

THE CLASH AND MASS MEDIA MESSAGES FROM THE ONLY BAND THAT  
MATTERS

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the music of the British punk rock band The Clash through the use of media imagery in popular music in an effort to inform listeners of contemporary news items. I propose to look at the punk rock band The Clash not solely as a first wave English punk rock band but rather as a “news-giving” group as presented during their interview on the Tom Snyder show in 1981. I argue that the band’s use of communication metaphors and imagery in their songs and album art helped to communicate with their audience in a way that their contemporaries were unable to. Broken down into four chapters, I look at each of the major releases by the band in chronological order as they progressed from a London punk band to a globally known popular rock act. Viewing The Clash as a “news giving” punk rock band that inundated their lyrics, music videos and live performances with communication images, The Clash used their position as a popular act to inform their audience, asking them to question their surroundings and “know your rights.”

For Pat and Zach Ahern

*Go Easy, Step Lightly, Stay Free.*

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## PREFACE: THIS IS A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

In March of 2010, I found myself driving home along the New York State Thruway coming back from covering a disastrous town hall meeting for my local newspaper in Rotterdam, NY, that went on for three hours too long. I contemplated my lede for the next day's story anticipating my inevitable anger from outraged residents over my choice of the issue with which to lead the town hall story—town zoning issues or slumlords selling apartments to military personnel. I thought about the hours I would have to work that weekend at my second job at the local Staples outlet and, to top it all off, my lack of social life over the past eight months. I turned on my radio and merged onto the off ramp for Exit 24 and my home in Albany.

I was frustrated, I was 22 and my life resembled that of a 40-year-old beat reporter who was overworked and underpaid. I was living at home, choking on student loans, and reporting on upstate New York politicians who lied to not only my face, but their constituents' as well. And while a year may not be enough time to figure out that newspapers are a dying breed (even at the local level), I was fed up with the long hours I was keeping for minimal pay. After a long day on the job as a reporter I would find myself toeing the company line as a computer specialist at Staples on the weekends, charging to fix computers at a price that would make the most jaded auto mechanic blush.

I was, for all intents and purposes, stuck between one dead-end job and another. It was not what being a college graduate looked like in the brochure. I was young, and I understood that you needed to work hard to go far, but I felt like all my hard work was going into a big black hole while my friends found free time to move out, move to the city and start up pop culture teams for trivia nights at a local pub. Most importantly, I felt lied to. Not about “the real world,”



but rather I had a sinking feeling that I wasn't the only one that loan companies took for a ride just to wind up in an 8x8 square cubicle.

Then I heard Mick Jones through the fuzzy stereo system in my jeep:

The voices in your head are calling. Stop wasting your time, there's nothing coming. Only a fool would think someone could save you. The men at the factory are old and cunning. You don't owe nothing, so boy get runnin. It's the best years of your life they want to steal. (The Clash *London Calling*)

It was 2 a.m. and Mick Jones had just sung me a lullaby of caution— stay on this path I dare you, and you'll be working for the clampdown for the rest of your life. I screamed along with the song as if it were a sacred hymn for everyone below the age of 30. Working the 9-5 plus six hours just leads to grey hairs and old age at the end of the day. The politicians want you tired and obedient— 'cause then you can't think, you can't learn and you can't ask why. It wasn't the first time The Clash kicked my head in, and it surely would not be the last, but for that one moment on the New York State Thruway I knew that I wanted and deserved more in my life than a dozen bylines a week and \$23,000 a year. I was anxious to be out on my own, but I was living in a world where moving out meant selling a kidney on the black market to pay for college debt.

Without The Clash it would be safe to say I would have been socially catatonic at 23. With searing, thoughtful lyrics fired from Joe Strummer; stadium rock-esque riffs from guitarist Mick Jones; reggae-infused bass lines from Paul Simonon and unwavering and tireless drumming from Nicky "Topper" Headon, the music of The Clash came to me at the age of sixteen to make me ask why the world wanted me to play follow the leader. I gained an identity from a shared feeling that there was more to the world than working for a house in the suburbs.

That something was off, that the world was not the way it was sold to me for the majority of my life.

With that said, and after doing further research not only into The Clash but also popular music culture, I can say that I am among those who have taken a mass consumed text and created personal meaning out of it. As I will further argue, to talk about The Clash without talking about their desire to reach out from the rock clubs of London to touch rock audiences worldwide would be a mistake. Much has been written, compiled and spoken about the political impact of The Clash on punk and popular music, but in this thesis I want to look at the dissemination of the politics of The Clash specifically through mass media. Radio stations, television programs, and music videos are all weapons to inform through entertainment, using the emotional reactions of listeners in similar situations as mine as catalysts for change. The music of The Clash is effective because it actively seeks outlets in (the rhetoric of) mass media, driven by the discourse of mass communication and its evolution from the printed word to the infotainment of television. For example, lead singer Joe Strummer acts as a global deejay in “Radio Clash” and “Rock the Casbah,” one of their best-known hits, is not solely about the song being played in one place to a mass of people, but about the song’s ability to spread and infect all corners of society, causing even the military to “wail” to “that crazy Casbah jive.”

Popular music brings people together by means of mass-mediated texts to form new communities of understanding from shared experiences. The Clash embody this sentiment through the replication of specific popular genres—from punk to classic rock—for a new audience. Songs like “White Riot,” “Police on My Back,” “Guns of Brixton” and albums with names like *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, *Sandinista!*, and *Combat Rock* draw their anger from a punk

pedigree, but urge listeners to think before taking action, and to know the consequences of their actions, even if it means moving away from the punk ethos of anarchy, rebellion and destruction.

Lastly, this thesis looks to view The Clash as a “news-giving group” rather than a punk group or even a politically-minded punk act. The music of The Clash is effective 40 years after their breakup because it still transmits daily woes from the streets in broad terms, using universal fears of destruction, death and government interference with the lives of individuals as catalysts to make fans think and speak up about the world that surrounds them on a daily basis. Instead of screaming “no future” The Clash ask “What are we gonna do now?” They send a telegram to the world that “war has been declared” and that words, not swords, will lead the charge against apathy and apocalypse.

## INTRODUCTION: “LISTEN”

During an interview on the *Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder* in June of 1981, Snyder asked the members of the punk band The Clash why they preferred to be called a “news-giving” group rather than a rock and roll group. While Strummer and company played to the audience, giving short and sometimes snarky responses (“too many songs have been written about love already—subject’s covered”), their performance of “The Magnificent Seven,” with its references to the workday doldrums, daytime television, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, explained to listeners what Topper Headon and Mick Jones said in the interview: “[Headon]We're just saying life is boring...[Jones] so we're trying to make it interesting” (quoted in *The Clash Live: Revolution Rock*).

I propose to look at The Clash not solely as a first wave English punk rock band but rather as a “news-giving” group as presented during their interview on the Tom Snyder show in 1981. I argue that the band member’s use of communication metaphors and imagery in their songs and album art helped to communicate with their audience in a way that their contemporaries were not able to do. While some may argue that the use of mass media images in their music was unintentional or not motivated by a purposeful agenda, I believe that this use of the news and its various incarnations is what set them apart from the nihilistic style of other bands during the first wave of punk. Viewing The Clash as a “news giving” punk rock band that inundated their lyrics, music videos and live performances with communication images, I perceive an alternative form of punk rock—less about cynical anger than about telling the audience to “know your rights.”

## Tuning Up: A brief history of The Clash

In 1976 Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Keith Levine were brought together by manager Bernie Rhodes to create a band on par with Malcolm McLaren's Sex Pistols after the explosion of punk in London in the mid-1970s.<sup>1</sup> Touring throughout 1976 and releasing their self-titled debut album *The Clash* alongside drummer Terry "Tory" Chimes in 1977, Nicky "Topper" Headon would later be brought in to take over percussion duties at the end of the recording session.<sup>2</sup> From 1977 onward the quartet would release four studio albums including their classic third album *London Calling* (1979) and its follow-up *Sandinista!* in 1980 and *Combat Rock* in 1982. Known popularly for the singles "Train in Vain," "Radio Clash," "Rock the Casbah," and "Should I Stay or Should I Go?," The Clash moved outside the confines of the punk rock genre and explored other popular music styles including reggae and hip-hop. Five years later after critical success in both the US and UK, a mixture of infighting and bad management from Rhodes would lead to the firing of Jones and a heroin-addicted Headon. Strummer and Simonon would move forward with The Clash Mark Two and release the album *Cut the Crap* in 1985. Simonon and Strummer would tour through 1985 culminating in a "busking tour" of Britain. While each of the members of The Clash would go on to form other bands (most notably Jones's Big Audio Dynamite and Strummer's Latino Rockabilly War and even later Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros), none approach the same level of success in terms of political awareness and the use of mass communications in the punk rock style.

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Levine is credited as a part of the musicians brought together by Rhodes to create what would become The Clash in 1976 but would leave soon after as a product of in-fighting. Levine would go onto create Public Image Ltd. alongside Sex Pistols front man Johnny Rotten in 1978 (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 65).

<sup>2</sup> Terry Chimes would leave after the recording of *The Clash* due to "artistic differences" with the rest of the band ("JOE: Terry, as he later admitted, got into music so he would be able to afford a Lamborghini sports car. He wasn't ready to be thrown in with this bunch of lunatic, rabid dogs"). Chimes would return during the Casbah Club and *Combat Rock* tour dates in lieu of a drug-addicted Headon (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 90).

“This is Radio Clash using aural ammunition.” Rebel media messages

In discussing The Clash as a “news-giving” band rather than a “news-making” band, I consider the group’s use of communication images to broaden the range of the punk rock formula while informing a large mass of people about inconsistencies of the world around them. In relation to the music of The Clash, I apply the ideas of mass communication theorists Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman and their ideas on information and its dissemination. While written in a pre-internet, pre-punk rock world, the works of both authors are relevant to this investigation of the music of The Clash. McLuhan’s ideas on mass communication, in particular, the “global village” and the fast-paced movement of information across borders around the world can be seen in multiple Clash songs and album artwork. The Clash’s musical style resonated with English punks as much as suburbanites in America on topics of nuclear proliferation, the Sandinistas of Nicaragua and nuclear fallout. The Clash want to use mass media outlets as a space to disseminate rebellious ideas, making references to pirate radio in 1960s England in “Capital Radio” and “pirate satellites” in “Radio Clash.” Forty years later, the music is still accessible and relevant to a new generation of fans and musicians globally. The use of specific media outlets helps to transmit the message but there is clearly a second level of consumption of the text by the audience member that McLuhan does not take into account. Where McLuhan saw the transmission and consumption of information in the electronic age through television and telephone wires, it became possible to consume music more quickly. The music created by The Clash alludes to subversive transmissions, with the creation and mass use of the Internet in the 1990s, popular music is now replayed for a new generation outside the confines of traditional airwaves. Music fans listen to songs repeatedly, dissecting the lyrics,

while casual listeners consume the text at face value. It is one of the issues at play within this thesis: Does the medium really matter more than the music? Does repetition matter in a society that quickly consumes information, soon to be forgotten as new texts emerge? Can a major label act be politically minded, taken seriously, and make substantial change? Considering the consumption of music by Clash fans decades later we can comprehend the impact The Clash had across generational boundaries and how popular music shapes everyday life. The broad ideas that are presented by The Clash can be interpreted in such a way that even the casual listener (let alone a devout fan) could make a connection to the news items present—or even re-interpret them in their own time and space years later.

#### “One More Dub:” Genre Mixing

The Clash infused the fast-paced styling of punk rock with a wide range of influences that incorporated reggae and rock and roll as well as early rap artists from the late 1970s. The broad range of influences not only allowed the band to pick and choose across genres for inspiration but also create a varied fan base in the process. Each of the “classic” members of the band—Strummer, Jones, Headon and Simonon—brought a different musical style to the table to create a robust sound that mixed arena rock, bubblegum pop, reggae and rockabilly. Strummer and Jones had previous experience in the London music scene. Strummer was the lead singer of the pub-rock band The 101’ers while Jones was a part of the early punk outfit London SS and a fan of glam rockers Mott the Hoople. Headon was well-verse in jazz before becoming the full-time drummer for The Clash in 1977.<sup>3</sup> Simonon came from an art school background like

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<sup>3</sup> Headon previously auditioned for The Clash in 1976, but turned them down to play with the soul group The G.I.’s during a tour of U.S. air force bases. He would later take the offer in 1977, playing his first official gig at The Roundhouse on April 10 (Gilbert 153).

Strummer and Jones but lacked the musical chops early on in the band's history (In the band's documentary *Westway to the World*, Simonon recalls how he painted the names of the chords on the fretboard of his bass to learn them) (Letts *Westway to the World*). Even as a novice bass guitarist however Simonon was influenced by the sounds of Reggae from growing up in Brixton. The spectrum of sounds incorporated by the band pushed them outside the confines of punk. The Clash would cover "Police and Thieves by Junior Murvin on their self-titled debut and by 1979 The Clash covered early rock and roll tracks from the likes of Danny Ray and the Revolutionaries and Vince Taylor on *London Calling*.

The band members also incorporated supporting acts outside the punk culture during live shows throughout their career that included (but were not limited to) Bo Diddley, The Sugar Hill Gang, Lee Dorsey and The English Beat. It is an integral part to their message, by attaching themselves to earlier and emerging genres The Clash can express frustrations to a larger audience through popular music. It also creates a direct line to earlier forms of rebellion and associates modern day problems to the issues of the past highlighted in the roots of rock and roll. The band frames itself as a part of rock history by building upon the past instead of ignoring outright in favor of fashionable genres.

Whether in the use of murals of riot police in album art, the addition of Morse code to the end of "London Calling," or television broadcasts in the music video for "Radio Clash," they were able to use communication outlets and varying types of texts to a high degree of jarring potency. The Clash not only championed causes against the near-fascist leanings of the National Front or the politics of Margaret Thatcher in England but also about the revolutions of South America and a global message of unification against the powers that be. Their popularity allowed them access to pop charts and radio play that allowed for the repeated transmission of their ideas



to a mass audience. To better understand how The Clash used mass media to their advantage, analysis of both cultural trends and popular music theory must be investigated.

### Studying the Charts: Theoretical Foundation

Alongside the theories of McLuhan and Postman I also draw on the writings of cultural scholars whose works help to explain the music of The Clash in regards to the London punk scene, popular music performance, popular youth culture trends and the recording industry. Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* creates a framework to examine the symbolic origins of punk as cultural products ranging from Nazi paraphernalia to Rastafarianism are re-worked and re-imagined within the youth space of punk. Hebdige's arguments rely heavily on the image rather than the message that is being presented. He analyzes the fashion of the punk subculture in late 1970s London outside the music that was at the heart of communal activities within the movement. While his work helps to frame my argument other sources must be used investigate how youth culture interacts with popular music to create their community and spaces.

A majority of popular press and music criticism on The Clash centers on their political stance. Pat Gilbert's *Passion is the Fashion: the Real Story of the Clash* (2004) gives a detailed history of The Clash and the inconsistencies of the group as they create an image outside of the confines of their middle-class, art-school beginnings. Gilbert's writing helps to contextualize my argument through the vantage point of research based on interviews with band members, associates and roadies. Marcus Gray takes a narrower view than Gilbert in *Route 19 Revisited: The Clash and London Calling* (2010) as he writes a detailed history of the creation and marketing of The Clash's third album *London Calling*. Gray analyzes the lyrics of each track as they pertain to particular news stories and historical events solidified into popular music by

Strummer and Jones. Finally, Mal Peachy and the Clash's co-authored *The Clash* collects interviews used in Don Lett's documentary *Westway to the World* with images of single and album artwork, photographs of the band and merchandizing tie-ins created for tours and appearances. All of these works provide a great background on The Clash, their origins in the London punk scene and their demise, however there is an emphasis on the static texts outside the music itself. While the visual image of the band and their recordings are important in framing The Clash as "the only band that matters" it presupposes the effects of their music on a listening public. The image of a transistor radio on the cover of the "Radio Clash" single goes hand-in-hand with the music; it is the relationship to the appropriated image/text/news event and the song that was created to highlight the event that drives home the message that is being conveyed by the group. A single by The Clash—vinyl and all—has to be consumed to get the full impact of the story being presented.

Recent academic publications on The Clash and punk rock in general look to a broad range of themes in cultural studies including Marxist theory, gender, ethnicity and race. Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay's *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* (2011) includes not only academic works on the relationship between race and punk but also writings by punk rockers and fans that provides insight into the music from the perspective of race and ethnicity. Antonio D'Ambrosio's edited volume *Let Fury Have the Hour: the Punk Rock Politics of Joe Strummer* (2004) compiles the work of academics as well as popular writers to analyze the politics of The Clash and lead singer Joe Strummer in particular. Both volumes collect interviews and analysis of The Clash decades after their breakup but, again, hold the music apart from the styles and fashion they inspired. The emotion created by the music clearly had an

impact on these authors however it seems to take a backseat—elevating the image of what the band meant visually rather than viewing the music as a part of the equation.

Discussing the power of popular music I look to Simon Frith's works *Sound Effects: Youth Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'N' Roll* and *Performing Rites* to flesh out my argument. Frith writes about popular music not only as a commodity but also about the relationship of popular music to youth culture and the individual's emotional response as one interacts with a popular text. In *Sound Effects* Frith analyzes the production and consumption of popular music and its relationship to youth culture (7). A key point I take from Frith is the idea of using common, everyday language and elevating it past the ordinary—creating an “emotional currency” that encourages people to “refuse the mundane” (37-38). In *Performing Rites* Frith discusses the power the protest song develops in repetition and dissemination (165). He also argues the importance of the experience of listening to music as it changes time and space, removing an experience outside of the ordinary (152-157).

The Clash worked within multiple modes of communication through concert backdrops, album art and the lyrics in their songs. While a strictly textual analysis of their lyrics only shows one part of the picture, the same can be said for looking at only the fashionable posturing of the punk culture as well. Songs are not only about words but the personal experiences that are intertwined with it by the listener (Frith 164). It is not enough that the music of The Clash invoke specific meanings within their fans but also how they work to inspire a new generation of popular acts to be politically minded and react to their surroundings. Frith's argument shows how the individual interacts with music on an emotional level however we need to also study how this music inspired later acts to be politically minded. In my examination of The Clash I

look at album artwork, song lyrics, interviews and fan interpretations to explain the depth and significance of The Clash's discography decades later.

### Conveying Politics through Popular Music

The music of The Clash is often analyzed by scholars for its political nature and the band is often studied within the context of the British punk movement alongside the Sex Pistols. In the beginning, both Rhodes and McLaren were connected to the clothing style found in specialty boutiques in London and used them as a staging ground to recruit into their rock groups. While both bands helped to promote individuality and independence from social norms each band was the creation of managers: Rhodes managed The Clash while McLaren had the Sex Pistols. While the Sex Pistols shocked listeners with snarky and angry lyrics about modern culture while wearing outfits created by McLaren at his punk fashion shop SEX, Rhodes instructed The Clash to be politically-minded (Gilbert 99). The Clash's music is an interesting combination of managerial creations and personal reflections on the issues of the day. Rhodes instructed The Clash to present their political ideals not to connect to a specific group (or even punks on the whole) but because he hoped to use his hand-picked band to make money and gain the same type of notoriety as McLaren.

As a band, they were named "Rebels with a Cause" by Rolling Stone in April of 1980 and "the only band that matters" by label CBS. Popular writers have stated that The Clash must be contextualized within a music culture of the 1970s and 1980s when artists did not interact in debates on politics but rather reacted to issues as they appeared. Pat Gilbert, for instance, cites Simonon and Strummer's 1978 appearance on *Something Else* to discuss the "disillusionment" of youth culture alongside Labour Party MP Joan Lestor (Gilbert 178-179). The discussion revealed

articulate and politically cognizant musicians who verbalized their fears of the National Front movement, racism in England and the problem with party politics.

I contend that The Clash was aware of the pitfalls of signing to a major label, but were willing to do so in order to forward their own ideas, even if those ideas did not run parallel to the outlook of many first (and second) wave punks. Rhodes may have hand-picked the members of the band in hopes of creating his own version of the Sex Pistols but in doing so also gave the four members of The Clash an outlet to speak their minds. Their contract with CBS allowed them access to a broader audience and the opportunity to work inside a system to change societal norms through the message of their music. Like many musicians before them, The Clash sought to move up in the world, with all the money and fame associated with such mobility. In doing so, they would be able to talk about the perils of the world they knew and came from. While this goes against the ideas of the “do-it-yourself” punk rock ethos that their music would later help to inspire, it allowed them to have a broader reach. With the connection to CBS, The Clash balanced political substance with punk style, working within a company to make a hit record but at the same time promoting a left-leaning ideology. It is this mass-dissemination of political ideas, as fashionable or otherwise, that can be consumed by later generations who identify with the punk movement.

