

"We are the World"

The 1985 charity song "We are the World" was created to combat famine in Africa, but in particular Ethiopia, a sub-Saharan Africa country that was plagued by famine from 1983-1985 and lost over 1 million people. The initial inspiration for the song came from Harry Belafonte, a musician and human rights activist, who was inspired by Band Aid's 1984 "Do They Know it's Christmas" project in the UK. Harry Belafonte wanted to recreate this project with US artists, and the following proceeds were to be donated to "United Support of Artist for Africa (USA for Africa)", a non-profit organization whose mission was to feed the millions of African people affected by the famine crisis. Harry Belafonte and fundraiser Ken Kragen spearheaded the project by including Lionel Richie, Quincy Jones, and Michael Jackson. Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson composed the lyrics and Quincy Jones produced the track with arrangement by Michael Omartian.

In creating the lyrics, it was imperative that the song didn't have the connotation of the US, a first world country, saving all of Africa, a third world continent. The lyrics were intended to appeal to human emotions and make everyone who listened to the song connect to the suffering of their brothers and sisters in Ethiopia. Even though we are all different the lyrics were intended to evoke a tone of unity. This is shown in the lyrics "We are the world, We are the children". As a listener, you are left feeling that no matter where we come from, we are all the same and we are all connected to one another. While our skin color might be different shades, we all bleed red. The song was also a call to action. Instead of standing ideally by, the song's intended purpose was to encourage individuals to take a stance and support the fight to end famine. This is seen in the lyrics "we can't go on pretending day by day that someone, somehow will so make a change". This means that change has to first start with ourselves before we can have collective change.

This song was included in the course to change the viewpoint from the local to the international. At the time, the songs that we were introduced to were music created by African musicians about the struggles in African. This song changes that viewpoint because it was an American song about the famine crisis in Ethiopia and other African countries. This shifted helped posed the question about whether musicians can create music about a culture they do not belong to.

All in all, "We are the World" was massively successful and it raised over 60 million dollars for famine relief.

Yolaine Mfinyom