

OPEN BOOK

Teacher
Guide
7th – 11th
Grade

What is the Power of Music?

**“In the beginning was the Note, and the Note was with God; and whosoever can reach for that Note, reach high, and bring it back to us on earth, to our earthly ears—he is a composer.”
Leonard Bernstein, 1963**

Leonard Bernstein was the face of classical music for a generation of Americans. Those who watched him lead the New York Philharmonic in the 1950s and 1960s remember him as a flamboyant, larger-than-life personality: a charismatic conductor, devoted educator, and skilled musician who popularized classical music in the concert hall and through the television screen. Bernstein, also a gifted composer and a powerful political voice, blended art and politics while spending his life reaching for that “Note.” How did Bernstein’s aspiration for the “Note” inspire him to create and share his love of music? How did he infuse meaning into Broadway musicals, symphonies, choral music, operas, songs, and ballets?

This lesson explores the power of music and the platform it has offered to Bernstein and other musicians. A multitude of voices reflect on the possibilities that music offers to express hope, communicate a political message, and transform the meaning of words—or to simply entertain.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Who was Leonard Bernstein?
- How did Leonard Bernstein use music as a form of social activism?
- What is the power of music?
- What responsibility does music have to be political or entertaining?
- Why do we listen to music?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this unit students will be able to:

- Explain that music is an artistic medium through which one can respond to, support, and convey a message.
- Describe how Leonard Bernstein conveyed his commitment to social justice through the performing arts.
- Identify ways to respond creatively to social issues that are important to them.

Suggested Pre-Lesson Activity

- 1. Introduce Leonard Bernstein.**
- 2. Ask: What kinds of music do you listen to? What do you like about that music? How do different kinds music make you feel?**
- 3. Find images online of Leonard Bernstein conducting, and ask students to copy the pose in each photo. Reflect:**
 - What emotion does each pose make you feel?
 - How do you think Leonard Bernstein felt about music?
 - What do you experience, physically and emotionally, when you listen to music?
- 4. Ask: What uses does music have? Why or when do you listen to music?**
- 5. Record students' responses on the board. For each response, ask the student to give an example. Examples can include bands, individual songs, or specific performances.**

Procedure

1. Refer to the *Open Book Overview* and follow the instructions for the “See, Think, Wonder” activity as a class. Consider using the following discussion questions.

See:

- What handwritten text are you able to read?
- What is typed and what is handwritten?
- What page is written on?

Think:

- Why do you think Bernstein and Robbins wrote in their copy of *Romeo and Juliet*?
- What do you think “an out and out plea for racial tolerance” means?
- Why do you think Bernstein and Robbins wanted to interrupt the prologue with a street fight?

Wonder:

- I wonder why Bernstein and Robbins chose a tragedy as the basis for their idea.
- I wonder why Bernstein and Robbins described their idea as “an out and out plea” as opposed to a softer word like “request.”
- I wonder why Bernstein and Robbins didn’t make any notes about the list of characters.
- I wonder how audiences responded to Bernstein and Robbins’s “plea.”

2. If you haven’t already, divide students into pairs or trios. Distribute one Talmud page to each group and Student Guide to each student.

- (optional) Play each song represented on the Talmud page for the class or allow students to listen to the songs in their *havruta* groups.

3. Refer to the *Open Book Overview* and follow the instructions for the *havruta* study.

4. Refer to the *Open Book Overview* and follow the instructions for the Wrap up activity. Consider using the following discussion questions.

- Can you find two texts that agree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?
- Can you find two texts that disagree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?
- How many uses of music can you find among the texts?
- How do you think audiences responded to songs by Bernstein, Miranda, and Sondheim (#3), Taylor (#5), Lamar (#6), and Beyoncé (#7)?
- How many of the songs mentioned were you already aware of? What opinion did you have about those songs? Has that opinion changed?
- How do you think Eisberg and Zupetic (#8) would feel about “Go Down Moses” (#4)? Why?
- Besides the Taylor piece (#5), which other texts are trying to “shed a little light” on a social issue?