The use of communication images by The Clash alongside left-leaning politics created a blueprint for future bands who took up social or political causes. The music created by The Clash is not strictly punk either. From the angry rants of Rage Against the Machine, to the Springsteen-esque Gaslight Anthem and the anarcho-punks Against Me!, major label acts have mixed styles and politics with the anger of their predecessors to create major label releases that bring a message to a larger public rather than simply “sell out.” The outspoken nature of The Clash set

up musicians to sound off—from U2 to Lady Gaga. For example, the 2004 release of *Rock Against Bush Vol. 1* in April and *Rock Against Bush Vol. 2* in August brought like-minded alternative acts together to vent frustrations and work against the presidential campaign of President George W. Bush. While the campaign ultimately failed with the re-election of President Bush in November, it showed a sizeable effort to bring popular punk acts together under the same banner to influence and connect with the record buying public. The Clash and their releases from 1977 to 1982 set a blueprint for applying popular causes to popular music and relating to their audience a desire for meaningful change. As a way to look at The Clash's transition from the London punk scene to the global stage and the wider promotion of their ideas, I look at the history of the band through an analysis of their major releases in chronological order, singling out specific cuts from each album to further my arguments.

#### The set list: A Chapter Overview

In my first chapter “A Riot of My Own,” I will look at the use of reggae and rock to present images of the tumultuous England in the 1970s through the genre of punk rock in the songs “White Riot” and “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” from The Clash's self-titled debut album (1977). Both songs embody the turmoil of an England whose government has turned towards the extreme right and express the need for political action from the new generation. While “White Riot” has Joe Strummer urging listeners to create “a riot of their own” in response to the riots of the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976, “(White Man)...” presents an alternative to violent action against the powers that be, suggesting a peaceful resolution between both black and white youths who were resisting the new wave of politics in England at the time (Letts *Westway to The World*). The two songs, situated on the same album, create a juxtaposition

that promotes the anarchic style of early punk as well a broadening spectrum of other musical traditions. The two songs incorporate differing theories of rebellion and respond to oppressive powers. Both songs also present a unity between races and express issues of the day in a broad far-reaching message that stands in sharp contrast to the nihilism of the Sex Pistols. If The Clash are not asking for a violent uprising on the track then the “white riot” of a punk show becomes a space where fans can communicate and react to the fast and loud sounds on stage through group participation of gobbing, smashing, into one and other and heckling the performers. The concert hall then becomes the space for rebellion and consumption of alternative cultural modes while providing a space to act out frustrations and aggressions. I employ the recent riots in London to frame my analysis of these two songs and the question of whether a “riot of our own” is still possible for white youth against the dominant structure of the powers that be. The Clash would move away from the strictly punk mentality in later releases but it is apparent even in early releases that they are aware of the narrow frame of the punk genre with the application and appropriation of reggae to flesh out their sound.

In chapter two “Don’t Touch That Dial,” I explore the criticism of commercial radio and mass communication outlet control and shaping of the radio industry in the songs “Capital Radio One” and “Capital Radio Two.” Joe Strummer responds to the state of music in 1970s England through government broadcasting stations and sings about a history of crackdowns by the government on pirate radio stations. In “Capital Radio Two,” a re-recording of “Capital Radio One,” the band thinks up a strategy to get on the radio by mockingly submitting to the disco styles of the time after “analyzing the pop charts” to see how to best take care of the lack of punk and reggae on popular radio (The Clash *Super Black Market Clash*). The songs take jabs at deejays of the time and in the original version of “Capital Radio One” the song begins with an

interview of the band members about the current state of music before going into the track. Both versions of the song “Capital Radio” present a society that is lacking a true voice, where music is a tool to be used by the state. Sarcastic as it is serious, it calls for a need for change in the distribution of ideas, and challenges the practice of broadcasting only watered-down versions of opposing viewpoints. The music and its message are shaped as much by the media that transmits them as by artist intent or audience reception. It is an experiment as the clash argue that a message in a song can still reach a youth audience with less jarring melodies and its mass, repeated transmission.

In my third chapter “London Calling” I look at the merging of popular music, newspaper headlines and historical documents to create a new form of news casting on the album *London Calling*. Specifically, I look at the songs “London Calling” and “Guns of Brixton.” Both the name of the album (*London Calling*) and the title song are a reference to the BBC’s World Service—re-appropriating the name and its embedded meanings for a new generation and a new audience. The song, and much of the album, creates an image of a world on the edge of chaos from environmental, political and end of time prophesies. As a nearly 40-year-old text, the record should be perceived as a response to a historically particular feeling of doom—musing on the threat of nuclear war, global warming and global floods. Alongside the two songs mentioned above I will look at *The Armagideon Times*, a concert program produced by The Clash that explained song tracks, and appropriated the look of a fanzine to promote the band during their UK leg of the 16 Tons Tour.

In my fourth chapter “This is Radio Clash,” I will look at the impact of *Sandinista!* (1981), the music video for the single “Radio Clash” (1981) and the final album of the classic lineup of The Clash—*Combat Rock* (1982). During their two week stint at Bonds in Times



Square in 1981 the group adopts and incorporates new ideas from the streets of New York City via the emerging style of hip-hop. The band uses news stories and current trends in their music, keeping the message topical while being broad enough to affect listeners across temporal and spatial boundaries. As a follow-up to *Sandinista!*, *Combat Rock* adds a global commentary on repressive regimes in “Rock the Casbah” and “Know Your Rights.” The struggle to listen to popular music while under repressive regimes, as highlighted in “Rock the Casbah,” is still an issue today. In both the Aceh province of Indonesia and in Iraq, youth are targeted for individual music and fashion choices as they deviate from conservative religious and political institutions. While both governments and militant organizations work to control the populace and their listening habits, popular music is still able to breach gaps through its transmission and consumption in underground communities—to spread understanding instead of limiting it.

The “news” as presented by The Clash gave new life to punk rock and made it acceptable and advisable to look outside current music trends for inspiration, encouraging listeners to gain deeper insight into the world around them on a regular basis. The success of The Clash may have been motivated by a need to make a band as successful as the Sex Pistols, but at the same time that success allowed them to create their own space that allowed for an open-minded look at the effects of global communication, favoring unity over close-minded cynicism. The fears and frustrations presented in the music of The Clash are still fought by fans of popular music residing in conservative cultures. From punks in Indonesia to emo kids in Iraq, popular music is a battleground for personal politics and style in everyday life.

### “Time is Tight:” Scope of Study

I am aware as both a researcher and a fan that there are specific constraints on my own view of The Clash as a band. I have never been able to see them perform but I am able to look at the progression of the band from London to a worldwide audience as a historical text. I can see the flaws and the frays in the band as a whole rather than in real time and I have also seen interviews with band members post-breakup that changes my viewpoint of the band. In doing research into their recorded releases there is little I am able to say about their albums that has not already been presented by rock critics or academics as it pertains to the political viewpoints and the band’s influences. *London Calling* in particular has been lauded by rock critics and added to multiple “Best of” lists, topping “The Best Albums of the 1980s” and in the top 10 of “The 500 Greatest Albums of all time” by *Rolling Stone*. There is little I can say about the popular effects of the albums on punk culture and popular music in general. However, my contribution to the discussion pertains to how they framed their sound and style within the context of mass media and radio airwaves in particular. It cannot be stressed enough that The Clash named songs and albums after the radio as an act of appropriation. The image of a radio and other mass media texts explains the influence of popular music and more importantly popular music’s transmission. It is both entertainment and a gathering of vital information to create a worldview from one’s living room. Whether it is a drawing of 1950s teenagers listening to the modern classics on the cover of the single for “London Calling” or a picture of an amp for the cover of “Complete Control,” the appearance of images of mass communication devices and the framing of songs as rebel transmissions from the frontlines sets The Clash apart from their punk rock contemporaries.

The Clash's message, in the end, is about how popular music can bring people together to change their surroundings. The merging of many styles of popular sounds broadens their fanbase while urging to work to change the culture from the street level. As people come together under the same roof to dance to the popular sound, entertainment becomes the catalyst for innovation.

## CHAPTER I. "A RIOT OF MY OWN"

*"I think people ought to know that we're anti-fascist, we're anti-violence, we're anti-racist and we're pro-creative. We're against ignorance. I don't have to get drunk every night and go around kicking people and smashing up phone boxes [...] We're dealing with subjects we really believe to matter. We're hoping to educate any kid who comes to listen to us."* –Joe Strummer, 1976 (quoted in Murison).

In the wake of the August 2011 riots across the United Kingdom, *New Musical Express* editor Krissi Murison wrote in *The Guardian* about the reprinting of The Clash's first interview in *NME*.

Later, as London smouldered, the irony of The Clash— a band forever associated with riot and protest— being on the cover of *NME* again was all too obvious. But while it would have been satisfying to draw parallels between The Clash's revolutionary tub-thumping of 1976 and the incendiary events of the week, the reality wasn't so neat. The basic facts of being young, broke and bored in London and beyond might not have changed much since those days, but everything else Mick Jones and Joe Strummer described has...(Murison).

Murison goes on to describe how the "dead-eyed, mob-like and opportunistic" rioters of 2011 have changed since the riots of the 1976 Notting Hill Carnivals that Joe Strummer sang of in "White Riot." In her piece, Murison said that musicians today are less likely to embrace political movements or be identified as political acts as The Clash did in 1976: "Unless someone is prepared to stand up and start screaming soon, this generation is in danger of losing its voice altogether" (Murison).

The U.K. riots of 2011 create an image of a new "white riot." But as Murison points out, while The Clash pushed for "a riot of their own" in the 1976 single, a stagnant culture that is still

based on racial boundaries remains, with the police shooting of 29-year-old Mark Duggan as the vehicle for the most recent string of rioting. Even with the catalyst of the Duggan shooting, the riots devolved into mobs as participant's looted stores out of general frustration or greed rather than protest over racial boundaries or just plain racism. The riots then became something else, instead of a "White Riot" against the powers that be, Murison states that The Clash say nothing for the disenfranchised youths of 2012. Without getting into an argument about "kids these days" versus "the old guard" that Murison contends there is a division between the rabble-rousing of Joe Strummer and Co. in 1976 and the musicians of today's England. Singer/songwriter Frank Turner is criticized by Murison for his lack of desire to be politically minded ("I'm uncomfortable being called political. I don't want to be divisive."), while Alex Turner of the Arctic Monkeys tells Murison that he is unsure of what he would achieve in showing an opinion "on what's going on" (quoted in Mursion). By invoking The Clash it is not so much the validity of their political message in 2012 but the desire to *have* a message that is at issue in Murison's critique.

"White Riot" tells punk rockers to fight for themselves like their black brethren. There is still a definite difference between why one battles the powers that be, however. The "white riot" is a communal activity; by bringing people together through the violence of a punk show there is the ability to create a conversation among audience members as they smash themselves against one another, smash beer bottles and spit on their favorite guitar heroes. Emotions run high at a show and create a space where fans can gain a better understanding of physical and mental boundaries in everyday life and create a space for organization. In this chapter I look at both the sound and style of The Clash's first album, specifically "(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais" and "White Riot" which pushed towards a unified front against the status quo by bringing

angry and disenfranchised youth together under the banner of punk. Through music, The Clash wanted to create a “White Riot,” and the punk culture of the late 1970s created a space where frustrated youths of England could react emotionally to their surroundings to escape the everyday—they only asked if there was some way to use this energy to inform the audience as well by venting their own fears and frustrations, waiting to see what their audience would say in return (Walsh 32).

### The Appropriation of Reggae and White Rebellion

The rising unemployment of the summer of 1976 fueled tensions between young black youths, police, and members of the emerging National Front. In the midst of this political climate, Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon and manager Bernie Rhodes attended the Notting Hill Carnival. The carnival, a space that is “one of the few places where England’s blacks can relax on their own terms in an otherwise cold, hostile climate,” became a battleground on the third day of the event as black youth fought with police, ending with 456 injured and 60 arrested (Savage 160-161). The 1976 Notting Hill Carnival, the ensuing riots and the events of the day became fuel for Clash songs, posters, concert backdrops and album artwork. Strummer said that the song “White Riot” came from the events that unfolded at the carnival because of his realization that “it [the riot] wasn’t our fight. It was the one day of the year when blacks were going to get their own back against the really atrocious way that the police behaved” (Savage 161). The song expresses ideological control through education and class boundaries that divide white and black youths into polar opposites. “White Riot” stands as a first generation punk song to combine a critique of structural racism with the timid image of white bourgeois society. between anti-racist sentiments

of punk culture and the barriers that prevent the rebellion seen at the Notting Hill Carnival happening within white culture. With a fire alarm and driving guitars the song attacks—

White Riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

White riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

Black people got a lot of problems

But they don't mind throwing a brick

White People go to school

Where they teach you how to be thick

And everybody's doing

Just what they're told to

And nobody wants

To go to jail!

White Riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

White riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

All the power's in the hands

Of the people rich enough to buy it

While we walk the streets

Too chicken to even try it

Everybody's doing

Just what they're told to

Nobody wants

To go to Jail!

White Riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

White riot, I wanna riot

White riot, a riot of my own

Are you taking over

Or are you taking orders?

Are you going backwards

Or are you going forwards? (Strummer, Jones "White Riot")

The song directly confronts a punk audience with questions piled upon sneeringly fast chants: what is stopping *you* from making an impact today? The mixture of education that is making fans "thick" can also be used as a catalyst for rebellion but everyone is worried about a stepping out of line for fear of being social outcasts, or more importantly, going to jail. The song ends with a repetition of the chorus but not before Strummer gives us one last thing to think about—"are you taking over, or are you taking orders? Are you going backwards or are you going forwards?" The song is unlike most punk songs of its time: while violently fast and perfect for the smash-your-teeth-in style of early punk rock in England, yet also transmits the desire to do more and use this growing punk community for physical change. The "white riot" is used as a way to transmit and understand specific emotions of anger and resentment at not standing up for one's rights in the face of ideological and economic repression ("All the power's in the hands/ Of the people rich enough to buy it/While we walk the streets/Too chicken to even try it"). It also gives the listener



an outlet, encouragement to seek out “a riot of [his/her] own,” putting the desire for change directly in the hands of the individual listener. While Strummer was aware that the riots during the Notting Hill carnivals were not his own he was driven to respond to why he was out of place during the riots.

Coming from middle-class backgrounds (as former art college students) Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon and Mick Jones understood the boundaries set up by societal norms that discouraged the same kind of rebellion within their own community. Strummer’s background—son of a government worker and former public school student—shaped his frustration with “white” culture and its inability to respond to social unrest with the same violence and fast action as his “black” contemporaries. Jones stated in the band's documentary *Westway to the World* (2000) that his reason for going to college was the lure of grant money, which he used to buy equipment to start his own band. Simonon grew up in Brixton on a healthy diet of reggae and attended the Byam Shaw School of Art in Notting Hill Gate (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 43-45). As Strummer discusses education and retaliation he not only explains to the audience that white culture and black culture are bordered off, but he also expresses the desire to have the freedom to violently rebel as a middle class kid, urging on those in similar situations as well. As he sings, Strummer calls out white youth for being educated to fall in line and fear the repercussions of the state as well.

According to Kevin C. Dunn, this song is a commentary on the inability of protests to create substantial change (Dunn 276). Writing about an anti-war protest he attended during the lead-up to the Iraq War in 2003, Dunn talks about the “myth” of the anti-war protest as part of the reasons why the United States left Vietnam in the 1970s, and how modern protests mimic earlier movements with this myth in mind. Dunn states that he is unsure if The Clash were of a

pro-rioting mentality but states that they were clearly past peaceful resistance (277). While this viewpoint delivers a response to the inability to change doctrine in the short-term it also brings up the question of how effective violence can be as a catalyst for change. Long-term investment in violent rebellion shows mixed results. Both the events in Palestine and Northern Ireland that transpired through paramilitary organizations and violent riots have only propagated violence between factions. “White Riot” calls for a response to frustrations of youth rebellion along the boundary of race. The violent imagery that is presented by The Clash in “White Riot” is a product of the punk culture that spawned the band but at its core is a call to come together, to create a “riot” of our own. Punk shows provide outlets for the explosive, pent-up fury of punks and “White Riot” transmits a call to actively resist culture and come together to create a vigorous response to one’s surroundings. If we can control and adapt our emotions at the concert hall during a punk show for something greater, something meaningful and past the fashionable posing, then there is a chance to beat that system of control. On the other hand if people favor posing and fashionable resistance over violent action, popular music can still be a space to engage and discuss subcultural values and ideas.

“But they don’t mind throwing a brick.” Appropriating West Indian Culture

The self-titled debut of The Clash incorporates the sound of punk rock contemporaries such as the Sex Pistols and The Damned with artistic renderings of photos from the Notting Hill Carnival and songs that discuss topics ranging from Americanization (“I’m So Bored with the U.S.A.”), to music critics (“Garageland”) to the lack of an identity within the punk movement (“What’s My Name”) alongside the topic of race relations presented in “(White Man)…” and “White Riot.” For a generation living in Britain in the 1970s, this album was a rallying cry

against societal norms and the lack of an affirmative identity. Though they themselves came out of the art colleges and middle-class suburbs, the sounds of The Clash appropriate the culture surrounding reggae and working-class black culture in place of their own. As Hebdige states, reggae had a political bite contemporary white music lacked and gave punks a “tangible form to their alienation” that threatened cultural norms and was adapted to modern-day struggles for bands like The Clash (38). “Reggae’s blackness was proscriptive. It was an alien essence, a foreign body which implicitly threatened mainstream British culture from within and as such it resonated with punk’s adopted values— ‘anarchy,’ ‘surrender’ and ‘decline’” (39). Hebdige points out that the association of reggae with the burgeoning punk culture helped to mark the otherwise white, middle-class movement. The association of reggae with punk helped to subvert cultural norms for youth looking for a voice outside the cry of “no future” that Johnny Rotten sang in “Anarchy in the UK.”

For The Clash, the incorporation of reggae numbers such as “Police and Thieves” mixed the fast-paced style of punk with the bass-heavy sounds of reggae. Whereas the Sex Pistols looked at a world where there was “no future,” in the first song on The Clash’s United States debut (“Clash City Rockers”), there are references not only to David Bowie and Gary Glitter but also to deejay Prince Far I. The addition of this well-known reggae deejay further delineates The Clash from other rock acts and gives a hint of racial equality and a cultural grounding. The use of dub and reggae by bands such as The Slits and The Clash incorporates the sound of West Indian immigrants in the same way that skinheads appropriated West Indian culture to help revive working-class culture (Hebdige 56). Unlike the skinhead culture of the UK, who restricted the association with reggae and ska to music, the punks used reggae to mark themselves as other. While the skinheads had a uniform that built upon the standardization of factory work, the punks

used the style of reggae to create individuality, using reggae and dub as a base to formulate a political opinion. Like the mods and beats before them, punks applied the alienation of black culture via reggae and built a community of like-minded individuals who understood the same codes within the texts. In contrast, glam rock and disco deliberately removed the black influence of earlier generations (and the political connections therein) from their music (56). The Clash took the style of punk far beyond the superficial fashion statements and posing of the London scene and injected reggae and dub directly into their work, far from the original connections (which I will discuss further in chapter four). While the two movements are as different as they are similar, The Clash championed the reggae and Rasta influences in their music and used images from the Notting Hill riots in their concert backdrops. The connection of punks to their Rasta influences showed up in fashion with clothing emblazoned with messages such as “Dub,” “Heavy Manners” and “Police and Thieves” while Bob Marley’s song “Punky Reggae Party” connected The Clash, The Jam and other punk acts to one of the most prominent reggae acts of the time (Jones 218).

“Are you going backwards or are you going forwards:” Race and Punk Posturing

The creation of large events such as Rock Against Racism (1978) transmitted the message to mass audiences across the UK while cementing what The Clash stood for, contextualizing their message within a specific performance. As David Widgery states in an excerpt from *Beating Time* punk was complete anarchy and was created out of the same social problems that birthed the National Front and needed to be grounded in a message so that fascists could not co-opt the nihilism and anger for their own hateful speech (174). Image can only go so far without an underlying message and as Paul Simonon states in *Search and Destroy*, the

message of The Clash's music is to comment on the lack of message within punk's symbols. Simonon, who lived in Brixton and Ladbroke Grove, talks about growing up around reggae and black culture.

