aspects of aid relief songs that makes it potentially more successful is that it relies on media technology to reach its audience. The songs are recorded for sale and filmed for representation and awareness. It is through music media, streaming technology, and the general population’s need to adhere to online trends that these songs and collective efforts can be at all fruitful in their attempt to actually raise money. Rheingold explains that online networks are responsible for fostering new forms of social organization and smart mobs (Rheingold, 2003). It is through online networks and connections that everyday people can read about a tragic event and quickly connect and support the aid relief song that was made to emphasize an emotional

response. For example the 2016 Broadway for Orlando song was recorded and filmed within mere days of the tragic mass shooting at the Orland Pulse Club, and vowed to give 100% of its proceeds to the LGBT Center of Central Florida (Playbill Staff, 2016). People within the LGBT and Broadway communities and the general population were able to transfer their emotional sorrow into something productive and hopeful, all thanks to the efficiency of online networks and media connections.

While being a clear example of collective action, aid relief songs also contain attributes associated with connective action. Bennet et al. explain connective action as being a formation of “personalized communication” (Bennet, et al. 2012). When it comes to aid relief songs we see this personalized communication in the form of network sharing of the filmed videos, the purchasing and downloading of the songs, and the sale of merchandise that showcases the group who recorded it. It is through this notion of personalizing the experience of the song/movement that the collective action then becomes connective between all the people it hopes to reach.

Tragic events continue to shake up the world continuously, and for many people they are left wondering how and what they can do to help when sometimes all hope seems lost. With the help of aid relief songs and the musical artists that make them, the population at large is able to feel connected to a bigger cause and meaning. Through personalized connection and collection and the wonders of music and digital media, whole communities of people are able to give emotional and financial support to the causes they care for. It can be easy to feel so disconnected from life’s realities but sometimes singing, “We are the world” can change just that.



## References

- Lundgaard, D., & Razmerita, L. (2016). Connective Versus Collective Action in Social Movements: A study of Co - Creation of Online Communities. Abstract from Connected Life 2016, Oxford, United Kingdom.
- Rheingold, H. (2003). Smart mobs. *Sociétés*, 79(1), 75. doi: 10.3917/soc.079.0075
- Staff, P. (2016, June 20). "Broadway for Orlando" Playbill's Exclusive Music Video Debuts. Retrieved from <http://www.playbill.com/article/broadway-for-orlando-playbills-exclusive-music-video-debuts>.
- W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2012): THE LOGIC OF CONNECTIVE ACTION, *Information, Communication & Society*, 15:5, 739-768