General prompting questions:

- What do you think is the power of music?
- Do you think a song can be political? Do you think it needs to be entertaining? Explain your answer.
- Is there ever a time when it is inappropriate for a song to be political? For it to be entertaining? Explain your answer.
- Besides composing songs, how else can you (students) create change through music?

Suggested Post-Lesson Activity

1. Explain that, as a young conductor, Leonard Bernstein once told his orchestra during rehearsal: “Give it all you’ve got and then crescendo [a gradual increase in volume of a musical passage]!” Reflect:

- What do you think Bernstein meant by these words? What do they mean for you personally?
- To what cause would you “give all you’ve got”? How? How would you perform a crescendo?

2. Ask: Of all the uses and purposes of music you have discussed, which one stands out to you the most? If you were a composer, what would you want your music to achieve?

3. Have each student make a playlist of five to ten songs that would achieve the goal you set out in question 2.

4. Reflect on the activity:

- Why did you choose the songs that you did?
- What emotions would you want the listener to feel when listening to your playlist?
- Who would need to listen to your playlist for the action to be achieved?

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Object Information

William Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*. Boston: Ginn and Co., 1940.

Edited by George Kittredge.

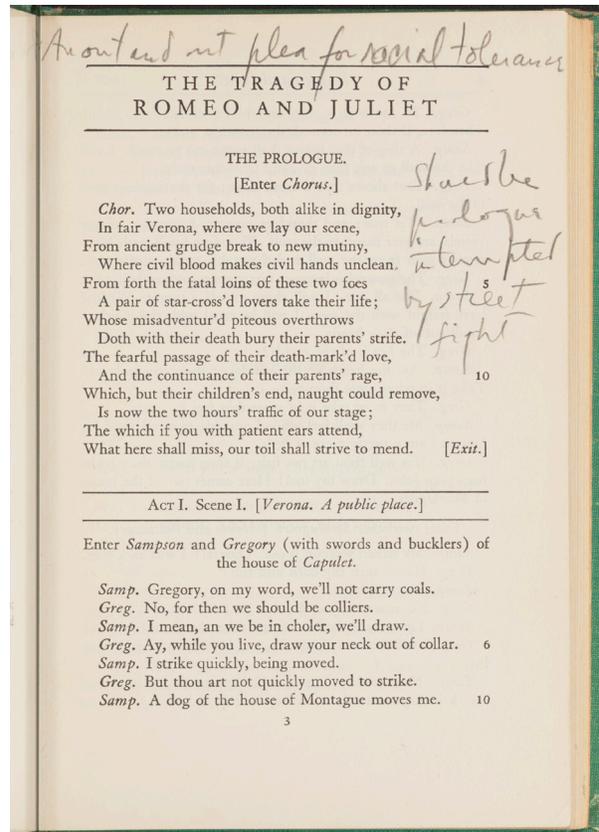
Annotated by Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins, 1940s-50s

The Broadway musical *West Side Story* (1957) is one of Leonard Bernstein's most memorable mash-ups of his musical genius and his activist impulse. The musical premiered during the early years of the civil rights movement and at a time of heated anxieties around immigration, American identity, and global political tensions.

The musical's Jewish creators—Leonard Bernstein (music), Jerome Robbins (choreography), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics), and Arthur Laurents (book)—sought to reimagine Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as a contemporary story of impossible love, family rivalry, violence, and tragedy. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the rival Capulet and Montague families in Italy are constantly fighting, even as Romeo (a Montague) and Juliet (a Capulet) secretly fall in love.

Bernstein and Robbins initially imagined their retelling as one of ethnic competition, racial discrimination, poverty, and violence set in New York's Lower East Side during the convergence of Passover and Easter. As they began to transform Shakespeare's classic, Bernstein and Robbins jotted notes and scene sketches into a copy of *Romeo and Juliet*. Above the prologue, Bernstein wrote: "an out and out plea for racial tolerance."