I mean, like, we play reggae in our sets and kids come along to our concerts—and some of them are National Front kids—and they like The Clash, and when we play reggae, it's sort of like turning them on to black music—which sort of helps lead them away from that racist feeling they might have. Which is like changing them. Also, from what we've done, it's made loads of kids that would normally go around wrecking up streets and fucking up cars, form groups. They're doing something creative, which I think is really important—and they're doing it and enjoying it. (Klein 170)

Simonon believes that Clash concerts or events such as the Rock Against Racism concert at Victoria Park in April 1978 encourages active consumption of the political messages within punk rock songs. There is active consumption in the attendance of a punk show as it brings people together. Album art and concert backdrops further this by reprinting the news of the day in alternative spaces. Most importantly, as in “Punky Reggae Party,” several different bands come together to celebrate, not fight, as one unified group. What this means then is that the sound of punk, with its fast hit-and-run mentality, creates a specific emotional response within the listener that sets the music upon the body, a space where feelings of the self, social interaction and cultural histories all interact and battle for supremacy (McClary 33). Mick Jones states in an early Clash interview with *Sniffin' Glue* in September 1976, in response to the violence of the punk movement.

I definitely think it [violence at shows] could escalate but the alternative is for people to vent their frustrations through music, or be a painter or poet or whatever you wanna be. Vent your frustrations, otherwise it's just like clocking in and clocking out...clock in at the 100 Club, everyone comes in, everyone clocks out, it ain't no different. ( Walsh 30)

The ability of music to create a space where one is able to express one's internal feelings about the world is powerful and can be easily misunderstood. As Strummer states in *Westway to the World*, "White Riot" was appropriated by the National Front and neo-Nazi groups as a white power anthem; The Clash's participation in Rock Against Racism helped to redirect the encoded message of their music away from narrow racist sentiments.

While swastikas and Nazi paraphernalia were used as a part of fashion and camp by punks, the cultural relationship with these symbols came into conflict with punks and ultraconservative political movements such as the National Front. As Roger Sabin points out, the music of The Clash was not intended to be racist—though both "White Riot" and "(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais" were appropriated by the NF alongside "White Noise" by Stiff Little Fingers. Nazi symbolism in bands such as Joy Division (a reference itself to a forced prostitution regiment in the Nazi army), Siouxsie and the Banshees and Sham 69 each created a space of ambiguity of true political leanings that needed to be explained. The level of interpretation in early punk songs that could be read as ultraconservative politics meant that bands had to explain themselves or clarify their messages, as The Clash did with their connections to the Anti-Nazi League (Sabin 58). Punks consumed particular cultures in relationship to their own ideas and what was "hip." For many of the first-wave bands of England this would include the use of Nazi

images under the guise of fashion, art or just plain racism. This adds to the weight of the music of The Clash and the invoking of West Indian struggles.

Stuart Hall argues that the intention of the information produced by the source must yield to the frameworks of knowledge by audience members as the message becomes a part of their meaningful discourse (Hall 168). For The Clash, this means that there is only so far the message of unity and white rebellion can go before the information is decoded as an anthem against immigration and for conservative politics. The need for The Clash to explain the meaning of their songs to those outside the confines of the community of punkers in London not only means that their message is only “understood” by a small group of listeners but to increase that listening audience, the music must be put in the correct context to facilitate understanding and change the knowledge bases of those listening. The organization of the Rock Against Racism events, the “playful” use of Nazi paraphernalia and the application of Rastafarianism to the alienation of punk is appropriated by London punks with a specific amount of education and openness that was not available to the poor working class that read the use of fascist symbols and culture literally. Even if class and education are issues in the interpretation of signs, Nazi imagery was used as part of camp, alternative fashion, and in some cases reflected specific ideologies of bands and managers. Bernie Rhodes even stated in early interviews that “some Pakis deserved it,” before being chastised by his own band (quoted in Sabin 62). During the Rock Against Racism concert in Victoria Park, London, Joe Strummer wore a Brigade Rosse t-shirt, highlighting the terrorist group in Italy in hopes of spreading the word about the attacks by the organization.

I wore [the Brigade Rosse t-shirt] because I didn't think they were getting the press coverage they deserved. After they shot Italy's answer to Winston Churchill, Aldo Moro, they shot down a new businessman every

day. And it ended up on the back page of the *Evening Standard*, like who won the greyhounds and who got shot in Italy today. So I wanted to have my photo taken in it, and put it in the papers. Which of course it wasn't. I don't think anyone could actually see it at the gig. (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 164)

During the same concert Mick Jones states that promoters thought he had come to the event dressed as a Nazi stormtrooper based on his all-black outfit and a BBC commissioners hat he had stolen during a recent interview (164). Gilbert points out that Strummer's international background as the Turkish-born son of a foreign aide may have created the desire to publicize a terrorist organization like the Red Brigade (Gilbert 190). The call for aggression from middle-class art students was a message to the punk audience to not fall down the path of nihilism but act upon the torn and ripped up aggression of the emerging rock style. Strummer uses his Brigade Rosse shirt to get the message out about the attacks of the Red Brigade on left-leaning politicians in Italy, a radio transmission debating recent IRA bombings plays during a concert, photos of police lines from the Notting Hill carnival are used as a backdrop on tour—The Clash brought politics (as conflicted as they might have been) to the front of their act.

Strummer tells the listener in “White Riot” not only that white people are unable to rebel in the same way as “our” black brethren because of education but because of apathy. The final verse of “White Riot” poses a question to the listener: “Are you taking over or are you taking orders?/ Are you going backwards or are you going forwards?” The fear of being ostracized for meaningful rebellion was at debate in “White Riot”—punks used fashion as rebellion and high fashion to question the bland everyday of British culture. The Clash asked why punks were scared of violent rebellion. If the use of studs and leather was to shock, why did the members of



this growing subculture hold onto specific artistic endeavors rather than something of substance? Was education and class structure still important to punks who rebelled against colleges and well-to-do families of England?

As Louis Althusser observes, there are specific ideological and repressive state apparatuses that control the everyday movements of individuals within communities and groups. Individuals are subjects within specific ideological structures. He goes on to state that through the operation of interpellation individuals are coded as subjects even before birth (Althusser 546). The ability to totally rebel or make meaningful rebellion along cultural boundaries becomes harder as individuals relate to specific cultural norms. "White Riot" explains to a specific audience the need to rebel and what specific importance it holds in relation to the powers that be. Even as musicians worked alongside the Anti-Nazi League and participated in the Rock Against Racism performances, Sabin points out that the anti-racist sentiments were directed towards Afro-Caribbean culture rather than other ethnic groups (62). There are specific boundaries that are not out of bounds but perhaps are, as Sabin suggests, not as "hip" as the influence of reggae among punk artists. Lines emerge along class and cultural connections as movements come in contact with style and fashion. There is an ideological fight that even while the members of The Clash, The Jam or The Slits praise Rastafarianism and use its political power to make their arguments, audience members and punk performers deny full-on connections to specific ethnic struggles. The connections with left-leaning socialist movements became just as dangerous as the National Front and to have a meaningful message without being connected to either extreme became a tightrope walk for many punk acts. The fear of alienating one group of fans over others, or having music applied to oppositional movements can work to break apart communities of fans back into warring factions.

The issue returns to Strummer's rabble-rousing: "Are you taking over or are you taking orders?" Within a set of ideological boundaries there are those rules that are made to be broken while some are deeply set within the cultural norms. Even as punk rebellion made its mark on the English way of life, it can be argued that it was also subsumed into England's cultural heritage.

"White Riot" is a song that questions the ability to come together to create a "riot of my own." Strummer asks his audience members to question the orders they are given in daily life, some of which could do more harm than good, moving culture backwards rather than forwards. It is important to remember that the riots of the Notting Hill Carnival came after a weekend when West Indian immigrants celebrated cultural similarities in good faith. The politics of The Clash warn of the repercussions of blindly following and consuming political ideals. Toward that end, Strummer calls for understanding the powers that be in relation to the individual in "(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais."

#### Last Train to Skaville: Punk Rock and the Reggae Connection

Mark Perry of *Sniffin' Glue* in March of 1977 said—

The Clash album is like a mirror. It reflects all the shit. It shows us the truth. To me its [*sic*] the most important album ever released. It's as if I'm looking at my life on film. A story of life in London. Playing in and out of the flats. A school that didn't even know what an O-Level was. A job that sat me behind a desk and nicked my brain. All that shit is no longer in the dark. The Clash tells the truth. (quoted in Colegrave and Sullivan 237)

In contrast, Alan Connor of the BBC talked about the scene described on the 1977 Clash track in 2007.

Reggae DJ Don Letts had thought the event would be up The Clash's alley, but the lyric starts from the seditious Strummer's disappointment at the apolitical poppiness he witnessed—'onstage they got no roots rock rebel,' [...] But then the lyric takes an unexpected turn into gonzo reportage with a cast including Robin Hood, Paul Weller and Adolf Hitler. What it's [(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais] 'about' depends on who you ask: the death knell of punk? A call for racial unity? An attack on gun culture? (Connor)

While Perry writes during the explosion of punk in 1977, Connor reflects on the music of the Clash before the demolition of the concert hall in for business complex in 2007, however, both Connor's and Perry's comments reflect the way that The Clash was able to insert contemporary meaning into the landscape of punk. With a debut album adorned with images of the riots at the Notting Hill carnival and songs like "Career Opportunities" and "London's Burning," The Clash presents headlines of the day, as Perry points out. Even during live concerts The Clash tried to talk to their audience by referencing contemporary crises. During a gig at the 100 Club in 1976, Joe Strummer improvised during a technical malfunction with a cheap transistor radio tuned to a commentary on IRA bombings, while at a later gig band members would try to "talk" to their audience with varying degrees of success (Walsh 31). In an interview in *Sniffin' Glue*, Strummer points out three distinct ways to confront a Clash audience.

Make 'em feel a bit...threaten 'em, startle 'em and second—I know it's hard when you see rock 'n' roll bands, to hear what the lyrics are but we're workin' on getting the words out and makin' 'em mean something

and the third thing is rhythm. Rhythm is the thing 'cause if it ain't got  
rhythm then you can sling it in the dustbin! (Walsh 32)

Strummer emphasizes out the power of lyrics during a live performance (and in popular music in general) and the disconnect between the audience and the spoken word. He also draws attention to the power of rhythm, the power to elicit emotion from individuals with pop songs. The Clash sought a connection with their audience outside of the shock and awe of punk culture. “White Riot” pushed away from the anger of the Sex Pistols by seeking dialogue with their audience about the structure of power and the state of the world.

In “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” Joe Strummer waxes poetic about a night in London after attending a reggae concert at the Hammersmith Ballroom with roadie Steve Connolly (also known as Rodent). After attending a show that lacked a “roots rock rebel” Strummer muses on the racial tensions between black and white youths, the rise in conservative politics and the need for unity rather than fissures between fringe groups throughout England. While the narrator of “(White Man)...” is just “looking for some fun” it’s clear that he is also worried about the future of England where a narrow-minded politics makes it possible that “if Adolf Hitler flew in today, they’d send a limousine anyway.” Explaining to his audience the state of politics in England and the need for unity through his experience at the Hammersmith Palais the listener still senses the barriers between black and white cultures. The song is a classic, politically charged rock song that identifies the problem as the artist sees it and direct his audience’s attention to it. It is about the alienation that Strummer felt at the club as much as it is about the image of the punks and the lack of identity outside of the tattered fashion that makes the song meaningful. During the show described by Strummer, the night was filled with reggae acts such as Leroy Smith and Delroy Wilson. However, instead of rebel songs and the songs of

personal and political struggle he witnessed instead poppy and apolitical music with forced encores that made him reflect on the authenticity of reggae and commodification of the London punk scene:

Midnight to six man,  
 For the first time from Jamaica.  
 Dillinger and Leroy Smith  
 Delroy Wilson, your cool operator  
 Ken Booth for UK pop reggae,  
 With backing bands, sound systems  
 And if they got anything to say  
 There's many black ears here to listen  
 But it was Four Tops all night,  
 With encores from stage right.  
 Changing from the bass line to the treble.  
 But onstage they ain't got no roots rock rebel.  
 Onstage they ain't go no roots. Rock rebel. (Strummer, Jones “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais”)

The audience is made aware that the “new groups” of the punk scene are more interested in the limelight of entertainment rather than any social action. The “white man” at the club sees the problems of the world and is unable to do anything about it (Connor). Even while both The Clash and the Sex Pistols were created for monetary gain, the message conveyed by Strummer is that with the ability to take a political stance against the powers that be within this new movement, the members of the subculture respond by hoping to gain notoriety and success through celebrity

and shocking style rather than rebellion. It is not enough to take the fashion of punk rock to shock and make money; one also needs to think critically about the society to which the subculture is a reaction.

“(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” is an opinion piece—whereas the majority of the album is a fast-paced and angry response to the political climate that spawned punk. Strummer sees a problem not only at the Hammersmith Palais that night, but also with the punk subculture more generally. He does not know how to deal with the consumption of punk for style rather than substance and muses on the consumption of the rebel songs as popular music and not for their underlying messages. As Strummer states about McLaren’s boutique Sex in *Sniffin’ Glue*:

We deal in junk, you know, I just realized that the other day. We deal in junk. We deal in, like, the rubbish bin. What we’ve got is what other people have put in the rubbish bin. Like Mick’s shirt was gonna be put in the bin until he paid 10p for it. I mean, you ain’t gonna go down to “Sex” with yer ten quid stuffed in yer pocket and buy some stupid...er...I dunno, I’ve never been down there. (Walsh 29)

The use of acoustic guitars, harmonica, soothing backing vocals from Mick Jones and a cleaner sound overall reflects the appropriation of reggae by punks like The Clash and the merging of multiple viewpoints into one song. There is a desire in the song to actively respond to the consumption of punk rock that leaves its audience feeling empty. There is a lack of a desire for change in this new style—it can be about enjoyment, but as Mick Jones points out, rock is about rebellion.

I think if you wanna fuckin’ enjoy yourselves you sit in an armchair and watch TV, but if you wanna get actively involved, ‘cause rock ‘n’ roll’s

about rebellion. Look, I had this out with Bryan James of the Damned and we were screamin' at each other for about three hours 'cause he stands for enjoying himself and I stand for change and creativity. (Walsh 34)

The use of reggae builds upon the consumption of punk fashion and style as sold by McLaren at Sex. As Antonio D'Ambrosio states in "The Only Band that Mattered" while punk set itself down a narrow road, The Clash had a "Vision-Positive" mindset, working to make the best of the future (D'Ambrosio). As Strummer sings on the track:

Punk rockers, in the UK,  
 They don't notice anyway.  
 They're all too busy, fighting  
 For a good place under the lighting.  
 The new groups are not concerned  
 With what is to be learned.  
 They've got Burton suits, ha! You think it's funny,  
 Turning rebellion into money. (Strummer, Mick Jones "(White Man) In  
 Hammersmith Palais")

As an audience member, the "white man" is isolated from the rest of his community and is let down by the lack of rebellion found within the all-night reggae show (Connor). Reflecting the first part of the song, the "white man" is also disappointed by the "new groups" appearing in the wake of the first wave of punk, more interested in making money than real change. Like "White Riot," the listener is not given a direct answer on how to deal with the world but asked to question what is wrong with the situation. How do you navigate through punk culture that is quickly being commodified and turned into big business? In the end Strummer says he is only

“looking for some fun” and it’s not (only) about the “white man” but about how one navigates through multiple different viewpoints in an effort to find one’s own voice. As I will discuss in chapter three, The Clash are at their best when merging genres instead of adhering to one specific popular trend, and “(White Man)...” brings that to the forefront as Strummer is “looking for some fun” in emerging popular sounds.

“White youth, black youth, better find another solution...”

The “white man” in “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” deals with the restrictions of modern life through the appropriation of reggae and West Indian culture in London. As exemplified in Mark Perry’s review of *The Clash* in *Sniffin’ Glue*, the songs on the album reflect the feelings of middle-class youth who are now situated in a society where they are unable to find a job or relate to cultural norms. It’s self-alienation, but it is also making a comment about that alienation and how it relates to the culture as a whole. Not only does Strummer discuss the alienation he felt at the Hammersmith Palais but also his concerns about a society that marginalizes dissenting opinions.

The Clash criticized the culture that birthed them and appropriated reggae to flesh out the political meanings within the punk movement. As Robert Christgau stated in the *Village Voice* The Clash stood in contrast to the destructive nature of the Sex Pistols:

[W]e get off on the Pistols' promise to tear it all down but find that The Clash help us imagine what it might be like to build it back up again. Of course, what makes my first person plural more satisfying is that one can imagine both participant observers and committed punks sharing in the building. (Christgau)



Punk's appropriation of reggae and the struggles of West Indian culture illustrate that particular cultures not only can help forward new ways of thinking but are often looked at for their style rather than their ideas. The riots in the United Kingdom during the summer of 2011 are defined by their destructiveness rather than any underlying meanings. While race was a factor within the riots according to the statistics of those brought up on charges, they were not seen as a major catalyst or were downplayed by media outlets as they interpreted the events as they unfolded.<sup>4</sup> The media's interpretation of the riots in England helps to control the protests in relation to mass audience reception and their effectiveness to make meaningful change. By defining boundaries created by specific culturally-relevant signs the power can be taken away from the protests and broken down to buzzwords and simplified ideas.

Emphasizing class and race, both events are distilled into easily defined ideas for audiences. Awareness of how dominant ideologies create dominant groups and specific ideologies allows for individuals and groups to work against dominant cultural norms. As Althusser points out, religion, family, schools and government help to create specific social norms and control the individual as a subject. Using their recording contract with CBS, The Clash subverted cultural modes to make a comment on society as a whole and bring to light what they saw in their local scene. The emotions contained within the songs set popular music upon the body, where it takes on new meanings depending on race and class. While the first Clash album questioned the state of punk culture and the frustrations of middle class youth, later singles would further question mass media and government control with song such as "Capital Radio One" and "Capital Radio Two," which I will analyze in my next chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Reports from the Ministry of Justice after the events showed that 46 percent of all rioters brought before courts were either black or of mixed heritage while 42 percent were white and seven percent Asian or of mixed Asian background (Muir, Adegoke).

## CHAPTER II. "DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL!"

"Yes it's time for the Doctor Goebbels show!" screams Joe Strummer as "Capital Radio" begins with screeching guitar riffs (and drumming) that more closely resembles a well-tuned air raid horn than a punk rock song. Originally a part of a free single coupon offer in *New Music Express* in September of 1977 and later included in *The Cost of Living EP* re-released in May of 1979, "Capital Radio" includes a staged interview by Tony Parsons recorded on the Circle Line and later at the band's rehearsal space that paints the members of The Clash as rebels fighting for the common man (Gilbert 150). The interview by Parsons helps to create a specific myth about a band fighting against societal norms: "About a year ago right, when I saw the Pistols I suddenly realized that I wasn't alone in the fact that I couldn't play too well, you know what I mean," says Strummer at the beginning of the track. "I was in a group where all these people could play quite well you know? And I felt inferior because of it, and when I saw the Pistols I thought it was great because it suddenly struck me that it didn't have to matter that much." Mick Jones follows up Strummer's recounting of seeing the Sex Pistols with his own outlook on the music of The Clash, even in its infancy.

We say what we want right? And people will either, like, catch onto it, get hold of it, grasp what we got, right, or they won't right? And it's up to them, we aren't gonna fucking preach and preach until it sounds like fucking nonsense you know what I mean? Sound like some sort of evangelist. (The Clash "Capital Radio")

The song itself laments the demise of pirate radio through government regulation while commenting on the effects of conservative programming on the masses. The lack of youthful, dangerous rock and roll on the airwaves for a new generation was helping to keep people in line rather than allowing them to think. In "Capital Radio One" and later the re-recording dubbed

“Capital Radio Two,” The Clash address the issues of getting on the radio, encountering a larger audience and using mass distribution via corporate sponsorship to further political causes. Where “White Riot” and “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” appropriated reggae and the riots of the Notting Hill Carnival for their criticism of both the nation and the new wave of music, “Capital Radio One,” “Capital Radio Two” and the 1978 album *Give 'Em Enough Rope* expanded their message to incorporate not only the youth rebellion at home but global terrorism, poverty and racial injustices. The music is an intelligent look at the band’s current surroundings, to which they responded with angry, fast-paced and powerful rock and roll. The outright criticism of the system created a new way of looking at mass media outlets while broadening the listening audience for The Clash. In this chapter I will use the ideas of Marshall McLuhan and the capacity of specific media to allow for new thoughts to flourish. I will use McLuhan’s theories alongside those pertaining to the appropriation of subcultures to sell commodities as presented by Dick Hebdige to examine the effects of “Capital Radio One” and “Capital Radio Two” not only towards a punk rock audience but as a mass-mediated, musical editorial on the state of popular music and youth rebellion. I will also explore how the music of The Clash, when directed at a specific audience, creates an emotional responses not only triggered by the lyrics themselves but also by performance, as discussed in the work of Simon Frith. The use of mass media, and the desire to be on the radio expresses The Clash’s aspiration to move the subculture out of London towards a national or global stage.

