

Chapter 1: Mix It Up, Mash It Up: Arrangement, Audio Editing, and the Importance of Sonic Context

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1. “American” by Edgar Madrigal, Donna Dimitrova, and Saul Rivera

“American,” composed by Writing Across Media students Edgar Madrigal, Donna Dimitrova, and Saul Rivera, centers around immigration. The students edit together samples from Rihanna’s “American Oxygen,” Portugal the Man’s “So American,” and John Lennon’s “Imagine” to reimagine what it means to be an immigrant in 21st-century America. Throughout their work, they place these musical refrains into conversation with xenophobic immigration discourse—and later on, Barack Obama’s thoughts on immigration reform—to demonstrate tensions in how Americans think about immigrants.

Transcript

[John Lennon’s “Imagine” plays softly in the background]

Donald Trump *[voice reverberates]*: . . . wrong about the fourteenth amendment, and frankly, the whole thing with anchor babies, the concept of anchor babies—I don’t think you’re right about that.

[Rihanna’s “American Oxygen” begins to play in the background. Donald Trump sound bite continues]

Bill O’Reilly *[voice reverberating]*: I can quote it. I can quote you the amendment. If you’re born here, you’re an American here, period. Period.

Rihanna: Breathe out, breathe in. American Oxygen, whoa. Every breath I breathe, chasin’ this American dream. We sweat for a nickel and a dime, turn it into an empire, whoa. Breathe in this feeling. American . . . *[song fades out, overlaps with Portugal the Man’s “So American”]*

Portugal the Man (from “So American”): You’re so American. Girls, all you girls. Yeah, you’re so American. He may not be born of this land, but he was born of this world. He was born of all the mothers and the colors of our brothers—” *[song continues to play in the background]*

Unknown Male Newscaster: total and complete ban on Muslims entering the United States—

Portugal the Man *[playing simultaneously]*: —And the love that was started. You are the one they call Jesus Christ—

Unknown Male Interviewer: —but this isn’t about being politically correct—

Donald Trump: We have a problem in this country, and we should solve it because we could have many more World Trade Centers if you don’t solve it. Many, many more. We have the California attack with these two animals. They’re total animals. They became radicalized. *[“radicalized” continues to echo]*

Portugal the Man *[playing simultaneously]*: There may not be a heaven or a place in which to send ya, but you know in the end there’s a madness in us all *[“Madness in us all” synced with Trump’s comment “They’re total animals”]*

Unknown Male Interviewer: Is—

[music in background slows down]

Donald Trump [*volume increased*]: we put in policy on immigration and that's build the wall. People have to come into the country legally. Have to do it. Have to do it. Have to do it [*crowd cheers*]. Or we don't have a country.

Portugal the Man [*playing simultaneously*]: There's a madness in us all [*refrain synced with Trump's comment "People have to come into the country legally"*]. There's a madness in us all. There's a madness in us all. So who wrote the rules?

Donald Trump [*volume increased*]: The anchor babies, we—we're gonna have to do something here. And they're not coming in legally. And if you read the language, other than some, some television scholars that said "No, no the babies are ours. We have to take care of the baby forever." People are coming from China, they're coming all over Asia, they're coming from Latin America, South America, they're coming from Mexico. They walk across the border. It's ours. It doesn't read that way.

Portugal the Man [*playing simultaneously*]: Who wrote the rules? Who wrote the rules? They say every one of you will never try to lend a hand when the policemen don't understand. Boys, all you boys. Think it's so American. Girls, all you girls. Yeah, you're so American. There's two eyes for every one of us. [*song fades out*]

[*music transitions back to "Imagine"*]

Barack Obama: "And that's why we're going to keeping focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security."

John Lennon [*playing simultaneously*]: Imagine all the people sharing all the world. You . . .

Barack Obama: Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids.

John Lennon: You may say I'm a dreamer, but I am not the only one. I hope someday you join us—

[*crowd cheers in background*]

John Lennon [*playing simultaneously*]: —And the world will live as one [*song fades out*]

[*"American Oxygen" fades back in*]

Rihanna: American oxygen, whoa. Every breath I breathe, chasin' this American Dream. We sweat for a nickel and a dime, turn it into an empire, whoa. Breathe in this feelin', American, American oxygen. Oh, oh, whoa. American oxygen, whoa. Breathe in this feelin', American, American oxygen. Oh, oh, whoa. American oxygen, whoa. Breathe in this feelin', American, American oxygen.

Barack Obama: Let's be honest. Rounding up, and deporting millions of people isn't realistic. Anyone who suggests otherwise isn't being straight with you. It's also not who we are as Americans.

Rihanna [*playing simultaneously*]: This is the new America. We are the new America. This is the new America. We are the new America.

Barack Obama: After all, most of these immigrants have been here a long time. They support their families. Many of their kids are American born or spend most of their lives here. And their hopes, dreams, and patriotism are just like ours.