Having initially pitted Jews against Catholics, Bernstein and Robbins soon decided to rework



Courtesy of the Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

their project to be more contemporary, choosing instead to focus on Puerto Rican Sharks seeking recognition as full Americans by the Jets. Puerto Ricans had been granted US citizenship in 1917 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act. In spite of this, they continued to suffer from discrimination. By the 1950s, around six hundred thousand Puerto Ricans had migrated to New York seeking economic opportunities, spurring anti-immigrant sentiments as well as discussions of what it meant to be American.

Appendix A – Historical Background

Leonard Bernstein (1918–90) was an American conductor, composer, educator, and humanitarian. In addition to his internationally recognized musical career, Bernstein consistently spoke out for civil and human rights and engaged in many political causes, from the podium to the protest, from the studio to the stage.

Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1918, to Ukrainian Jewish immigrants Jennie and Samuel Bernstein. While Sam pursued the American dream, founding a company that furnished beauty products and equipment to Boston salons, Leonard attended public school and began taking piano lessons at age ten. The Bernsteins attended the Conservative congregation Mishkan Tefila (Sanctuary of Prayer), a synagogue that featured organ music and a mixed-gender choir. In the early twentieth century, these were still uncommon, progressive practices in America’s Conservative congregations. From a young age, then, Leonard Bernstein heard music that pushed boundaries.

Leonard Bernstein composed for Broadway, conducted major orchestras, starred on TV, and became during the 1950s and 1960s the best known of all American conductors. He used his prominence, his talents, and his larger-than-life personality to make classical music and music theory accessible for people of all ages—and to advocate for social change, both on and off the stage. He infused his commitment to social justice into all aspects of his life, but especially into his music, demonstrating the power and importance of music in bringing social change.

The arts have always been a means for addressing political and social issues, and for

Bernstein that included a lifelong commitment to racial equality. His 1939 Harvard thesis, entitled “The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music,” analyzed the many musical traditions brought to this country by immigrant communities and developed in the African American community, notably jazz. During the 1940s he became involved with the National Negro Congress (NNC), an interracial organization founded in 1935 with a mission to “secure the rights of the Negro people to be free from Jim Crowism, segregation, discrimination, lynching, and mob violence.” As a student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Bernstein wrote to his childhood piano teacher, Helen Coates, about the possibility of leading “an all-Negro Symphony Orchestra! ... I’ll be only too glad to work with them [NNC]. It’s a great social triumph, too, if it succeeds; conquering the latest suspicion of whites among the Negroes (and how justified that suspicion is!) is a large step forward.” By conducting an orchestra of all black musicians, Bernstein also hoped to show white audiences that the only barrier stopping people of color from becoming professional musicians was the lack of education and training, enforced by prejudice and segregation.

Bernstein recognized the discrimination in arts education as well as segregation’s impact on the opportunities for people of color to enter the great orchestra halls and theaters of the time. In 1947 he published an article in the *New York Times* titled “The Negro in Music: Problems He Has to Face in Getting a Start,” criticizing the lack of resources available to African Americans. Nora Holt, classical music critic for the *Amsterdam News*, an African American newspaper, commented that writing this editorial “took more than ordinary courage for Leonard Bernstein. [H]e measures a human being according to his qualities without odious reference to race or creed.”

Bernstein continued to be an outspoken advocate for civil rights throughout his life, including participating in the historic 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, and featuring African American musicians in his popular *Young People's Concerts*.

[On the Town: A Case Study in Leonard Bernstein's Social Activism](#)

The Broadway musical *On the Town*, written and premiered during World War II, was one of Bernstein's earliest works for the stage. The musical tells the story of three sailors, Chip, Ozzie, and Gabey, enjoying one day of shore leave in New York City. In the musical, each of the sailors courts a woman and aims to see all the sites of New York, "a helluva town."

The show premiered in 1944, at the height of World War II. At that time, the American armed forces were still segregated and a mixed-race Broadway cast was a rarity. In *On the Town*, however, African American servicemen and servicewomen dance hand in hand with white sailors. This was striking given that public touching or romantic gestures between men and women of different races could be dangerous or even illegal in the Jim Crow South and stage practices reinforced segregation on and off stage. *On the Town's* choreographer, Jerome Robbins, explained that "for the first time they [black dancers] danced with the whites, not separately, in social dancing. We had some trouble with that in some of the cities we went to [on tour]."