In “Capital Radio” The Clash argue that mass media has a specific effect on how a band is perceived. Not only is it about their frustrated politics but the reception of their lyrics by listeners on their records, at concerts and (though lacking) on the radio. With the rise of punk in England rock music once again became a danger to societal norms and the status quo. Whether

the statement was orchestrated or off the cuff, Johnny Rotten's "dirty fucking rotter" dig at Bill Grundy generated "the Filth & the Fury" of British punk (Colgrave, Sullivan 162-166). With the demise of the Sex Pistols and the influence of reggae and American rock and roll on their second album, The Clash moved forward with their own agenda; moreover, the band members were growing in their capabilities as musicians. "Capital Radio One" and "Capital Radio Two" are examples of The Clash looking outside their genre for innovation and airplay.

### Capital Radio: The Medium is the Message

The Clash, especially after the release of the single "Radio Clash" in 1980, used images of radio towers, boom boxes, televisions and newspapers in a subversive way. It was not only about their lyrics, but modes of transmission to audience members and the emotions that are created through specific interactions with the music. In "Capital Radio" The Clash openly criticize mass communications within the United Kingdom as a whole and not along specific class lines. On their self-titled debut they criticize the government in relation to class struggles alongside the lack of meaningful rebellion within the punk subculture. On *Give 'Em Enough Rope* and the "Capital Radio" single the band broadens its scope to question further how mass culture is used to mold a specific cultural outlook of the world. The Clash may have been "political" but without the ability to transmit their message to the masses through record sales and radio play they would have had limited impact. Like references on *The Clash* to the dead end jobs in "Career Opportunities" and "the new groups" that are "fighting for a good place under the lighting" in "(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais" The Clash once again comment on the state of England in the late 1970s. It is important to not only look at the lyrics of the music but also look at how these ideas are presented to the masses. The power of a repeated message, like the

transmission of popular music over the radio not only gains the artist a larger audience but disseminates intent. The medium allows for faster and expanded consumption of a text also works in the same way as a news story as the message is repeated, consumed and recreated. This idea, in regards to Neil Postman is expanded in my fourth chapter.

How one consumes the message within popular music is based on how one first hears the sound. Whether in isolation or in the context of a larger album, hearing a single over the radio and consuming a text as a part of an album changes how one interacts with the song and any underlying message that the band is trying to present. The way the music is presented, or specifically the singing of the lyrics of the song is not only expression of specific feelings but also as Peter Wicke points out “the collective presentation of emotions, postures and gestures” (quoted in Middleton 220). It is not only about the lyrics and an analysis of the verses that make up the songs but also the reactions of the audience. The way one hears popular music is further compounded by the meanings held within the music and the power of the lyrics to express specific emotions (Frith 164). With popular music the sounds and lyrics evoke specific emotions within their listeners. If the record is an extension of the voice and the radio is an extension of recorded tracks and print media, then new forms of communication are created within the dissemination of popular music. These emotions evoked by audience members from recorded tracks create a new discourse in our society that results in shared experiences that bind together groups. Since new media, as McLuhan argues, are extensions of the human body, when they work together they can create “a whole new universe of psychic meaning” and change our consciousness and how we interact with others on a daily basis (Powers 87). With popular music, we have a shared experience; in the case of “Capital Radio,” that shared experience is the desire to have a voice that extends past the individual and into airwaves to create meaningful discourse.

In the crafting of a radio playlist, the music that is selected is often that which embrace cultural norms rather than upsets the power balance. Subcultures like punk that emerged in the 1970s created, as stated by Will Straw, “new networks of small-scale capitalism and artisanal labour” that weakened the division between the creators and consumers. This created niche audiences that consumed a small grouping of cultural texts in defiance of mainstream acts. This new type of subcultural audience in the 1970s and 1980s actively attacked mainstream tastes to fight against prevailing sounds in hopes of grounding authenticity on the claim that “music was degraded outside of a life fully devoted to music” (Straw 68). This devotion in the punk subculture is reflected in the lyrics of “Capital Radio One” and “Capital Radio Two” as Strummer recounts radio pirates work to bring rock to the airwaves in the UK in the late 1960s. The cutting off of a classical music recording by a guitar lick on the intro of “Capital Radio Two” sets up The Clash as descendants of this line.

The disco sound of the 1970s and the remnants of the counterculture movement of the 1960s were commodified and used by record companies to give more of the same. Popular music works as an ideological state apparatus as it allows for the expression of specific feelings and practices. The music creates displaced meanings along specific cultural patterns and reflects specific ideological norms supported by those in economic power while repressing radical or subversive viewpoints (Althusser 557). Adorno writes that popular music is centered on the promotion of music for economic gain, that popular music is “social cement” used to adjust oneself to the daily routines of modern life (306-312). The lyrics of “Capital Radio One” and “Capital Radio Two” combined with presumed readings of punk rockers as rebels against society helps the audience to create a specific reading of the text that resembles an opinion section of a newspaper rather than a Top 40 hit, with the songs working from the outside trying to get in. The

Clash thus push their own specific ideologies onto the masses in hopes of not only raising cultural awareness of the problems within Capital Radio's broadcasts but, also of pushing their own record sales. The inclusion of interviews done by the band bundled with the release of the single "Capital Radio" shows an desire to be a voice for their audience and use mass media outlets to their advantage as much as possible. The Clash align themselves with an alternative airwaves, pirate radio deejays who were in tune with the youth while the radio outlets are presented as a hegemonic and oppressive enemy.

"A long time ago there were pirates...." Rebel rock on the airwaves

The style and sound of the punk subculture were reincorporated back into society through the use of media outlets and the redefinition of deviant behavior (Hebdige 95). Ideologically and commercially the subculture is integrated into society, diluting the power for it to shock and create immediate change. The new subculture also becomes a commodity to be sold to the masses outside the niche of high fashion and small boutiques where they are codified and "frozen" within specific symbols: "Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones" (96). Both "Capital Radio" songs are a criticism of the control of mass media through government regulation and London's Capital Radio (now Capital FM) and its conservative leanings. The song criticizes by the radio station for its lack of punk and reggae which Strummer believed they should be promoting rather than the top hits of the day (Gilbert 151). After the interview section of "Capital Radio" Strummer references Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels before singing—

There's a tower at the heart of London

With a radio station right at the top  
 They don't make the city beat  
 They're making all the action stop.  
 A long time ago there were pirates  
 Beaming waves from the sea.  
 Now all the stations are silenced,  
 'Cos they ain't got a government license.' (The Clash "Capital Radio").

The band openly mocks not only the control of the government on popular culture but also, in particular, those who should be the "taste makers" for not connecting with new sounds. Targeting Capital Radio's Aiden Day by name in the song ("If you want to hear a record/listen to Aiden Day/ He picks all the hits to play/to keep you in your place all day"), they are not only angry at the station as a whole, but also upset with those making the decision of what to play on air. Towards the end of the song, Mick Jones repeatedly sings "Capital Radio" while Strummer screams one liners like "in tune with nothing," "I'm gonna break through today," "Grab attention, I've got my tool against the town!" and "slippin' off, slippin' off," before ending the song by belting "Don't touch that dial, don't touch that dial!" (The Clash "Capital Radio").

As the "Capital Radio" single was limited to those who responded to the coupon offer from *NME*, The Clash re-recorded the single for release in 1979. The lyrics stayed the same for a majority of the song but the song benefited from a crisp, stronger rock sound. There are two different stories within "Capital Radio Two" that set it apart from the original: at the beginning of "Capital Radio Two" we hear a melodic, classical recording violently cut off by Jones's driving guitar, as if the members of The Clash have literally taken over the broadcast booth at Capital Radio. At the end of "Capital Radio Two" we hear a strategy by Strummer to get on the radio.



Calling out to his band mates he states that “I've been studying the charts, using my mind and my imagination and I can see it all now. The drummer is in the box office and he's countin' all the money!” With that, Headon drums gradually to a crescendo that is accompanied by an explosion as the rest of the band mockingly plays a disco riff with Strummer screaming “You're the one that I want!” (The Clash “Capital Radio Two”). The combination of mocking Capital Radio FM with the two songs and creating their own mythos via the Circle Line interview allows The Clash to use mass media for their purposes. Through both press releases and stories from writers like Parsons, The Clash created their own makeshift back story to authenticate themselves as punks with a meaningful message. The Clash are shown as working man philosophers, barstool thinkers, a point Lynskey clarifies by stating that Strummer would happily call his work “protest songs,” (267). Strummer recounts the impetus for “Capital Radio:”

We recorded a track, Capital Radio, for the *NME* flexi-disc, which was slagging off the only London-based commercial radio station available at the time (and which was never gonna play Punk records). It seemed unfair to us that there was all this stuff going off in the capital and you couldn't hear it on the airwaves [...] As a promotional exercise I decided to paint Capital Radio and the BBC with White Riot in six-foot letters in red paint. I was quite surprised when this didn't result in any airplay, but you live and learn. (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 132)

The rebellious nature of their work inside the punk subculture gave them the ability to be political without being pompous—targeting societal norms and structures like Capital Radio helped to question what was being presented to young people to keep them in their place. It also helped that they were able to do outlandish stunts that came off as authentic punk attacks on the

norm. Where other punks used Nazi imagery for shock value it is attention-grabbing to see The Clash use the same imagery with the invoking of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels to open “Capital Radio.”

The messages conveyed within the lyrics of The Clash are powerful on their own, but the lyrics by themselves cannot effectively explain why the music created by this band has survived the test of time. It is not enough to say that the words penned by Strummer and Jones were sufficient in and of themselves, but when paired with the band's explosive musical styling those words helped to promote a specific feeling within their audience. Invoking the power of radio as rebellion with pirate radio, The Clash are responding to the information produced by Capital Radio and the lack of options within mass media outside of record sales and concerts. In “Capital Radio Two” the band goes as far as to mock the disco sound of the 1970s (most likely John Travolta, Olivia Newton John and *Grease* as Strummer yells “You’re the one that I want!”) and hatch a plan to get on the radio, with explosive results. The music is filled with the desire to explain to the audience why rock and roll is most effective when it speaks out against music that lacks teeth.

#### Protest Songs as News

Popular music is driven by the emotions that are created when both the lyrics and the performance are combined to express the feelings of a specific, implied audience (Frith167). The repetition of “Capital Radio” by Jones at the end of both songs is structured within the sound and style of punk that drives home the message that there is something wrong with the radio station.

As Frith has pointed out in *Performing Rites*, the protest song, he argues, does not work to convey specific ideas but rather slogans that can be easily reproduced and explained. The

messages of protest songs however are often distorted from their original intention: Frith uses “Born in the USA” by Bruce Springsteen as an example where a song about the down-and-out Vietnam War veterans was appropriated by the Republican Party for the 1984 presidential election campaign of Ronald Reagan (165).

The songs are not specifically based in the lyrics, and one can look at the lyrics separately, but popular music is driven by how the performance of the song moves people. When Mark Perry of *Sniffin’ Glue* stated that the first album by The Clash “reflects all the shit” Frith would argue that it was not only the lyrics of the song but how it made Perry feel within the specific recorded performance of The Clash. Popular music allows people to express emotions and articulate specific feelings of anger, love or sadness in everyday life (169).

The application of these slogans to mass media outlets like Capital Radio mixes simple slogans of the punk movement with the criticism of a mass media outlet. As a text, “Capital Radio” features the violent nature of punk with its use of heavy guitar riffs and drumming with the precise and straight-to-the-point singing of Strummer. Like a newspaper article or television news segment their music helps to formulate specific ideas to audience members based on cultural background. Songs like “Capital Radio” take this a step further by commenting on the issue directly. The chanting by Strummer and Jones at the end of “Capital Radio One” and the mocking of popular music at the end of “Capital Radio Two” are editorial commentaries. We are given a background on the issue of Capital Radio and their lack of reggae and punk music on their airwaves with a band that wants to further their own outreach to their audience.

On *Give ’Em Enough Rope* the band plays with explaining not only fights between teddy boys and punks on Kings Road (“Last Gang in Town”) but also excursions to Jamaica (“Safe European Home,” “Drug Stabbing Time”) and the commodification of the punk subculture (“All

the Young Punks”). Building from their first album *The Clash* broadened their reach and expressed opinions of life in England but also those living abroad. Alongside the music the art for singles and albums was topical, cutting out articles from Middle Eastern newspapers for the single “Tommy Gun” ( a song about “the ego of terrorists” according to Strummer (quoted in Mal Peachy 194), a picture of a sound system for the “Complete Control” single and the appropriation of a still from the animated *Animal Farm* adaptation for the single “English Civil War (Johnny Comes Marching Home)” to signify the issues between West Indians and Anglo-Saxon cultures (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 194;212).

In *Sound Effects*, Frith points out that not only is the audience’s relationship to songs based on assumptions about the performers (such as punks being “incoherent, vulgar, annoyed” and pop stars as being fake and frauds), but it also demonstrates how lyricists use day to-day speech for meaningful communication through common language (35). Like Frith’s analysis of Bob Dylan or Ira Gershwin, *The Clash*’s music gains power through its application of everyday language to heighten the listener’s sensitivity to everyday phrases (Frith 36-38). Both their album artwork and the fast-paced power of their songs come together to create oppositional readings of the powers that be, like many punk acts, but by pulling from real world situations *The Clash*’s music is not only emotionally appealing but informative. For instance, the song “Julie’s Been Working for the Drug Squad” off of *Give ’Em Enough Rope* deals specifically with Operation Julie—a drug sting operation near Wales where police infiltrated a group of university graduates creating and selling LSD by using their own hippies who had to continually take drugs to keep their cover. Strummer said that the song related to the idea of watching cops drop acid, “This stuff was the strongest outside Switzerland. The songs’ really about that, imagining tripping policemen,” (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 184). The band poked fun at the powers that be and used

real world, topical examples to help drive home the point. Whether or not these points were understood by their audience depends on the context; however the fact remains that The Clash worked to walk a fine line between information and self-interest. The application of these news events to punk music takes everyday events and rises them above their everyday occurrences into a broader realm of pop music. It is through these stories made into song that punks could present their own subcultural values by bringing light to their cause and showing unity in specific acts (Hebdige 114).

The chanting of “Capital Radio” combined with popular FM call outs (“Don't touch that dial”) creates meaning within everyday words. Songs creates specific emotions for the listeners outside of the lyrics, the way the words are presented gives meaning and interacts with their emotions and what they consider important based on their own background and assumption of the band playing the music. Since The Clash are considered by music critics to be politically-minded and known for their ideological stances at the beginnings of the punk rock movement, I argue their interpretation by fans and audience members already pre-supposes specific interpretations of their songs. It was not only seen as artistic to take on the privately owned Capital Radio but also rebellious. The only way audience members were able to hear the original cut of the song was to send away for it through *NME*. It was a good business move for a band that could not find permanent radio play to spread their message and it also helped to work upon the emotions of their audience members who were fed up with the status quo.

In “The Future is Unwritten:” *The Clash, Punk and America, 1977-1982*,” Kenneth J. Bindas explains the power of the music of The Clash to promote the ideas of a more egalitarian society and in the realm of mainstream popular music. In North America, fans were more interested in the music rather than the politics with 87 percent of top-selling records in the United

States being about romantic relationships (Bindas 84). Bindas also points out while The Clash was received positively by critics, the sounds of disco and blue-collar woes of Bruce Springsteen and John Cougar Mellencamp connected with middle-class youths more readily than the social and racial concerns forwarded expressed by The Clash (84). “Capital Radio Two” brings this point to the forefront. Punk, in both the US and UK were new musical forms that deviated from popular tastes. The relationship to this new style had not broken out yet to a wide audience. While punk was a new form, it had not had the cultural impact to sway listeners or gain heavy airplay on either side of the Atlantic. The Clash were frustrated with British radio play and making it as a band in the United States as well. Their expression of this in the revamped version of “Capital Radio” with its disco ending that alludes to *Grease* with Strummer screaming “I’m the one that I want!” The Clash fought against the control of the state outlets over individuality. Bindas states,

The Clash wrestled with the issue that embattled much of their generation, namely control versus autonomy. Within a society they believed could only be restored through direct intervention of humans. As musicians, they felt empowered to facilitate this transition, but found that much of their American audience either missed the point or did not want to think about it. (85)

The angry rhetoric of Strummer and his compatriots, while thought out was still based on the responses of audience members and the ability to express specific emotions. “Capital Radio” deals with the issue of the band getting airplay and submitting to popular sounds to make their way onto the charts. The songs works on two levels: not only can it evoke specific emotions in the listener but the lyrics are straightforward and easy to remember, based on earlier mass texts.

It is the appropriation of the radio as a rebel outlet through the rock pirates of the 1960s juxtaposed against the pop, disco sounds of the 1970s and 1980s that makes the song powerful not only to jaded rock critics but also audience members.

Frith points out in “Formalism, Realism and Leisure” that punk changed the landscape of popular music by representing a class consciousness, challenging the capitalist control of mass music production and how music works in regards to meaning (166-167). The Clash acknowledges not only the power of everyday language in “Capital Radio” but also their need to subvert the power of the music business. It is, as Frith states, “not only the Adorno argument about commodities, but also a romantic argument about creativity” (169). As long as the music that was being created was still in the hands of the producers and kept outside of big business punk acts were able to flourish. The problem that Frith points out is that rock politics, including punk, are not only about the meaning alone but also about the context in which they are created. The fact that “Capital Radio” is a song about going against the powers that be during a time when punk rock acts were making grand gestures to sign to major labels (as both The Clash and the Sex Pistols did) and shocking audiences on national television tells us that the meaning is not only in the medium but also in the channels of transmission and consumption by members of the community. “Capital Radio” is about the ideological control of the state and its ability to present mass mediated ideas to youth culture that depicts specific norms and helps to sell specific ideals based on popular hits and trends of the day. The songs explain the wanton desire to be different while dealing with the stigmas and lack of opportunities for speaking out against dominant forces.

Like the rise of rap in the 1980s the use of music charts helped to create a specific “genre culture” through the management of specific musical styles within a societal context (Harrison,

Arthur 309). During the time that The Clash wrote and released “Capital Radio” there was a distinct lack of reggae and punk on the airwaves of both the BBC and Capital Radio, which Strummer wanted to see being played as the new subculture gained ground in London. Outside of small venues and specific record stores the style of punk was inaccessible. When punk became commercially viable it was sold through a specific set of cultural images—based on shock value rather than political awareness. What the band is showing in the release of the “Capital Radio” tracks is that there is a brain to this new sound coming out of London beyond safety pins and spikes. By melting down the effects of punk to specific images and stereotypes, the power of the music is lost, but to get on the radio one must conform to a set of popular music “rules” that make the music that is being played relevant to a wide audience. The sarcastic tone of the Olivia Newton John ending of “Capital Radio Two” may be just that, but it foreshadows the effects of early popular music forms on helping the band to get further recognition to a global audience.

### Conclusion

For a band like The Clash it was not enough to invoke specific emotions within their fans they also aspire to act as a self-appointed voice for a movement that would help to propel their own interests as a popular music act within the punk movement. While they may have been working to make it as a popular rock band, the music that was created, the images that were presented and the context in which it was created in build a set of multi-layered texts that transcend the vinyl on which they were recorded on and give meaning to ordinary events of the audience’s lives. They create an oppositional voice to the mediated messages of outlets such as BBC and Capital Radio—outlets that commodified the sounds of the 1960 rebels for commercial gain and created a sound that is neither shocking nor rebellious but allowed people to express



emotions without defying societal norms. With the desire for an all-out takeover of the radio The Clash disseminated their message, jokingly co-opting the popular disco sound. Not only would a chart-topping hit have helped the band financially, but it highlights the power of communicating a message through known styles, as I will point out in chapters three and four.

Invoking the image of an all-knowing and all-controlling broadcast company that “keeps you in your place all day” speaks to the lack of choices and variety at the beginning of the punk movement. The Clash worked actively to cultivate their image as the working man’s thinker and used their releases as the means to fight against oppressive powers as they created fast and catchy slogans to accompany their performances. Both the “Capital Radio” singles and *Give 'Em Enough Rope* highlight the issues of not only holding onto the creativity of punk culture but the issues that fans should be aware of in both their immediate surroundings and the global stage. The music that is created and then consumed by an audience depicts and comments on a specific issue at hand. The success of The Clash is that while their performances may have been a part of a scheme to make them a more popular band (like Strummer’s “White Riot” graffiti on the side of both the BBC and Capital Radio buildings), were presented in such a way as to still be effective and explain the frustrations of the band. It is clear that manager Bernie Rhodes wanted to make money off of The Clash and the members wanted to become rock stars in their own right; but, unlike their contemporaries, the subjects of their music came from actual questions rather than just anger. In questioning government and private radio outlets alongside social issues ranging from authenticity within punk culture to racial violence, The Clash create a breadth of subjects and influences to pull from. This allowed them to appeal to audiences across a large spectrum of issues. “Capital Radio” and *Give 'Em Enough Rope* set the stage for the dark and foreboding sounds of the end of the world that fueled *London Calling*.