When African Americans were cast, they generally received small, stereotypical roles such as household helpers, laborers, and criminals. *On the Town* featured African

American dancers and actors playing the same character types as their white colleagues—all together, part of the same street scene, and living equal lives. Sono Osato, who played Gabey's love interest, remarked that the musical "depicts just people, any people, the people of New York as they live and dance and ride in subways, all intermingled." Nine months into the run of *On the Town*, Everett Lee, an African American violinist and concertmaster, stepped in to lead the all-white pit orchestra at Bernstein's urging, and the two men continued working together after the show closed.

It was especially significant that *On the Town* featured Sono Osato, a Japanese American ballet dancer, in the role of Ivy Smith. Osato's father, Shoji Osato, had been arrested by the FBI one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor as an "enemy alien." He became one of 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were held in internment camps throughout the American West. He was held for six months and was not given permission to travel to New York to see his daughter perform until April 1945. Yet, here, on the Broadway stage, audiences saw a Japanese American woman in a role onstage that was off limits to her in real life, representing a remarkable moment on Broadway during World War II.

[West Side Story](#)

West Side Story premiered during the early years of the civil rights movement and at a time of heated anxieties around immigration, American identity, and global political tensions.

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Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as a contemporary story of impossible love, family rivalry, violence, and tragedy. Bernstein and Robbins initially imagined a story of ethnic competition, racial discrimination, poverty, and violence set in New York's Lower East Side during the convergence of Passover and Easter. As they began to transform Shakespeare's classic, Bernstein and Robbins jotted notes and scene sketches into a copy of *Romeo and Juliet*. Above the prologue, Bernstein wrote: "an out and out plea for racial tolerance," showing how he was thinking about Jewishness in terms of race in the mid-1950s.

Having initially pitted Jews against Catholics, Bernstein and Robbins later decided to rework their project to be more contemporary, choosing instead to focus on Puerto Rican Sharks seeking recognition as full Americans by the Jets. Puerto Ricans had been granted US citizenship in 1917 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act. In spite of this, they continued to suffer from discrimination. By the 1950s, around six hundred thousand Puerto Ricans had migrated to New York seeking economic opportunities, spurring anti-immigrant sentiments as well as discussions of what it meant to be American.

[Bernstein's Legacy of Activism](#)

In 1958, when Bernstein became music director of the New York Philharmonic, the orchestra consisted only of white men. *Young People's Concerts* gave Bernstein, who spoke and wrote about discrimination in classical music, an opportunity to promote racial equality by inviting and featuring African American musicians. He recognized that the lack of diversity in professional orchestras, including the absence of women, resulted not only from prejudice but also from lack of access to

professional training opportunities for minority communities. Bernstein hoped that, by making classical music more accessible, more young people of color would become interested in playing classical music. In 1961 he appointed Sanford Allen as the orchestra's first full-time African American member.

In his later years Bernstein continued to speak out for social justice, leveraging the ways in which his voice could have an impact. He strove to improve relations between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, and conducted *Kaddish*, *Halil*, and selections from his *MASS* for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. He spoke on peace and nuclear disarmament at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine and brought a "Journey of Peace" Youth Orchestra to Hiroshima on the fortieth anniversary of the bombing. He refused the National Medal of Arts to protest President Bush's revocation of National Endowment for the Arts funding for an art exhibition that dealt with AIDS. He conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in an historic concert at the opening of the Berlin Wall. He advocated for nuclear disarmament by asking his admirers to celebrate his sixty-fifth birthday by wearing blue armbands to signify their opposition to the nuclear arms buildup. At historic moments Bernstein never hesitated to speak his mind first and let the music follow.

Appendix B – Supplementary Information for Talmud Page

01 HOW TO PRAY

Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg, known as Yehudah HeChasid, was born in Speyer, Germany, in 1150. He was a leader of the Chassidei Ashkenaz, a religious movement dedicated to Jewish mysticism. A composer of liturgical poetry, he is also believed to have written *Sefer Hasidim*, a collection of mystical, ethical, and very strict teachings. In 1195 he moved to Regensburg, where he founded a yeshiva and trained a generation of scholars. He died in Regensburg in February 1217.

02 RUNNING A COUNTRY

Leonard Bernstein (1918–90), a composer, conductor, and pianist, was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, to a working-class family of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants. A musical genius who profoundly contributed to modern American symphonic forms and composed music for Broadway, ballet, and film, Bernstein did not receive any musical training until he was ten years old and did not hear a live symphony orchestra until the age of sixteen. However, his considerable musical talents were soon recognized. Bernstein studied music at Harvard University and then attended the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In 1943, at the age of twenty-five, Bernstein became the assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; shortly thereafter he was asked, with no rehearsal, to step in and conduct the orchestra after a guest

conductor fell ill. The concert was broadcast on the radio and was so well received that Bernstein was soon recognized internationally. The following year Bernstein made his debut as a composer. In the following decade Bernstein became the musical director of the New York Philharmonic and composed the music for several theatrical shows, including the musicals *West Side Story* and *On the Town*. In subsequent years, Bernstein composed his *Kaddish Symphony*, dedicated to President John F. Kennedy after his death, as well as the *Chichester Psalms*. He also became known as perhaps the world's best conductor of the symphonies of Gustav Mahler. Bernstein was dedicated to social activism as well as music; he held fundraising parties for various civil rights causes at his apartment and, when at the Philharmonic, oversaw the orchestra's hiring of its first black violinist. In the 1980s he publicly supported the fight against AIDS. At the same time, it became public knowledge that Bernstein identified as a gay man. Bernstein was relentlessly creative and restlessly energetic. Later in his life he said, "I want to conduct. I want to play the piano. I want to write for Hollywood. I want to write symphonic music. I want to keep on trying to be, in the full sense of that wonderful word, a musician. I also want to teach. I want to write books and poetry. And I think I can still do justice to them all."

03 MARIA

Stephen Sondheim (b. 1930) is an American composer and lyricist known for such iconic Broadway works as *West Side Story*, *Into the Woods*, and *Company*. In *West Side Story* Sondheim wrote the lyrics to this song, "Maria," in which the Jets character, Tony, sings of his newfound love for Maria, a Puerto Rican Shark, who he meets at a dance in the school gym. Later that night Tony sings of this

love-at-first-sight moment when “suddenly that name, will never be the same to me.”

Lin-Manuel Miranda (b. 1980) is an award-winning composer, lyricist, and actor-performer. His musical *Hamilton*, for which Miranda wrote the book, music, and lyrics, opened on Broadway in 2015 with Miranda originating the title role. Notably, *Hamilton*'s cast consists of mostly nonwhite actors telling the story of our nation's (white) founding fathers—specifically, the life and contributions of the first secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton.

In recent years Miranda has been engaged with activist causes from natural disasters to social issues. In 2017 he created the benefit single “Almost Like Praying” to help fund relief efforts in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. The song takes its cue from *West Side Story*'s “Maria,” returning the word “Maria” to an object of love after a hurricane of the same name ravaged Puerto Rico.

04 SONG OF FREEDOM

This song traces its origins to mid-nineteenth-century America, when it became a popular spiritual sung by enslaved blacks yearning for freedom. The song was inspired by Exodus 8:1, in which God tells Moses to go down to Egypt and instruct Pharaoh to free the enslaved Israelites. In the twentieth century, “Go Down Moses” has been recorded by African American artists, including jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong and singer-actor-political activist Paul Robeson.

Today, “Go Down Moses” is also sometimes sung during the Seder, the ritual meal for the Jewish holiday of Passover, which recalls the

experiences of the Israelites journeying to freedom during the Exodus.