## CHAPTER III. LONDON CALLING

Opening with the image of Big Ben, the “London Calling” music video cuts away to Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Joe Strummer and Topper Headon as they walk, musical weapons in hand, dressed as 1950s gangsters, towards the Festival Pier at Battersea Park, London. The scene is ominous—rain pours down on the four rockers as they play near the River Thames a song ushering in the end of times. “London Calling to the faraway towns. Now war is declared and battle come down,” sings Strummer. “London calling to the underworld, come out of the cupboard, you boys and girls.” Playing the part of a modern-day prophet, Strummer warns the listener of a coming ice age, solar flares, nuclear fallout, food and oil shortages alongside widespread floods—“But I have no fear because London is drowning, and I, I live by the river!” The song ends with a crash of guitars and cymbals with Strummer screaming “I’ve never felt so much a ‘like,’”<sup>5</sup> as a guitar taps out S.O.S in Morse Code (“London Calling” *London Calling*).

After the two “Capital Radio” singles and *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, The Clash were left without a clear direction. Internal struggles with Bernie Rhodes left the band embroiled in a legal dispute with their former manager. Record company CBS promoted their second album to American audiences who were only aware of The Clash if they frequented punk minded circles and independent record shops where the album was sold as an import (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 178). *London Calling* helped to widen their appeal in both the punk rock subculture and popular audience of the late 1970s while declaring them “the only band that matters”—the descriptor decreed by CBS to promote the album. Incorporating a diversity of styles from rockabilly to reggae to bubblegum pop, the album is a combination of real-world anxieties and 1950s rebel attitude. Joe Strummer draws inspiration from newspaper headlines and historical texts ranging

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<sup>5</sup> Sourced from liner notes and clarified by [londonsburning.org](http://londonsburning.org) (Hudson).

from accounts of the Spanish Civil War to rock and reggae hits by Vince Taylor and the Playboys, The Rulers, and Danny Ray and the Revolutionaries. The album came out as 1980 loomed around the corner—the Labor Party was forced out of office in March 1979 amidst worker strikes and a no-confidence motion calling for a vote in May of that year. Violent storms, a nuclear meltdown on Three Mile Island in Harrisburg, PA and threats of oil embargos and mass starvations due to crop failures gave the S. O. S. call by The Clash a sense of urgency—not only does the drum and guitar heavy sound of The Clash conjure up a feeling of dread with the opening track but the lyrics play out like a radio transmission not only to the edges of the UK, but to North America and beyond (Gray179-182; 190-191).

In this chapter I analyze *London Calling* and the use of mass media images in the album to bring the punk quartet into the rock mainstream. From there I will analyze the tracks “London Calling” and “Guns of Brixton” as texts that build upon real-world news events and use popular music to disseminate feelings of dread. Finally, I examine the use of mass communications images by The Clash to look at *London Calling* as a newspaper as opposed to just a rock album through liner notes and promotional releases connecting the album with *The Armagideon Times*, a concert program created in the style of an early punk fanzine by managing firm Blackhill Enterprises. The Clash sought to inform their audience of contemporary struggles and news items. The adaptation of punk style alongside other forms of popular music brings in multiple viewpoints and generates a text accessible to a broad audience as opposed to a narrow subsection of listeners. I argue that the dissemination of this “emergency broadcast” from London situates popular music as not only entertainment but also an information outlet.

“I Never Felt So Much a ‘like:’” The Normalization of Punk and *London Calling*

In “Cohesive Shambles: The Clash’s ‘London Calling’ and the Normalization of Punk” author Matthew Gelbart looks at how the music of The Clash and their album *London Calling* helped to normalize punk through its blend of stereotypically punk and non-punk styles to entice listeners and critics into specific spheres on the album depending on personal tastes. The music is a mix of punk anger and posturing with earlier rock styles. He notes that the album cover pays homage to Elvis Presley’s 1956 debut album but the orange and green lettering is juxtaposed with an photograph of Paul Simonon smashing his bass guitar during a concert (Gelbart 241).

The album combines the fury and fears of the punk generation with the romantic leanings of bands such as The Beatles and The Beach Boys. *London Calling* bridges a gap between what was generally considered punk and “not punk.” Joe Strummer, the lead guitarist and songwriting partner of Mick Jones brought his own background of pub rock to the third album. Jones’s own interest in studio-manipulation of sound appeared on the album after working with Sandy Pearlman (of Blue Öyster Cult fame) on *Give ‘Em Enough Rope*. After the demise of the Sex Pistols, Jones would tell *New Musical Express* that The Clash “are the only survivors,” of the punk movement in London (Gelbart 241-243). This viewpoint only helped to extend concerns of punks commodification and, with the death of the Pistols, it had to be reborn or at least re-imagined beyond of the gritty anger of Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious. The incorporation of earlier music sounds from the 1960s helped to normalize punk rock and give it a broader audience, in the same way reggae helped to give it a political base.

The album depicts, for the most part, the lives of unnamed rebels dealing with feelings of failure, alienation and looming cataclysms. The songs often deal with personal politics rather than a need to change the culture as a whole as seen on earlier albums, using popular culture

images of gangsters and rebels as a template. If punk “died” in the late 1970s with the demise of the Sex Pistols, then *London Calling* is a response to the narrow definitions and styles of the genre that were created through snarling nasty posturing. The band appropriates earlier gangster and reggae styles to not only help show their competence as musicians but also siphon the punk culture into recognizable cultural texts. The album is as much punk as it is a collection of youth rebellion styles since the 1950s. In looking at the normalization of punk through the music of The Clash in 1979 and onward, Gelbart examines not only the lyrical content of the music on the album but also the critical response of fans outside of the usual divisions of popular music. With the broadening of The Clash’s work there were new audiences created as positive reviews returned from periodicals ranging from *NME* to *Down Beat* (238).

In a *Rolling Stone* interview in April of 1980 during the American tour to back the release of *London Calling* Joe Strummer talks about making their music more accessible:

We realized that if we were a little more subtle, if we branched out a little, we might reach more people. We finally saw that we had been reaching the same people over and over. And the music—just *bang, bang, bang*—was getting to be like a nagging wife. This way, if more kids hear the record, then maybe they’ll start humming the songs. And if they start humming the songs, maybe they’ll read the lyrics and get something from them. (Henke)

Strummer bridges the gap between the desire of the performer to make meaningful change and the individual emotional responses created from listening to the music. As Simon Frith points out, popular music works within the “ordinariness of language”—using everyday words to create lasting meaning (Frith 37). Co-opting the sound of popular music The Clash does exactly what

they had mockingly suggested since their first album: getting their voices heard on a wide scale. Like the use of reggae as a catalyst for songs like “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” and “Bankrobber,” the band appropriated popular sounds (albeit a more classic popular sound of the 1950s and 1960s) to connect with a broader audience. Gelbart points out that the critical acclaim for *London Calling* centered less on the fact the album was a “punk” album and more around the idea that it was a great rock and roll album—that one of the top punks bands (the only punk band that mattered?) evolved into one of the best rock and roll acts of the 1970s/1980s (Gelbart 239). Strummer’s thoughts also echo feelings expressed by Simonon in *Search & Destroy* in 1978. Simonon stated that shows like the Rock Against Racism concert in Victoria Park influences youth culture through the diffusion of reggae by top acts (Klein 170). In the same *Rolling Stone* article in April of 1980, Mick Jones talks about his own anti-military leanings and fighting against the status quo. When speaking with a fan who intended on joining the U.S. Marines, Jones stated, “people prefer to dance than to fight wars” (Henke).

As Simon Frith argues, popular music is “an immense communication network” that involves personal connections with others. There is a social aspect to punk rock that shapes not only our own interpretations but how our individual experiences compare to the group and the entertainment industry, which must always adapt to new sounds and scenes (Frith 28). The Clash’s music on *London Calling* is an extension of their politics, and their music relates to individual choices, “Politics with a small p” to quote Simonon (Henke). Like “(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais” or even “Capital Radio” a personal choice to question authority is at the root of the song. The difference between *London Calling* and their first two albums is that it builds upon punk posturing against the status quo and leaves the songs open to interpretation rather than offering specific targets. In songs like “Lost in the Supermarket,” “Rudy Can’t Fail,”

“Death or Glory” and “Guns of Brixton,” the individual listener to applies the songs to his/her daily lives while songs like “Clampdown,” “Koka Kola” and “London Calling” that sound like news bulletins. There are intricate storylines within the songs (“Spanish Bombs,” for example, melds holiday vacations, fascism and Irish Republican Army bombings in the same set of lyrics), but it is up to the listener to uncover this information. Strummer wants the music stuck in a person’s head, the person humming along, to give the song a chance not only for a person’s own interpretation, but to make a popular music hit. *London Calling* incorporates multiple vantage points inside the style of punk. None of the anger is lost even if the sounds of the album are more mainstream fare—songs like “Jimmy Jazz,” “The Right Profile,” and “Hateful,” have a fuller, upbeat sound but harbor stories of drug abuse, mobster violence, and Hollywood stars on a path of self-destruction. The album, as Gelbart points out, balances the punk culture with the classic rock style effectively so that each individual can read into the lyrics and rhythms of the music their own way.

For a song like “Guns of Brixton,” the appeal of individual freedom expands outside the geographic and historical context of Brixton and England to become an anthem of individual freedom that builds upon earlier popular texts. Outside the context of England the song reflects individual desires: a reggae-inspired bassline that thumps through the first part of the song leads to an individual question of freedom: “When they kick down your front door, how you gonna come? With your hands in the air or on the trigger on your gun?” The rhythm of the song is taken from reggae while the lyrics written by Simonon are inspired by *The Harder They Come* as well as The Skatalites’ “Guns of Navarone.” The lyrics explain real-life fears of being searched without probable cause by police (Gray 280). Addressing the audience directly, Simonon asks *you* the listener to choose—to be shot down defending yourself or giving in consensually to the

powers that be. The Clash down play the first generation punk styles but hold onto the rebel attitude. Using the Sus (Suspect) Law that allowed police to search anyone who they assumed to be a “suspicious person” as a vehicle, the song creates the fear of a looming police state. The lyrics can be viewed as referencing both an internal struggle and a message to others. Gray writes about the multiple interpretations of the lyrics—one can look at them in regard to the Sus Laws mentioned earlier, the character of Ray Gange in the film *Rude Boy* (1978), a continuation of the story of the character from “Rudie Can’t Fail” or even the fight over creative control by The Clash and CBS over *London Calling* (283). The song’s lyrics and chorus are simple and get to the point straightaway like “White Riot,” but are less aggressively thrown at the audience (“You can crush us, you can bruise us but you’ll have to answer to the Gun of Brixton”). The lyrics are mellow, sullen and sung slowly by Simonon who tells the story of Ivan who is searched and arrested by the police for possession of a firearm. If *London Calling* is an emergency, it is an album working as an early warning system. “Guns of Brixton” warns listeners of the dangers of police brutality and the government-sanctioned laws that dictate and rationalize it.

Simon Frith argues in “Music and Everyday Life” that radio helped to remove the boundary between the public and the private, creating “the possibility of music as an ever-playing soundtrack to our lives” (Frith 153).

If television in all its varieties were to be abolished, it would make little dent on radio not just for broadcasts but also for the support of orchestras and concerts, for commissions and record sales. And while the pop world would have to adapt its ways if television no longer played a part in star making, radio is still the most important source of popular musical



discourse, defining genres and genre communities, shaping music history and nostalgia, determining what we mean by “popular” music in the first place. (153)

While dated, Frith’s argument is true with regards to the era The Clash were active as a band.

The radio has helped to normalize the idea of music in everyday events, and has helped to create personal soundtracks for daily lives. Music has also worked as a means of dissemination of cultural themes faster than before. Topical uses of gangsterism and youthful rebellion in songs like “Guns of Brixton” and “Rudie Can’t Fail” are adapted out of their original context into new areas and audiences. *London Calling* itself is a reference to the BBC World News Service and it is clear that The Clash want to make themselves out to be the deejays in this global newscast.

Gray points out that Strummer recalled hearing and interpreting the Rolling Stones’ “Street Fighting Man” in 1968 as “accurate reportage of what was going on in the capital,” while early interviews with The Clash have Strummer stating his desire for the band to create their own radio station (Gray 187-188). With the “Capital Radio” recordings it is clear that The Clash were interested in the power of mass-mediated information with “London Calling” opening up an album of individual reports from the slums of London to the Wild West of America to the decimated villages of 1930s Spain. The listener is given the images of a world on the edge inspired by newspaper headlines read by Strummer including (but not limited to) the OPEC boycott of 1979, global warming predictions and an impending food shortage (Gray 179-181). The “Capital Radio” singles questions the ability to get on air at the only commercial radio station in London, “London Calling” plays like an alternative vision of the future from rebel newscasters.

### Information Overload: “London Calling” and Media Metaphors

The band tackles rebel images from nearly every continent to broaden their own sound from the apartments looming over the Westway in London. Covering classic sounds from Jamaica and the United States amplify the message to other cultures. The S. O. S. of “London Calling” is to the globe. Like an international broadcast, The Clash pulled from the shared experiences of many groups rather than just punks working against the system in London. They use classic rock and reggae not only for political posturing but also to help stir up nostalgic and culturally significant images. At the end of “London Calling” as Strummer sings “I’ve never felt so much a ‘like’” over Morse Code he is not only addressing his own fears of the end of the world but it also could be read as having a feeling that everyone is having during “The Winter of Discontent” in England. The welcoming of the natural and manmade disasters (“but I have no fear, cause London is drowning and I live by the river”) reflects the shocking and hyperbolic speech of newspapers of the early 1980s. “London Calling” has immediacy about it that is built up in the fast tempo of the drums while Jones leads Simonon and Strummer in a gloomy and dangerous fit of guitar. The lyrics put the band on the airwaves and repeat the title of the song like a set of call letters in the same style as “Capital Radio”—“London Calling, we ain’t got no high except for the one with the yellow eyes,” “London Calling, see we ain’t got no swing except for the ring of that truncheon thing,” “London Calling, at the top of the dial, and after all this won’t you give me a smile? London Calling...” Nancy L. Nelson argues in “Metaphor and the Media,” that the effects of media are based in the ideologies of the system they come from (24). Media outlets cannot have a strict objective outlook on reporting since language shapes how we perceive events. For example, using illness to write about the economy in *The New York Times*, Nelson states that it frames the world economy as having a malady, dramatizing the events and

using bodily functions as a way to connect the issues at hand back to the individual (18-19). Strummer structures the end of times in “London Calling” like a radio deejay about to drown in the overflow of not only the River Thames but catastrophic world events, framing this inevitable drowning as a positive. The crumbling of London and the call from a four-man radio broadcast situates the fears of The Clash post-Rhodes and post-punk in London. As an entertainer working within mass media outlets he is inundated by a flood of bad news in 1979 and decides to punch out an S. O. S. to the rest of the world. Additionally, the song could be read as Strummer being hit from all sides, talking about multiple end-of-times prophesies as he was “drowning” in information overload. Like Neil Postman’s theories on television news in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* since the creation of the telegraph the way information is presented has changed since the mid 1800s. He argues with the creation of the telegraph people could now succumb to “information glut” where absorption, application and understanding were weakened as the news became more abstract and readily available (Postman 68). Strummer’s calling out of the different natural disasters could then be read as a plea against mass media. The positive remark that Strummer lives by the river then becomes self-reflexive as he and The Clash are a part of this information swell.

The album art for “London Calling” single harkens back to classic teenage culture and reincarnates the beginnings of youth rebellion: the front cover of the single shows a drawing of two teenagers dressed in 1950s garb surrounded by recent classic ranging from The Beatles “Please Please Me” single, the first Elvis album, and Bob Dylan’s *Highway 61 Revisited*. Punk albums are also strewn about including *The Clash* and The Sex Pistol’s *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols*. The back cover shows a scene of 1950s youth dancing with the title of the B-side “Armageddon Time” right above their heads, a reggae anthem that adds to the

dread of “London Calling” and reminds the listener that “a lotta people won’t get no supper tonight, a lotta people won’t get no justice tonight,” (The Clash “Armageddon Time”). The merging of 1950s teenage sock hops and listening parties with feelings of dread and disaster over the airwaves ties the mythos of The Clash back to earlier forms of rebellion—specifically the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s with Elvis Presley, the British Invasion with The Beatles, and the folk movement in the 1960s with Bob Dylan. “London Calling” is looking to the faraway towns and while Strummer sings “phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust.” In “London Calling” a new sound has appeared that hopes to incite the same level of rebellion.

By mixing relevant news material with the fears of oppression in their music The Clash are connected to real world concerns. In “Guns of Brixton” the fear of being killed for possessing opposing viewpoints, just as being swept up in extremist propaganda, may lead to jail time or death. While the lyrics are up to personal interpretation, The Clash wants to drive the construal in a specific direction. Like Mick Jones’ comment about being the “last survivors” of the punk movement in London, the album has a sense of urgency and struggle—if this doesn’t work, what comes next? The S. O. S. has been sent, but will anyone respond (Gelbart 241)? During the 16 Tons tour of the United Kingdom (January-February 1980), The Clash worked to convey a specific meaning within their songs by telling their audience directly through *The Armageddon Times*—a professional fanzine created as a part of the merchandise for the tour—what the songs were about; mixing the do-it-yourself style of punk fan magazines with the professional, commercial money-making plans of Blackhill Enterprises.

*London Calling* as a Newspaper: *The Armagedion Times*

To help promote *London Calling* and the 16 Tons Tour, The Clash created a tour program and took a professional merchandizing stall on the road while touring the United Kingdom (at the insistence of their managing firm Blackhill Enterprises). *The Armagideon Times*—a collection of photos and articles written by Jones and Strummer—was created by The Clash along with Stiff Records as a piece of merchandise during the UK tour. The magazine was to be an ongoing publication to highlight the newest transactions within the band, what Gray calls “a cross between *Sniffin’ Glue* and *The Beatles Monthly*” (Gray 419). For the 16 Tons tour two issues were created, while the third installment appeared as the liner notes of the album *Sandinista!* *The Armagideon Times no.1* included an up-to-date history of The Clash, photos by Pennie Smith during the “London Calling” music video shoot, and handwritten notes and drawings from all four members of the band. *Armagideon Times no. 2* included photos from the tour taken by Pennie Smith and questionnaires by the band and crew with a full page devoted to support act Mikey Dread (420).

While the program was created to help promote the new album on the tour, *The Armagideon Times* acts as a vehicle for the mythos of The Clash. Using the style of the fanzine as a starting point, The Clash appropriate earlier forms of punk rock culture to sell to new audiences as they incorporate the classic rebel rock look and sounds from the mainstream into punk culture, and vice versa. The ability to still market themselves to the punk audience through merchandise promotions like *The Armagideon Times* shows that they have not completely forgotten their roots, but want to use the aesthetics of the movement for monetary gain rather than shock value and promote their own agenda. It is a negotiation between Blackhill Enterprises and record company CBS to make money off of the investment in The Clash. *London Calling*

was a double record album sold at the price of a single album, against the wishes of CBS, who were also openly criticized by the band for the refusal to release the single “Bankrobber” and the desire to put out new albums very quickly after the release of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* in the United States (Gray 418-419).

The title is a nod to the single “Armageddon Time” originally written by Wilbert “Willi” Williams and re-recorded by The Clash while the information in the first issue of the tour program included a five-page guide to the songs on *London Calling*, to help explain the stories behind the songs. The information about the songs in the program only further creates a specific image of The Clash as poetic rebels. The band wants to be clear as possible what message is to be conveyed within their songs or at least what way they lean politically. “Koka Kola” (a song about corporate greed and capitalism during the Cold War) is explained in a sarcastic tone. As Gray writes:

Joe’s comments on “Koka Kola” in *The Armageddon Times* are very much in the hokey outta-da-side-a-da-mouth tradition of a komix caption “Now all the White House staff are sniffing away the giant korporation steps in and busy up all the space along broadway—‘Sure a packet is expensive, Mac! But you can use a kredit kard.’” (Gray 327)

Strummer jokes about capitalist greed that leads to drugs and death as much as any other event on *London Calling* and expresses sarcasm towards American culture. While cutting, the comments bring to light the way bands are created in a specific image. In one way *The Armageddon Times* helps to bring context to the songs on *London Calling* but at the same time panders to the audience of The Clash. For 40p the band plays up its rebel attitude and gives veiled information surrounding the inspirations for their newest releases. Simon Frith states that

the individuality that is created in commercial popular music is a part of the sales pitch. The inclusion or exclusion from specific groups through specific genres and the “star system,” where fans identify with specific idols, helps to persuade people that popular music is key to understanding how they fit within communities and “what sort of people they are” (Frith 38-39). The consumption of concert merchandise like *The Armagideon Times* fetishizes a mass produced item. It holds a certain weight for the fan who connects the purchase to not only a specific performance but also a set of ideals. With *The Armagideon Times* The Clash used the template of a fanzine as a way to balance popular music merchandise with their roots. Overseen by Blackhill and produced by Stiff Records, the magazine includes four pages of advertisements including a full page for Blackhill Enterprises and other bands managed by the firm including Ian Dury and the Blockheads (whose keyboardist Mick Gallagher played with The Clash on *London Calling* and the 16 Tons tour), and an advertisement for the 101er’s (Strummer’s defunct pub-rock band) (Gray 420). As with the two “Capital Radio” singles, The Clash here actively worked to present themselves as authentic, poetic, rebels to their audience while working to make it as a popular act. The sacking of manager Bernie Rhodes changed the style of The Clash and the introduction of Blackhill Enterprises into the fold changed the way the band toured and presented itself to the public. No longer was Strummer vandalizing the headquarters of Capital Radio and the BBC with “White Riot” as a part of guerilla marketing but now going through traditional channels of marketing and advertising.

While the addition of the “professional merchandizing stall” during the 16 Tons Tour and *The Armagideon Times* are seen as money-making ventures at the same time we see The Clash as a band release *London Calling* at a loss and working to keep control of the book as it is created. In the second issue of *The Armagideon Times* there are no mentions of Blackhill Enterprises past

the artists and producers of the pamphlets. It is a weird balance of rebellion and capitalism, but does it mean that they have sold out, lost the way of the punk ethos of do-it-yourself culture?

The Clash created an image of themselves as rock and roll rebels on par with Dylan, Presley, or The Beatles (or so they would like you to believe). Like their cover of “Revolution Rock” (originally performed by Danny Ray and the Revolutionaries) that “officially” ends *London Calling* before the hidden track “Train in Vain” begins. “Revolution Rock” has Strummer singing about dancing with the beat to rise up against constructed boundaries. The song however ends with a sarcastic callout for gigs, after selling an album at nearly half the price of a usual double album: “Any song you want, playing requests now on the band stand, El Clash combo, 15 dollars a day, weddings, parties anything, and bongo jams a specialty.” The Clash’s motives are twofold—to promote a better understanding of the world outside of London while promoting themselves outside the punk scene that birthed them.

### Conclusion

With *London Calling* The Clash show their range as musicians with the incorporation of what has come before in popular music. Strummer and Jones ask *you* about the clampdown, looking for your own identity and dealing with oppressive regimes both new and old. In the end, like Frith states, the fight between “identity versus difference” and how one navigates community interactions within mass-produced products matters within popular sounds (38). A part of the appeal of *London Calling* is the album’s ability to connect different popular music genres together, breaking down specific genre and cultural boundaries between popular culture’s subgroups. The artwork to both the album *London Calling* and the single for the title track harkens back to the 1950s, a simpler, idealized time when listening to rock music was not a part of violent rebellion but a reason to dance away frustrations and fears. The album touches upon



many different issues of the day in ordinary language used by Strummer, strengthened by intricate guitar compositions by Jones and drumming by Headon that changes on a dime. The doom and despair of the album is relieved by the hidden track “Train in Vain,” recorded after the record sleeve had been created for the album the track. “Train in Vain” is a pop send-off to the fears at the beginning of the album. Jones sings of lost love, standing alone “to keep the wolves at bay” and fighting for survival.

Now I've got a job.

But it don't pay.

I need new clothes.

I need somewhere to stay.

But without all these things I can do.

But without your love I won't make it through.

But if you don't understand my point of view.

I suppose there's nothing I can do.

Did you stand by me? No, not at all.

Did you stand by me? No way.

(“Train In Vain” liner notes)

The song shows Jones' talent in creating a great pop song, an ability that would be put to future use in later releases. As the song fades out, there is a glimmer of hope, sure Armageddon may be upon the denizens of London, New York, Hollywood, and Jamaica but there is a chance for change. *London Calling* begins the move towards a global sound and the creation of The Clash not only as a punk rock act but as front-line reporters in a war, using music as a common language to inform listeners. The 16 Tons tour of the UK, Europe and later the United States

would set the stage for triple album *Sandinista!*, an album that pulls from every corner of the globe to explain the need to fight against the powers that be, using the airwaves as the preferred super weapon of the 1980s.

## CHAPTER IV. THIS IS RADIO CLASH

The single “Radio Clash” opens up with a screeching cackle from Joe Strummer and funky drumming: “This is Radio Clash on pirate satellite, orbiting your living room cashing in the Bill of Rights. Cuban army surplus or refusing all third lights. This is Radio Clash on pirate satellite!” Strummer uses this radio as “aural ammunition” for the everyday, concealing real world issues within danceable beats and the emerging sounds of New York hip hop. It’s a fitting single for 1981, a year after calling to the four corners of the globe to answer an S. O. S. that the End Times are coming. The Clash are militant deejays using the airwaves to communicate the news of the world through popular sounds.

Both *Sandinista!* and *Combat Rock* build upon the global messages of rebellion through a mixture of well-worn styles such as reggae and rock alongside funky bass lines, early rap and sampled sounds ranging from radio deejays and cleanser advertisements to spray-paint cans being shaken. *Sandinista!* not only takes its name from the Nicaraguan revolutionary fighters but also comments on the backing of South American dictatorships by the United States government, police brutality, draft-dodging and the re-imagination of an arms race between the Soviet Union and the U.S. on the floor of the Studio 54 discotheque in New York City. *Combat Rock* finished what *Sandinista!* started with the hit songs “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” and “Rock the Casbah,” the latter commenting on the power of sheiks in the Middle East and the effects of western rock and roll on a viciously conservative society. The two albums give life to Mick Jone’s quote in 1980 that “people prefer to dance than fight wars,” exemplified by songs “Rock the Casbah” and “Radio Clash.”

*Sandinista!* has been criticized by music critics (and members of the band post-breakup) for filler tracks experimenting with radio samples, dub and reggae. *Combat Rock* spelt the end of

the classic lineup of The Clash with the sacking of Headon and Jones by the end of 1983. What is left is a mixture of musical influences from every corner of the globe pressed onto vinyl and transmitted through satellites on Top 40 radio. Like McLuhan's "global village," the music created by The Clash on these two albums, along with the single "Radio Clash," reflects the combination of multiple global viewpoints. The music touches upon a breadth of influences while promoting the power of mass communication as a weapon to inform on all wavelengths. This chapter examines these two albums as news magazines of the early 1980s.

#### Vacuum cleaner sucks up budgie: The Clash as Punk Rock Reporters

Music critic Pat Gilbert writes in *Passion is the Fashion* that the music that was created for *Sandinista!* came from interactions that Strummer and Jones had while recording in Electric Ladyland in New York City, that the interactions with multiple cultural viewpoints gave shape to the songs that were being created by the writing duo (274). The triple album that came out of this embrace of world sounds would later be called "a record for people on oil rigs and Arctic stations" by Mick Jones. "It gave them something to listen to, and you don't have to listen to it in one go, you could dip in and out. Like a big book" (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 280). In the UK, *Sandinista!* would be sold for £5.99 which meant that the first 200,000 copies were sold at a loss for the band. (Gilbert points out that *London Calling* had only sold around 180,000 copies in the UK, virtually negating any profit from sales when it was sold at a discounted price by the band). In the United States, *Sandinista!* would sell for \$14.98 and reach #24 on the US charts (Gilbert 281-287). Not only did The Clash sell the record at a loss but they also named it after the Nicaraguan *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* who overthrew General Anastasio Somoza Debayle in July of 1979, going as far as to give their album the matrix number FSLN1.

The band would later give the same treatment to *Combat Rock* with the matrix number FMLN2 in honor of rebel forces in El Salvador named *Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberación* (Gray 442-450). Even as a symbolic gesture, the band's use of these specific matrices and naming of *Sandinista!* in relation to the conflict in Nicaragua and the rebel force's overthrow of Somoza brings to light the struggles of rebel forces globally while connecting rebel activity to the ethos of rock and roll. The album liner notes are also named *The Armagideon Times no. 3*, a scribbling of lyrics and drawings to illustrate the songs on the album. The lyric sheet is reminiscent of fanzines but unlike the promotional programs on the 16 Tons Tour look closer to an actual newspaper with printed lyrics on the front page bordered off along specific lines above and below the fold. Cartoons drawn by Steve Bell within the liner notes explain specific songs on the album including "The Leader," "Let's go Crazy," and "One More Time/One More Dub." Alongside the illustrations by Bell are pictures of Mikey Dread, boom boxes and a map of Central America under the lyrics to "Washington Bullets" and "The Equalizer."

Songs on *Sandinista!* call out specific contemporary global news items alongside broad critiques of capitalism and military backing of corrupt regimes. John Piccarella's review of the album in the March 5, 1981 issue of *Rolling Stone* put it best:

If the ambition of *London Calling* was to recast the whole of (largely American) rock & roll history, then *Sandinista!* wants a place in the cultural traditions of the world. Its lyrics—and its melodies and rhythms—make reference not only to the U.S. and U.K. but to the U.S.S.R. and places in Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America and the Caribbean [...] From the arms-race-as-disco-dance contest of "Ivan meets G.I. Joe," to the ghostly battlefield ball, "Rebel Waltz," to the festive and

rebellious “Let’s Go Crazy,” we’re offered music and dance as a  
antidote—not only as release but as positive community spirit. (Piccarella)

I argue that Piccarella’s review of the album shows the embodiment of Marshall McLuhan’s theories of the global village by The Clash. Living in what McLuhan called a “simultaneous happening” with the loss of temporal and spatial distance accompanying the rise of near instant electronic communication the songs on *Sandinista!* gather many different informative news pieces together into single songs. McLuhan argues that a purely visual view of the world is too slow to be effective as information is constantly presented and consumed by audience members. A viewer’s environment is always changing and in a state of flux.

Print technology created the public. Electric technology created the mass. The public consists of separate individuals walking around with separate, fixed points of view. The new technology demands that we abandon the luxury of this posture, this fragmentary outlook. (McLuhan 63-69)

In many ways, the inclusion of a wide range of global influences and musical styles on *Sandinista!* plays out the ideas of McLuhan and the need for simultaneous multiple viewpoints to explore and understand the world around us. The sounds on the albums are so far-reaching and incorporate so many different ideas it is hard to keep up with the messages being presented unless one is aware of the context in which the music was created. While The Clash want to create songs that incite dancing rather than wars there is a very immediate need to understand many different musical styles that are outside the confines of traditional rock and roll and the London punk scene. While Piccarella gives the album high praise for its reaches and movement outside of the confines of the punk subculture, other reviewers were less kind. Pat Gilbert notes that Nick Kent of *New Musical Express* stated that the album ““simply perplexes and utterly

depresses,' [...] Savagely, he wondered why The Clash bothered carrying on" (quoted in Gilbert 203). As a divergent sound from earlier recordings, *Sandinista!* could have easily alienated earlier fans of The Clash and the punk movement in general. As Frith points out in *Sound Effects* as bands in the punk movement moved past the original shock tactics they actively explored avenues of creativity to look at how music was created (163). The use of reggae in their music allowed for the creation of a new space that "was the moment of cultural analysis; it didn't express something else, some prior reality, but *was* the structure of the experience, for musician and audience alike" (163).

The album, while nearly 40 tracks long, is rich with influences from reggae to blues to standard pop melodies while the subject matter switches from the east coast of the United States, to Nicaragua, to England to Vietnam. As stated in chapter three, Postman points out that since the introduction of the telegraph news has been fragmented and changed from knowing background and implications of one story to knowing many different stories without understanding the substance or any qualitative facts that surround them (Postman 70). In this way *Sandinista!* is a compilation of quick hits from the airwaves that influence thought with fast, witty and concise comments on the world by The Clash. The mixing of multiple sounds and the application of new styles makes for a broad-reaching album but strays from the quality of *London Calling* with a deluge of remixes and dub versions on the album that comes at the listener from all sides. The images and news stories brought forward by The Clash in *Sandinista!* are fast-paced and hip, relying on images from everyday experiences, their time spent in New York City, and the power of television as the king of mass media transmission.

With the rise of rap and hip hop culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s, The Clash combined the new sound of the streets with newspaper headlines to create "The Magnificent 7"

and “Radio Clash,” two songs that specifically call out pertinent issues of the day. “Magnificent 7” with its references to workday doldrums, Karl Marx and Fredric Engels, pairs news headlines taken by Strummer with a spoken-sung, funky sound more closely related to rap than punk or even reggae. The beat is set by what sounds like a shaken spray paint can in the background as Strummer sings about sports scores and daily headlines. “The Magnificent 7” can not only be read as a nod to John Sturges’s 1960s western but the 7 o’clock nightly news, with Strummer as lead anchor (Gilbert 276). Strummer mentions in *Westway to the World* that during their time in New York City the members of The Clash became interested in the sounds of rap during their stay. The songs “The Magnificent 7” in particular gave rise of “The Magnificent Dance” an instrumental version of “The Magnificent 7.”

WBLS was blasting all over the city and we just hooked onto some of that vibe and made our own version of it. We made an instrumental mix of “Mag 7” [“The Magnificent Dance”] and WBLS played it to death, you couldn’t go anywhere in New York that summer without hearing it. And it was us, weirdo, punk rock white guys, doing the kit, Ha! (quoted in Letts *Westway to the World*)

Jones points out that he was “so gone with it” the others called him “Whack Attack” because of his interests in hip hop. He said of “The Magnificent Dance,” that it “was another signpost to the direction we were going in. We always took on board the music that was happening around us, made it part of our thing” (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 312). Furthermore, during their stay “in residence” at the Bond’s International Casino in Times Square in June of 1981, the band had opening acts including Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, the Sugarhill Gang and the Treacherous Three alongside punks acts the Dead Kennedys, The Fall and reggae acts such as



Mikey Dread (Gilbert 296). If there is one key element to the sometimes jumbled nature of *Sandinista!* it is the way the album works not only for punk or rock audiences but also a global audience. While other songs on the album take up heady causes, ranging from Nicaraguan rebellion, CIA black ops and the draft, “Magnificent 7” tells the story of a lone working class-type that is reminiscent of The Beatles’ “A Day in the life,” albeit influenced by funk and the new sound of rap. The song starts with (and ends) with a drum beat that leads into Strummer describing the day in the life of a nameless worker.

Ring ring! Its seven A.M.!  
Move y’self to go again,  
Cold water in the face,  
Brings you back to this awful place.  
Knuckle merchants and you bankers too,  
Must get up-an’ learn those rules.  
Weather man and the crazy chief,  
One says sun and one says sleet.  
A.M the F.M. the P.M. too,  
Churning out that boogaloo.  
Gets you up and gets you out,  
But how long can you keep it up?  
Gimmie Honda gimme Sony,  
So cheap and real phony,  
Hong Kong Dollars + Indian cents,  
English Pounds & Eskimo Pence!

You Lot! What?

Don't stop!

Give it all you got!

The song goes on to see this worker drudge along during the long hours at work (“the minutes drag and the hours jerk!”) before “the lunch bell rings” to give the worker an hour to “do your thaang.” The song cuts to a new scene as the worker watches (or reads) the daily news during his lunch hour, signaled by Strummer’s screaming of “cheeseburger!” that breaks the song into a new scene.

What do we got for entertainment?

Cops kickin’ gypsies on the pavement.

Now the news—snap to attention!

The Lunar Landing of the Dentist Convention.

Italian Mobster Shoots a Lobster,

Seafood restaurant gets out of hand.

Wanna car in the fridge,

Or a fridge in the car?

Like cowboys do—in T.V. Land!

You lot! What?

Don't Stop! Huh?

(“Magnificent 7” liner notes)

Realizing that “it’s no use for man to work in cages,” the worker sets out to “drink his wages” at the end of the day leading to a movement from the workplace to a 7-11 checkout line where Karl Marx pays for Frederic Engels before moving again to “[Martin] Luther King and Mahatma

Gandhi who went to the park to check on the ball, but they was murdered by the other team, who went on to win 50-Nil, you can be true you can be false, you'll be given the same reward.

Socrates or Milhouse [*sic*] Nixon, both went the same way through the kitchen.” The song ends with a question “Plato the Greek, or Rin-Tin-Tin? Who’s more famous in the billion millions? Newsflash! Vacuum Cleaner Suck up Budgie [a pet bird], ooh buh bye” (“Magnificent 7”).

The lyrics of the song are set to a fast and simple bass groove that repeats throughout the album as Strummer rattles off his lyrics like a machine gun, or more accurately, a radio transmission. The lyrics are coupled so as to not give too much information too quickly while keeping up with the rhythm of the band. There are multiple popular culture references, to disgraced former President Nixon, Rin-Tin-Tin, Sony and Honda scattered among outrageous news stories (“Italian Mobster Shoots a Lobster,” “The Lunar Landing of the Dentist Convention”) that leap at the listener as if from a nightly news anchor. The image of Strummer as a nightly news anchor comes to fruition in the songs “This is Radio Clash” and “Radio Clash.”

“This is Radio Clash”/“Radio Clash” were originally meant to be played together as one long song but were broken up for radio play. “This is Radio Clash,” the better known of the two tracks, furthers the band’s desire to use the airwaves for quasi-military rebellion. But unlike the armed rebellion of the third world, The Clash wants to incite the same level of rebellion within the dancehalls and streets of the first world through new rhythms and mixing techniques. The emotional power of pop music combined with the ability to re-listen and re-read lyrics (via the lyrics sheet) allows for active consumption of *Sandinista!* within multiple media to build upon earlier modes of communication through entertainment. The television, which Postman would argue is responsible for “amusing us to death,” is being re-worked here to comment on and change the perception of pop music. The Clash aim to do this through “aural ammunition”

beamed from “pirate satellite,” to every corner of the globe. Strummer starts off the second verse of the song explaining the new sound of The Clash, “this sound does not subscribe to the international plan. In the psycho shadow of the white right hand. Then [*sic*] that see ghettology as an urban Vietnam. Giving deadly exhibitions of murder by napalm,” (“This is Radio Clash”). Strummer in the next verse repeats the title “Radio Clash” in the form of a radio station identification with apocalyptic references in the same vein as “London Calling.” He repeats the title (and slogan of the song) “This is Radio Clash” before another snippet of new information:

This is Radio Clash, tearing up the seventh veil.

This is Radio Clash please save us not the whales.

This is Radio Clash, underneath the mushroom cloud.

This is Radio Clash, you don’t need that funeral shroud.

From there the song leads into a personal plea within the bridge: “Forces have been looting my humanity. Curfews have been curbing the end of liberty. Hands of law have sorted through my identity. But now this sound is brave and wants to be free—anyway to be free” (“This is Radio Clash”).

While telling the public listening to the pirate satellite the news of the day, it sounds like the deejay at the controls is fearfully optimistic of the future: On one side we see the loss of humanity or the fear of an ever-growing police state taking away individual identity while on the other the “brave new sound” is reaching the masses. In the final stanza of the song Strummer points out that the radio sound the audience is listening to is not “free Europe” (Radio Free Europe, now Radio Liberty) “Nor an armed force network.” Strummer ends the song on a question as he sings, “This is Radio Clash using audio ammunition, this is Radio Clash can we get that world to listen? This is Radio Clash using aural ammunition, this is Radio Clash can we

get that world to listen?” The Clash repeatedly asks radio listeners if they understand the band’s intent and the power of radio broadcasts as “aural ammunition.” The Clash use pop music as a staging ground to arm a mass group of listeners with the spoken word as a weapon, while alluding to the power that alternative viewpoints can have on a willing group of listeners.

Postman points out that on television the nightly news is not for informing but entertainment, as the medium creates a situation where the information is not heard or read but seen (Postman 87-88). While Postman sees this as a negative side-effect from the transition to television, The Clash tries to inform the audience through their triple album in the same short and direct means as a televised program. The song (and the whole of *Sandinista!*) plays out in as a form of infotainment—the information about workday doldrums in “Magnificent 7” or the pop melodies of “Police on My Back,” “Ivan Meets G.I. Joe” and even the political message of “Washington Bullets” is underscored by the melodies of popular music. The lyrics enter the listener’s mind before any connections to Sandinistas, the CIA, Marxist theory or the Cold War arms race are made. Postman argues that the effect of television is that it takes away from meaningful discourse and replaces it with images. We are no longer learning about specific news articles in detail, but gaining small snippets of information that are given to us without detail only to be removed from our immediate memory by sets of new information moments later. Whether done on purpose or a product of popular music and mass entertainment, there is a parallel with the music of The Clash on *Sandinista!* and Postman’s arguments—we are directed by very short sets of information that change the discourse of everyday conversations.