05 SONG OF HOPE

Born in Boston in 1948, James Taylor grew up primarily in the red-soil countryside around Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and spent summers in Massachusetts, where his family traced its ancestry. After struggling with depression, Taylor moved to New York in 1966 and formed a band called The Flying Machine. He then grappled with a heroine addiction while his debut album, *James Taylor*, was being released in 1968—becoming the first artist signed to Apple Records after the Beatles. In 1969 Taylor moved to California and recorded the album *Sweet Baby James*, which included the single “Fire and Rain.” Both album and single achieved the #3 spot on the Billboard charts. He continued to compose chart-topping music for much of the 1970s and 1980s, while continuing to struggle with drug addiction and mental health concerns. Taylor is known for his support of environmental causes and liberal politics, including a *Vote for Change* tour through American swing states in 2004 with the Dixie Chicks (in support of presidential candidate John Kerry) and numerous concerts and appearances in support of Barack Obama's two presidential campaigns. In 2015 Taylor received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, and he received a Kennedy Center Honor in 2016.

06 SAY SOMETHING

Kendrick Lamar was born in Compton, California, in 1987, to African American parents from Chicago. His father was a member of a

street gang, and Lamar grew up as a beneficiary of welfare and public housing. Lamar was a straight-A student at a public high school in Compton. His first musical heroes were Tupac Shakur and Dr. Dre. At the age of sixteen, Lamar created a mixtape that helped him land a record contract and build his reputation as an emerging West Coast rapper. In 2012 Lamar released his first major-label album, *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, which received great critical success. The following year Lamar went on tour with musician and producer Kanye West, which further boosted Lamar's profile. At the 2014 Grammy Awards he received seven nominations, including Album of the Year, and critics noted that Lamar's musical style was creative and rule breaking; they also praised his storytelling skills and incisive commentary on current events, especially those involving police brutality and police killings of young black men in America. To date, Lamar has won twelve Grammys, and in 2018 he received the Pulitzer Prize for Music—the first musician who did not play jazz or classical music to win the award.

07 SINGING WORDS OF WISDOM

Born in the city of Enugu in southeastern Nigeria in 1977, Adichie's parents were university professors from the Igbo ethnic group. When she was nineteen, Adichie left Nigeria for Philadelphia, where she studied at Drexel University. For the first time, Adichie later remarked, she had to contend with issues of race and of people's assumptions about her because of her skin color. She went on to receive a master's degree in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University, and then a master's in African studies from Yale. She published her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, in 2003, and her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*,

in 2006. Her third novel, *Americanah*, propelled her to mainstream fame in the United States. The novel was selected by the *New York Times* as one of the best books of 2013. In 2017, she published a nonfiction book, a "feminist manifesto" in the form of a letter to a friend discussing how to raise a feminist daughter. Her TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," is one of the top ten most-viewed TED talks. In this speech, Adichie reflects on the fact that, growing up, she educated herself by reading American and British literature, whereas American and British teenagers never read Nigerian literature. She argues that people and cultures are complex and multilayered and should never be limited to one single narrative of identity.

08 POLITICAL MUSIC

Howard Eisberg began performing in coffeehouses in the late 1980s with fellow Kansas City musicians. He has released dozens of CDs and written and recorded hundreds of songs. He retired from a forty-plus-year career as an immigration lawyer in 2017, but was called back into "service" three days later when President Trump's travel ban first took effect. Eisberg now spends much of his time as a songwriter and musician with his band, Howard Iceberg and the Titanics. His dream concert lineup includes The Clash, The Pogues, and Buddy Holly, and he says the best advice he ever got was "Be who you are where you are."

Matt Zupetic served in the US Navy for twenty-three years. He considers himself a liberal progressive, and a music fan of U2, Bruce Springsteen, and even Ted Nugent, though he'd prefer not to hear political commentary from any of them during concerts. "I don't pay

money, especially what it costs now to go to a concert, to sit there and listen to somebody talk politics for 10 or 15 minutes,” Zupetic says. “I look at concerts like escapism, you know? Especially as I get older. I like that I can be 18 again watching my first Rush concert. And I 100 percent believe in freedom of speech. Got it. But damn, bro, I just spent 120 bucks for one ticket. If I want to hear this, I’ll turn CNN on. If you want to give a stump speech, do it at a rally.”