As typography once dictated the style of conducting politics, religion, business, education, law and other important social matters, television now takes command. In courtrooms, classrooms, operating rooms, board rooms,

churches and even airplanes, Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas; they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials. (Postman 92-93)

While Postman is concerned with the effects of parsed out information to allow for critical understanding of the issues of the day, I argue that The Clash are hyper aware of this on *Sandinista!* and their 1981 single “This is Radio Clash/Radio Clash” in particular. Creating a music video for “This is Radio Clash” that reflect the effects of televised newscasts.

The “This is Radio Clash” music video complements the single by adding specific visuals to the song that relate to the rebellious desires of the band. The music video for “This is Radio Clash” interweaves live footage taken during the band’s 14-gig stay at the Bonds International Casino with film of Strummer quickly clicking through television channels and images ranging from bug-spray advertisements to rebel insurgents in Tehran, Nicaragua and Afghanistan flashed on the screen—thus pulled off of the nightly news for the music video. Visual and audio messages are presented to the viewer in quick succession in the same way the nightly news moves quickly from one story to another. The song is synched to merge seamlessly with a B-reel of New York City with the lyrics of the song and the concert footage like a news cast where the story is run alongside footage taken at the scene (“Radio Clash”). As Postman states, no longer does one know in-depth information about one or two news stories but knowing about multiple news stories at a basic level in the age of electronic media. The radio is thus used as a catalyst for rebellion, boom boxes to disseminate that information on the street level, and new styles incorporated to keep their message towards the target audience of lower-and-middle class youths up-to-date as possible. The question about the music of The Clash at this point turns from

production to dissemination. The band has a clear stance on contemporary news events, but getting this message out to their audience past the funky bass lines and innovative drumming is the same issues that Strummer discussed in *Rolling Stone* in 1980: getting the audience members to hum along to the song helps to get the message of The Clash out past the initial listening.

For “Radio Clash” (the long-playing B-side to “This is Radio Clash”) Strummer screams out over a bass and sax before stating that “This is Radio Clash, resuming transmission, beaming from a mountaintop using aural ammunition. With extreme prejudice we terminate our mission. This is Radio Clash consider your position!” The song then resumes with the same bass line as “Radio Clash” before Strummer resumes his broadcast: “Breaking newflash assassination. The whole country has been shot! Evil will abate in revelation in the Ministry of Whitewash!” In the following verse Strummer then pleads with the audience screaming “Wait! Wait! Don’t switch over to def [*sic*]! We got the latest score! Rebel Islanders 101, Home Guard 44!” (The Clash “Radio Clash”). The song is very similar to “This is Radio Clash,” however the long-playing B-side includes expanded lyrics that again play with talking directly to the listener. “This is Radio Clash and we count your thoughts, when lightning splits the sky in half sharper than a sword. And in the thundercloud you see another cloud, bones as big as sticks, even angels were in Hell on the morning of the sixth” (“Radio Clash”). As with the performance by the Central Scrutinizer in Frank Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage* or John Lennon’s narrator in “A Day in the Life,” the news of the day becomes a catalyst for a poetic rambling about the surrounding culture. Strummer is jamming along with his band mates in the long playing “Radio Clash” while leaving subtle hints about the state of the world. It’s a dance track, much like “Magnificent Seven,” and relies first and foremost on getting people on the dance floor to spread the message of corrupt governments, the dangers of capitalism and the looming fears of an overarching police state. Strummer urges

the audience member to listen to his reporting behind a funky backbeat, fearing the individual choice to change the channel away from his “aural ammunition.”

For a band who have often promoted the radio as a way to communicate with the masses, the mixing of multiple media within the medium of the music video stands in line with earlier desires to use the airwaves to promote themselves and the causes they thought important. The music videos and lyric sheets let the listener re-play and re-read the text as it was intended by the creator. While adding the entertainment value of a televised news broadcast, this ameliorates the loss of discourse as it pertained to typography, a fear that Postman brings up in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. There is the ability for “re-transmission” of a message over and over. Whereas Postman discusses the changing of discourse from a print-based culture to an “entertainment”-based culture in 1986, I believe that the music of The Clash in 1981 helped instead to merge a culture driven by typography and one based in news broadcasts as entertainment. As Postman states in the opening chapters of *Amusing Ourselves to Death* one must take the time to sit down and read, actively understanding the letters printed on the page and waiting to decide the legitimacy of the argument until it is finished (27). His argument is of course that one cannot do that when information is fed to an audience in the form of headlines and short bursts. However, The Clash worked within both typography (with the *Armagideon Times* and lyric sheets) and the newer entertainment-based culture for substantial change. When coupled with a meaningful message, popular music can be brilliant and worthwhile—though this is an idea with which Postman may not agree—working within both modes to inform an audience.

Popular music is based on and within modes of spoken language. By singing, the meanings of words are taken out of their everyday use and inserted into new situations, where



dominant readings of specific phrases are created and are sharpened by the rhythms and style of the music with which it is associated (Frith 166-181). For songs like “This is Radio Clash” or “The Magnificent 7,” meaning is not solely within the words but also the beats, rhythms and performance by The Clash as a four-piece rock outfit. As stated earlier, the use of rap acts during the Bonds concerts and as a part of a growing back catalogue of The Clash. The addition of these acts stretched their fan base to the edges and made a broad sound that could be picked up by anyone, however like *London Calling* could also alienate longtime fans. If The Clash were trying to communicate a message of standing up for one’s own rights and questioning authority, they were making sure everyone else was dancing to the same beat. “Know your Rights” and more importantly “Rock the Casbah” from *Combat Rock* would further reach out to a massive audience through popular music to ignite feelings of rebellion.

#### The Public Service Announcement of *Combat Rock*

The follow-up to *Sandinista!* came in 1982 with *Combat Rock*, a collection of songs that mixes sounds and style of Vietnam and Thailand with the darker alleyways of New York City. For example, the album mixes references to New York City’s vigilante group the Guardian Angels (“Red Angel Dragnet”) with the after-effects of the Vietnam War (“Straight To Hell,” “Carjamming,” “Sean Flynn”) and the impending nuclear war driven by a mixture of corporate greed and governments spiraling out of control (“Atom Tan”) (Fricke). The album also contains the two best known Clash songs: “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” and “Rock the Casbah”—songs that are driven by their danceable beats, with the latter song implicitly recognizing the power of music in community building and the defeat of oppressive regimes. Of the songs on *Combat Rock* I focus on “Know Your Rights” and “Rock the Casbah” in particular because of

their contrasting messages of how to deal with modern society and the constraints put on the individual.

Like *London Calling* the album deals with the coming demise of western civilization; unlike their 1980 release *Combat Rock* begins not with an S. O. S. to the four corners of the world but a “public service announcement with guitars” (The Clash “Know Your Rights”). “Know Your Rights” is a rockabilly Strummer rant about the three rights we are allowed, with a few caveats: You have the right not to be killed (unless you’re a policeman or an aristocrat), you have the right to food money (as long as you don’t mind an investigation and humiliation), and you have the right to free speech (“as long as you’re not dumb enough to actually try it!”). Towards the end of the song Strummer states, “It has been suggested in some quarters that this is not enough. Well...Get off the streets! Get off the streets! Run!” (“Know Your Rights” liner notes). Mick Jones’ guitar bends back and forth in response to each of the three rights Strummer lists before straightening back into a sharp knife that works with the thumping bass of Paul Simonon that looms over the track like a mugger about to strike. Like earlier tracks in The Clash discography, “Know Your Rights” is a cynical message about how to navigate the oppressive, modern world. The Clash sound as if they are telling their North American audience that the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness come with an asterisk next to them and thus remind their American audience of the price one must pay to exercise these “rights.” The song is a reminder of the impending doom of “London Calling,” but instead of a natural disaster via ice caps melting or “the sun zooming in” the sights of the song are directed at the regulation of humanity and the downfall of free will.

As discussed earlier, the words and messages conveyed within popular music are heightened within the space of a specific performance, creating specific stresses on the particular

words used in relation to the rhythms and sound of the song (Frith 181). The voice in “Know Your Rights” is sarcastic—Strummer wills his voice to sound a particular way that creates a feeling of stress and sarcasm in the same moment that is “real” enough that an individual listener can recreate it from the safety of his or her own home. Frith argues that the voice is the expression of the body and the sound of the body as it creates specific feelings through the use of vocal sounds (192). Furthermore Susan McClary states that the body is the point where we learn how to experience “socially mediated patterns of kinetic energy, being in time, emotions, desires, pleasures and much more,” (McClary 33). Strummer’s singing on the track sounds as if he is gasping for air as he tells the listener to “get off the streets.” Acting as an informant running from the law Strummer uses the song as a last-ditch attempt to speak out—putting it upon listeners to make up their minds.

The sarcasm that is sung/shouted in “Know Your Rights” is amplified by the bouncing bass lines and sharp guitars of Simonon and Jones, respectively. The Clash, once again using the imagery of public broadcasting, play the part of informants rather than musicians. The Clash make their audience aware of the system they are a part of much like “Radio Clash” “Capital Radio,” “London Calling” and “The Call Up”—an anti-draft single from *Sandinista!* released in November of 1980. Unlike their earlier singles that use mass media images, “Know Your Rights” comes off as pessimistic and direct. The delivery of the lyrics by Strummer is sharp and direct rather than hidden behind poetic images of London burning or drowning. The song beats the information into the listener and, while snarky, is also pleading. It’s the last straw for The Clash, telling the audience that if they don’t get it at this point there’s no saving them.

In contrast, “Rock the Casbah” depicts the suppression of pop music by extremist theocratic regimes and the inability of the powers that be to control the new sounds as they

infiltrate their flocks. The ways in which the music is disseminated are key to not only the song but the ethos of The Clash. *Combat Rock* is a clever way of explaining (or expressing) the fears of military aggression and that the way to fight back is not through armed aggression (harkening back to the frustrated anger of “White Riot”) but through musical resistance. The “Combat Rock” in *Combat Rock* is a desire to inform and bring multiple viewpoints under one banner—the application of the sounds that were experimented with on *Sandinista!* in a field test. The lyrics of the songs explain the need to move away from violence while the backing tracks conform to multiple different popular music styles to get people moving and dancing.

#### That Crazy Casbah Jive

“Rock the Casbah,” is the standout track on the album and is one of the best known in The Clash discography. It tells the story of the inability of the state to control the desires of the masses. Strummer states that the lyrics of the song came out of a conversation with manager Bernie Rhodes.

We found that whenever we’d play a tune on the *Combat Rock* sessions, it would be six minutes, minimum. After a few days of this, Bernie came down the studio and I think he heard “Sean Flynn” and he said, “Does everything have to be as long as a raga?” From then on everything we did we called a raga. I got back to the Iriquois Hotel [in New York] that night and wrote on the typewriter, “The King told the boogie men You gotta let that raga drop.” I looked at it and for some reason I started to think about what someone had told me earlier, that you got lashed for owning a disco album in Iran. So I transferred that line from Bernie, to these religious

leaders who tried to stop people from listening to music. (Mal Peachy, The Clash 352)

The song opens up with a cheerful piano and guitar combination before Strummer sets the scene:

Now the king told the boogiemmen

You have to let that raga drop.

The oil down the desert way

Has been shakin to the top.

The Sheik he drove his Cadillac

He went crusin down the ville.

The mezzin was a' standin

On the radiator grille.

The Shareef don't like it.

Rockin' the Casbah, Rock the Casbah.

The Shareef don't like it.

Rockin' the Casbah, Rock the Casbah.

The song depicts both the oil crisis of the late 1970s and the effects of oil production on Middle Eastern powers in the opening verse before going into the crux of the situation in banning the new sound and subverting the law of the land for personal enjoyment.

By order of the Prophet

We ban that boogie sound.

Degenerate the faithful

With that crazy Casbah sound.

But the Bedouin they brought out  
The electric camel drum.  
The local guitar picker  
Got his guitar picking thumb.  
As soon as the Shareef  
Had cleared the square  
They began to wail.  
(“Rock the Casbah” liner notes)

Even at the temple where “the in crowd says it’s cool to dig this chanting thing,” after “the temple band took five” they are enticed by these new rhythms (“as the wind changed directions, the temple band took five. The crowd caught a whiff of that crazy Casbah jive”).

After the king finds out about the playing of the new sound amongst his people inside and outside the religious centers he calls out his own military to strike against the “boogie sound” that has taken over his faithful flock. But even the jet fighter pilots turn on the Sheik after he turns their back on them, and like the musicians in the square, begin to wail. “As soon as the Shareef was chauffeured outta there the jet pilots tuned to the cockpit radio blare.” The music is so intoxicating (and in the eyes of the Sharif, dangerous) because it is able to infiltrate even the armed military.

The dissemination of this “boogie sound” is based in live performances, radio play and word of mouth. Popular music is not just about the creation but the dissemination of a mass produced product to the four corners of the globe. In “Rock the Casbah,” The Clash make a strong argument for the militarization of popular music to remove oppressive regimes. Art for the single had a picture of two men, one dressed as an Arab holding a boom box and the other as

a Hasidic Jew, dancing together against a Middle Eastern background. The back cover includes a quasi-military insignia of a radio on top of a star with a banner reading “let that raga drop.” The logo on the back cover of the “Rock the Casbah” single is similar to that on the single for “Know Your Rights” with an open book with a carved-out space for a revolver that states in blood “the future is unwritten” (Mal Peachy, *The Clash* 340-347). The Arab and the Jewish men dancing to the wild and untamed sounds of rock and roll would return for the Don Letts-directed music video dancing along Texan roads, driving a large convertible with bull horns on the front and even stopping at a Burger King before scalping tickets for a Clash concert (“The Clash—Rock The Casbah”).

The music video presents a dramatization of the power of music to bring people together but not one that I believe is far from the truth. If music is able to bring people together it is also able to work as a catalyst for change. As Jeremy Wallach argues in “Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta” following the emergence of popular pop-punk bands like Green Day, Rancid and the Offspring in the mid-1990s there was a creation of a network of bands, fanzines and independent record labels that worked to produce and distribute punk music and the ideologies of the movement (Wallach 319). Alongside the emergence of popular punk bands in Indonesia, the punk movement also came to life as the Suharto dictatorship was overthrown in 1998 through a reform movement led by student activists, of which Wallach states many were fans of underground rock.

Almost from the beginning, musicians in the Indonesian underground movement performed songs attacking the corruption and brutality of the Suharto government, even when it was dangerous to do so. Thus, although Indonesian punk is as politically divided as its Western counterparts, it is

not surprising that many Indonesian punks place their movement and their allegiance to it in the context of the struggle against Suharto. A particularly eloquent punk from Cirendeui, a region on the border between Jakarta and West Java province, stated that he became a punk because of the pain he felt as one of Indonesia's "little people" (*rakyat kecil*) victimized by the oppression and injustice of the Suharto regime. He added that he was a member of a local band named Stainlees,<sup>6</sup> which sang about this theme.

(321)

I use the work of Wallach to explain that popular music can be transformed from its original context to specific situations to bring people together for meaningful change. The influence of big-name acts like Green Day, the Offspring and Rancid upon Indonesian students interested in underground rock created a sense of community through similar fanbases. "Rock the Casbah" points out of the power of popular music and the lengths those in power will go to in order to stop the spread of new ideas and is based on information Strummer had received about owning popular music albums in Iran (most likely as a part of the Ayatollah Khomeini's edicts during this time). Popular music has the power to influence and is dangerous to those in power because of the emotions that can be inflamed through the combination of everyday language and a backing dance beat.

The Clash want us to hear the new sounds and make a point to show in their music, album art and performances the importance of mass media technologies on the accessibility of music. The widespread access to new popular music is sped up in an electronic age when new information is presented and overwritten at blinding speeds. Like McLuhan stated in *The*

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<sup>6</sup> The spelling of this band's name is in fact Stainlees and was mistakenly fixed by the editors of *White Riot*. This has been confirmed by the author Jeremy Wallach.



*Medium is the Message* we now live in a “global village” where we are consciously affected by the issues and events of cultures thousands of miles away from our own. Within the music of The Clash and other punk bands we are given snippets of information about critical issues of the day through “entertainment” (66-67).

It is important to look at The Clash and “their crazy Casbah sound” today as we see violence over popular music appear in Iraq and Indonesia. Since February of 2012, young Iraqis wearing the Western “emo” fashion of tight t-shirts and jeans have been beaten to death with bricks because of a conflation of “emo” with gay or with engaging in Satanic rituals (Healy). “Emo” (or “emotional hardcore”) is a genre of music that appeared out of hardcore punk culture in the United States in the 1980s and gained prominence in the 1990s for its softer, thoughtful, lyrical content—musing on suburban life and popular culture. Shi’ite militias have passed out flyers calling out specific “emo” youths by name and associating the style with homosexuality. Members of the subculture have been told to change their ways. “Your fate will be death if you don’t quit doing this [...] Punishment will be tougher and tougher, you gays. Don’t be like the people of Lot” (as quoted in Healy).

In the province of Aceh, local police rounded up 64 punks in December of 2011 during a charity concert. The punks were then brought to the Aceh State Police School for “re-education,” to “restore their morals” to align with those of the prominently Muslim province (Hasan). Aceh police chief Inspector General Iskandar Hasan stated that when the punks entered the school that—

There will be a traditional ceremony. First their hair will be cut. Then they will be tossed into a pool. The women’s hair we’ll cut in the fashion of a female police officer [...] Then we’ll teach them a lesson. We’ll change their disgusting clothes.

We'll replace them in nice clothes. We'll give them toothbrushes, toothpastes, shampoo and prayer gear. It will all be given to them [...] I'll remind [police] not to breach human rights. This is our country too, right? (Hasan)

The General Inspector's quote in the *Jakarta Globe* conflates punk with being dangerous, dirty and immoral. Alongside a physical change in their appearance he points out the distribution of prayer books to the youths as a part of their time spent at the police school. Photos of the apprehended punks show them being shaved by police officers and doused in water before being "re-educated." Gustav Leo, a spokesman for the Aceh police told the BBC in 2011 that youths were not arrested but were taken in to help the children of the providence. "They are Aceh's own children—we are doing this for their own good. Their future could be at risk. We are re-educating them so they don't shame their parents" (Vaswani). Youth expression in conservative and restrictive cultures poses a threat to those in power, as police action like that seen in Aceh, Indonesia or the Shi'ite militias in Iraq show. In a global community, the effects of outside cultural images stands as a threat to the norm and are judged as alien and corrosive to traditional ways of life. The extremes taken in Indonesia and Iraq ignore the positives of mass culture on youth communities outright and go directly towards violent and repressive solutions to the invading culture that can only act as fuel for further rebellion in the end.

In a June 8, 2012 article in *The New York Times* Jessica Bruder compiled a list of global punk scenes—from Russia to Burma to Iran—that stage local shows under the watchful eye of oppressive regimes. Fighting dictatorships and deadly repercussions these groups use music as a weapon against injustice.

Punk today belongs more to Russia and Iraq, Myanmar and Indoneisa, than it does to its birthplaces. Like any other movement steeped in dissent and

nonconformity, punk's moral force grows with government suppression. As authoritarian regimes crack down on rebel rockers, their efforts to censor subversive voices often backfire by attracting attention from international media and human rights activists. (Bruder)

For a band like Pussy Riot, who were detained and face seven years in prison for staging an anti-Putin "punk prayer" in a cathedral in Moscow, punk is dangerous to the status-quo and imprisonment and bodily harm are prices people pay to make change in their own world (Bruder).

The effects of popular, western sounds on other cultures—be it in Indonesia or Iraq or anywhere else—question the authority of those in power who may not understand the music or its message out of fear or outright hatred of something alien to the dominant culture or belief systems, like those held onto by Shi'ite militias in their promotion of violence towards "emos." The fear of Satanism and music is not new to rock and roll, but when violence erupts over the presence of emos in Iraq it shows the power that a social movement can have on older generations that are vying for power. The suppression and labeling of new ideas as inherently "evil," even those of the "emo" culture, shows the apparent dangers of popular music that The Clash sang of in "Rock the Casbah." There is a fear that this new sound will "corrupt"—and in doing so move people away from what is considered culturally relevant.

### Conclusion

The songs analyzed in this chapter reveal the desire of The Clash to be not only a critically acclaimed rock band but also a guerilla news casting force of the streets—be it London, New York City, El Salvador or Tehran. The album art imagery of radios, warring groups dancing together and boom boxes are weapons of informed rebellion on *Combat Rock*. The album is on

par with how an underground newspaper forwards the sentiments seen on *London Calling* in their use of S.O.S and historical struggles alongside modern news pieces. The commentary through entertainment in hip hop-inspired songs “The Magnificent 7” and “Radio Clash” express workday woes through everyday language set to a back beat. “Radio Clash,” “Rock the Casbah” and “Know Your Rights” stress the importance of public broadcasts and the effect of having a knowledgeable populace, if not an entertained one.

However, as The Clash point out, as much as the music is feared for its new ideas by the old guard, it is still able to bring people together to create new communities of understanding and unification under a banner of shared experience and feelings. While suppression may stop the spread of new ideas in the short term, it will slowly infiltrate cultures and change it from the inside out in the long term. Popular music is consumed by the individual listener and dancing in the streets becomes an act of rebellion as pop songs are consumed as weapons of freedom.

## CONCLUSION. "SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?"

In 1983 the classic lineup of The Clash would dissolve amidst a set of rock and roll clichés. Topper Headon would be fired as his addiction to heroin became more than the band could bear, bringing former drummer Terry Chimes back into the fold for the Casbah Club and Combat Rock Tour. Later that year in-fighting would lead to the dismissal of Mick Jones by Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon and manager Bernie Rhodes at the end of the US Festival tour in May. Strummer and Simonon would march on to form Clash Mark Two to limited success while Jones would form Big Audio Dynamite (B.A.D.). The final Clash album, *Cut the Crap*, sounded like a parody of the punk movement with synthesizers and a flash of new wave style. The follow-up to *Combat Rock* was nearly universally panned with *Rolling Stone* giving it one-and-a-half stars and *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* excoriating the album as well (Gilbert 355). By the end of 1985 The Clash Mark Two had disbanded with Strummer retreating from the public eye and Simonon going on to form Havana 3 a.m.

Eight years and six albums would leave "the only band that matters" with a discography that became required listening for playing all kinds of music, ranging from the global pop of U2, the politically smart raps of Public Enemy, political punk of Against Me!, the pop-punk of Pennsylvania's the Menzingers and the Bay Area street punks of Rancid. With the death of Joe Strummer in December of 2002, Tim Armstrong of Rancid would pen "Indestructible" for his band's 2003 release of the same name: "And I'll keep listening to the great Joe Strummer, 'cause through music we can live forever!" In the end, the music of The Clash changed how popular music and political messages coexist. Where the Sex Pistols had used anarchy and nihilism to shock and appall, The Clash asked for reasonable, realistic answers to the ailments of England,

and more important to my argument, the need to disseminate the message of questioning the contemporary norms of the 1970s and 1980s.

With the application of multiple diverse musical styles that each band member brought to the table The Clash could communicate within specific styles of popular music and create a persuasive response to the tunnel vision created by the Sex Pistols at the birth of the London punk scene. The Clash's message is their ability to look outside the punk genre for inspiration and become the most important punk band that is not particularly punk. By the release of *London Calling* the band was not only working outside the confines of the punk explosion of 1977 but making strong commentary on their surroundings, using newspapers and radio programs as influences. The use of images of boom boxes and transistor radios throughout their time as a band suggests the desire to transmit their messages to a wider audience. On the airwaves songs gain a new power and can be used to bring people together under a banner of shared experiences. The cover for the single "Radio Clash" has a transistor radio that cannot be tuned to specific radio stations but international cities including Tokyo, Oslo, Paris, Lisbon, Moscow, Berlin and New York while the "Rock the Casbah" single has Jewish and Arab men dancing together to the sound of, presumably, the music coming from the Arab's boom box. The inner sleeve to *Cut the Crap* reveals the title "CLASH COMMUNIQUE OCTOBER '85" and urges listeners to participate in radical social change (Marcus 125). More militant than earlier ventures with *The Armagideon Times*, it asks fans to work together, from the ground up to make some lasting change:

Wise MEN and street kids together make a GREAT TEAM...but can the  
old system be BEAT? ...no...not without YOUR  
participation...RADICAL social change begins on the STREET!...so if

you're looking for some ACTION...CUT THE CRAP and get OUT there.

(quoted in Marcus 126)

Even as a failed experiment in rock and roll turned journalism, The Clash as a “news giving group” set the stage for what one can do with popular music. While social commentary has always been a part of popular music, the mashing of mass media styles together—be it audio from toilet cleaner commercials snuck into “Inoculated City” from *Combat Rock* or news reports of rebel activity anywhere from Belfast to Tehran played during concerts and in music videos—changes popular music commentary from just a personal plea for peace or understanding and uses popular images and modes of communication to do some of the work for the artist. The ever-updated sound of The Clash as they take sounds from the streets to connect with popular styles expands their range and influence as much as their own abilities as musicians. Chuck D wrote in 2004 of the high regard he holds for The Clash and lead singer Joe Strummer:

I had great respect for Joe Strummer. How he used his music—incorporating a lot of black music like hip-hop and reggae—was very different from the guys who invented rock ‘n’ roll: He always paid homage to those who came before him. I admired him for his humility as an artist and for the fact that he dug musical cats, no matter what type of music they played. He was constantly pushing the boundaries of The Clash’s sound and of what music could do on a greater level. And Joe was still rebellious: he was speaking about things he saw in his life—the things right in front of his face that no one wanted to talk about—and taking his message around the world. (Chuck D xx)

The use of communication images in The Clash's music functions to promote the idea of mass media as a coercive force in our culture. Music becomes a force that can be commandeered and used for rebellion and bringing different cultures together. Incorporation of the bubblegum, rockabilly, classic rock, and rap genres blankets their records in the familiar to promote a message of awareness and dissent. Through this subversion of pop music people can weaken those in power through entertainment while educating them on flaws within the system: be it the Sharif, the old cunning men at the factory working for the clampdown or record company executives who want "complete control"—the masses have the ability to navigate mass culture for their own ends and take something meaningful out of the music.

Mentioned multiple times within my argument, Mick Jones's statement that "people prefer to dance than to fight wars" has always frustrated me as a fan of The Clash, since I always thought it was a copout that didn't fit with my view of the band as a strictly punk rock act with political ideals. However in looking at The Clash through the lens of a band promoting themselves as "the only band that matters" and a news-giving group rather than a rock and roll act it is clear to me that Jones doesn't just want punks coming to shows, but rather a mosaic of different cultures coming out to interact with their sound and their message. Dancing isn't a passive act when coupled with Strummer's desire to inform people through rhythmic memory of songs and in-concert shout-outs. Dancing is a social event and brings people together in ways that they may not otherwise intend. In dancing rather than fighting, people can be a part of a community who have had similar experiences and make connections otherwise unseen before. The Clash made being smart cool: looking at the lyrics of their songs made me think twice about my surroundings like no other band had for me at the tender age of sixteen. The political issues that are debated within their songs are just as important as how The Clash want to be heard—



through pirate radio and S. O. S. messages from London. Through the paintings of graffiti artists in New York City and flashy military outfits in Thailand. The enduring image associated with The Clash, even during the Combat Rock years, is a transistor radio. Worked into pieces of art, logos and single covers, the idea is reinforced that a radio transmission is mightier than well-oiled police force.

In further research I would like to see how the appropriation of images and styles of media is used in bands to create a sense of urgency. Big Audio Dynamite and Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros, the two best known bands to come out of The Clash breakup would both play with the use of mass communication again in later releases, using popular music as a catalyst to look for cultural similarities rather than borders. Mick Jones mixes radio transmissions, television and movie lines into his dance single “C’mon Every Beatbox” and puts on the mask of a worker in a Japanese electronics plant to talk about the effects of globalization in “Sony.” Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros’s 2001 release *Global a Go-Go* and its title track work within the same boundaries of *London Calling* and *Sandinista!* by pulling from different sources of global music for inspiration. In “Global a Go-Go” opens with a “world service bulletin from the nightshift DJ, to all wavebands of the Earth” before coupling popular acts with specific international cities: “Big Youth booming in Djakarta [Jakarta], Nina Simone in Sierra Leone, wild sounds of Joujouka in Nevada...everywhere, everywhere Bob’s bringing it back home,” (“Global a Go-Go”). Outside of the individual bands created with the breakup of The Clash those inspired include Rage Against the Machine who play with the mixing of medias in album art and music videos for political actions, most prominently in the music video “Testify” which mixes and mashes footage from the 2000 presidential election of George W. Bush versus Al Gore with images of violence and death in the United States.

I would like to see work done into how bands work to address the audience as a part of a social happening or related community. The power of The Clash as mentioned before I argue comes from the ability to transmit a message that hooks onto specific emotions in its listeners. Like many popular acts, The Clash brings together people from different social and economic backgrounds based on specific songs, albums and being incorporated into an overall product. I would like to see how bands work to create an imagined community outside the regular confines of fan-created groups or concerts where people actively come together to discuss the band. Songs like “Radio Clash” come from somewhere far outside the confines of punk rock in the growing rap community of the 1980s. How can bands create new sounds outside of the confines of a specific genre or fan base without being considered phony their activities? Again, as I look at the career of The Clash as whole text 40 years out through academic research on the band and reviews of albums from that time it sounds like (at least from the vantage point of rock critics) The Clash were able to mix new styles into their music with few detractors after *London Calling*.

#### Guaranteed Personality: The Legacy of The Clash

While The Clash used mass media imagery to promote their own causes in a time when popular music acts did not take definitive stances in politics or humanitarian causes, they did create a framework of how to interact with fans and have intelligent reactions to popular issues. Using Twitter in 2010 to promote her third album *Born This Way*, Lady Gaga’s hash tag #BORNTHISWAY was central to the discussion of the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” by asking her followers to contact Senator Harry Reid on the issue. Using the power of the social platform Gaga tweeted in response to tweets from Senator Reid on a vote on the issue in late September: “God Bless and Thank you @HarryReid, from all of us, like u, who believe in

equality and the dream of this country. We were #BORNTHISWAY” (Kreps). In 2011, Gaga also launched the Born This Way Foundation with support from the Berkmen Center For Internet and Society at Harvard University, the California Endowment and the John T. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The Born This Way Foundation will work to support anti-bullying and youth empowerment initiatives (Perpetua). Music can be used as entertainment but it can also make in-roads to think differently about personal surroundings. When people get together for a concert or a listening party they are also communicating with each other about the state of their world, individual fears and desires for a better tomorrow. When popular musicians express topical responses to the world around them it connects with the audience member who can relate their popular songs to their personal situations.

In 1999 The Clash released the live album *From Here to Eternity: Live*. It collects concert performances of their best known tracks from throughout their career as a band. While the live tracks add to the discography of The Clash, the liner notes for the album include quotes from fans that show the impact of The Clash across temporal and geographical boundaries. Clearly handpicked by the band, these quotes help to explain individual punk experiences and identity-changing moments framed by interactions with The Clash. One fan named Crawford writes about his first experience seeing The Clash.

I saw The Clash for the first time in Hong Kong in 1981. Where I grew up The Clash were the soundtrack to the lives of many expatriate British kids there, but the biggest Clash fan in my School was Sikh with a turban! The Clash played at the AC hall in front of 3000 kids. They were a big band then. I remember being surprised there were so many Chinese kids there and the show as so incredibly intense, they played over 40 songs. (*From Here to Eternity: Live* liner notes)

Another fan named Eric recounted his experience at a show in 1982:

I saw The Clash with Terry Chimes on drums in Chicago at the Aragon Ballroom in August of 1982. The atmosphere was unforgettable: punks, dreads, Japanese bamboo kids, rockabilly rebels, mods, ordinary men and women of all ages, colours and sartorial styles, all profiling before the show and dancing like maniacs during. The band was ghostlike in their sense of committed purpose. (*From Here to Eternity: Live* liner notes)

A majority of the quotes react to the people at the concert, from all walks of life—police academy students, public school kids, punks, rastas and everyone in-between coming together under the same banner to dance the night away. One of the best comes from Daniel, who was only able to experience The Clash through recordings: “I am only 18. I have never seen The Clash but I would sell my grandmother to have seen them.” The Clash had an impact on the way of life for fans that either saw them live or experienced them through their recordings years later. It changed them and made them think critically about their everyday surroundings.

The music of The Clash is a shared experience that creates in-roads to different cultures and flourishes in specific social circles, most notably that of punk rock. The anger and frustration that I felt as I sang “Clampdown” on The New York State Thruway is relevant in 2010 as it is in 2012 as it was in 1980. Finding out that a co-worker, boss, friend or distant relative interacted with the music of The Clash, even when from widely differing worldviews, brings people together. I can still remember the day when my editor at *The Spotlight* walked up to me after seeing The Clash badge on my messenger bag and said “Ahern, when they kick down your front door how you gonna come? With your hands on your head or the trigger of your gun?” It is as if Bill DeVoe had read my mind as he repeated the lyrics from “Guns of Brixton” to me after a

rough news day. It reminded me of the first time I found out a younger cousin of mine, nearly identical in age to me but one I had not interacted with for 14 years of my life, listened to *London Calling*. During a camping trip he mentioned how much he liked the album, and I spent the rest of the trip stubbornly making sure he got the lyrics right (Pat, I don't remember what the argument was, I think it was over the Spanish in "Spanish Bombs," but you were right).

There is something about the music of The Clash, and it's not just the politics, but how those politics are framed that is directly influenced by their images of mass media as a weapon against tyranny and corruption. The idea of a reporter as a rebel without a cause on the streets or a deejay loading the turntable with "aural ammunition" appeals to the journalist in me. While Postman forecasts a Huxleyan future where entertainment suppresses the ability to respond to the control the government has on the masses, the interpretation and individual responses to these songs show that entertainment can be used to incite rebellion and meaningful change in a culture, based on the sounds of the streets.

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## APPENDIX: ALBUMS AND TOURS

Information contained in this appendix can be found in Pat Gilbert's *Passion is the Fashion: The Real Story of The Clash* and Mal Peachy's *The Clash*. This list includes initial releases of the six albums put out by The Clash between 1977-1985 and does not include compilations such as *The Story of the Clash Vol.1* (CBS 1988), *The Clash On Broadway* (Epic/Legacy 1991), *Black Market Clash* (Columbia 1991), *Super Black Market Clash* (Columbia 1994), *From Here to Eternity* (Columbia 1999), and *The Singles* (Epic 2007).

## Albums

*The Clash* (CBS)

UK Release: April 1977

“Janie Jones”

“Remote Control”

“I’m So Bored With The U.S.A.”

“White Riot”

“Hate & War”

“What’s My Name?”

“Deny”

“London’s Burning”

“Career Opportunities”

“Cheat”

“Protex Blue”

“Police and Thieves”

“48 Hours

“Garageland”

*The Clash* (Epic)

US Release: July 1979

“Clash City Rockers”

“I’m So Bored With The U.S.A.”

“Remote Control”

“Complete Control”

“White Riot”

“(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais”

“London’s Burning”

“I Fought The Law”

“Janie Jones”

“Career Opportunities”

“What’s My Name?”

“Hate & War”

“Police & Thieves”

“Jail Guitar Doors”

“Garageland”

*Give ’Em Enough Rope* (November 1978)

UK Release: CBS

US Release: Epic

“Safe European Home”

“English Civil War”

“Tommy Gun”

“Julie’s Been Working for the Drug Squad”

“Last Gang in Town”

“Guns on the Roof”

“Drug-Stabbing Time”

“Stay Free”

“Cheapskates”

“All the Young Punks (New Boots and Contacts)”

*London Calling* (December 1979)

UK Release: CBS

US Release: Epic

“London Calling”

“Brand New Cadillac”

“Jimmy Jazz”

“Hateful”

“Rudie Can’t Fail”

“Spanish Bombs”

“Right Profile”

“Lost in the Supermarket”

“Clampdown”



“Guns of Brixton”

“Wrong ‘Em Boyo”

“Death or Glory”

“Koka Cola”

“Card Cheat”

“Lover’s Rock”

“I’m Not Down”

“Revolution Rock”

“Four Horsemen”

“Train in Vain”

*Sandinista!* (December 1980)

UK Release: CBS

US Release: Epic

“The Magnificent Seven”

“Hitsville UK”

“Junco Partner”

“Ivan Meets G.I. Joe”

“The Leader”

“Something About England”

“Rebel Waltz”

“Look Here”

“The Crooked Beat”

“Somebody Got Murdered”

“One More Time”

“One More Dub”

“Lightning Strikes (Not Once But Twice)”

“Up In Heaven (Not Only Here)”

“Corner Soul”

“Let’s Go Crazy”

“If Music Could Talk”

“The Sound Of The Sinners”

“Police On My Back”

“Midnight Log”

“The Equaliser”

“The Call Up”

“Washington Bullets”

“Broadway”

“Lose This Skin”

“Charlie Don’t Surf”

“Mensforth Hill”

“Junkie Slip”

“Kingston Advice”

“The Street Parade”

“Version City”

“Living In Fame”

“Silicone On Sapphire”

“Career Opportunities”

“Shepherds Delight”

*Combat Rock* (May 1982)

UK Release: CBS

US Release: Epic

“Know Your Rights”

“Car Jamming”

“Should I Stay Or Should I Go?”

“Rock The Casbah”

“Red Angel Dragnet”

“Straight To Hell”

“Overpowered by Funk”

“Atom Tan”

“Sean Flynn”

“Ghetto Defendant”

“Inoculated City”

“Death Is A Star”

*Cut the Crap* (November 1985)

UK Release: CBS

US Release: Epic

“Dictator”

“Dirty Punk”

“We Are The Clash”

“Are You Red...y”

“Cool Under Heat”

“Movers and Shakers”

“This is England”

“Three Card Trick”

“Play to Win”

“Fingerpoppin”

“North And South”

“Life Is Wild”

#### Tours

**First United Kingdom Tour** (July-November 1976).

**Anarchy in the UK Tour** (December 1976).

*Tour included the Sex Pistols, The Damned, and The Heartbreakers.*

**White Riot Tour, United Kingdom** (May 1977).

*Support acts included the Buzzcocks, The Jam, The Slits, and Subway Sect.*

**Europe '77 Tour** (June to October of 1977).

**Out of Control Tour, United Kingdom** (October-December 1977).

*Support Acts Included Richard Hell and the Voidoids and the Lous.*

**Rock Against Racism, Victoria Park, London** (April 30, 1978).

**Out On Parole Tour, United Kingdom** (June-July 1978).

*Support acts include the Specials and Suicide.*

**Sort It Out Tour, United Kingdom** (October-January 1978).

*Supporting act The Slits.*

**Pearl Harbour Tour, North America** (January-February 1979).

January 31, 1979: Vancouver, Canada.

*Support act Bo Diddley.*

**London Calling Tour, United Kingdom** (March, July 1979).

August 4: Ruisrock Festival in Turku, Finland.

**Take The Fifth Tour, North America** (September-October 1979).

October 16, 1979: Vancouver, Canada with support from DOA.

*Support Acts include Bo Diddley, Sam And Dave, the Undertones.*

**Sixteen Tons Tour of the UK, United Kingdom** (January-February 1980).

*The Armagideon Times* is sold as a part of the concert merchandise created by Blackhill

February, 27, 1980: Paris France.

**Sixteen Tons Tour of the USA, United States** (March-April 1980).

*Support acts include Mikey Dread, B-Girls, and Lee Dorsey.*

Enterprises

**Sixteen Ton Tour of Europe** (May-June 1980).

**Impossible Mission Tour, Europe** (April-May 1981).

**Bonds International Casino Concerts, New York City** (May-June 1981).

Fourteen shows over a two week period in New York City after the club had over-sold tickets for the gigs scheduled from May 28-June 8.

*Support acts included The Sugarhill Gang, Dead Kennedys, The Treacherous Three, Lee Perry*

*and Mikey Dread.*

**Theatre Mogador, Paris, France** (September 1981).

Eight-night concert series in Paris following the Bond's Concerts in the fall of 1981.

*Support Acts included Wah! and The Beat.*

**Radio Clash Tour, United Kingdom** (October of 1981).

*Support acts included Theatre of Hate.*

**Far East Tour, Asia/Australia** (January-February 1982).

**Casbah Club USA, North America** (May-June 1982; Canadian dates June 26-29).

**Casbah Club UK** (July-August 1982).

*Support acts included the English Beat, Under Two Flags, Pearl Harbour, and UK Southern Death Cult.*

The Casbah Club tours would see the return of Terry Chimes as The Clash's drummer with the sacking of Topper Headon from his drug addiction.

**Combat Rock USA Tour, North America** (August-November 1982).

September 25-30 and October 12-12, 23-29 The Clash supported The Who during their tour.

*Notable support acts included The English Beat, Kurtis Blow, Jerry's Kids, and Khmer Rouge.*

**US Festival Tour** (May 1983).

The May 28 date of the tour would be the last gig with Mick Jones as guitarist of The Clash.