

LEGACY

A Journal of Student Scholarship

Volume 24

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A Publication of the Sigma Kappa Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta
& the Southern Illinois University Carbondale History program

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Will Brady

How Bork Made it to the Supreme Court: Judge Robert Bork's Nomination Battle and Its Impact on American Judicial Politics

Since Donald Trump's presidency (2016-2020), the Supreme Court has been marked by challenges to civil liberties and their legal protection: reproductive freedoms have been challenged, *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned, affirmative action has been struck down, and arguments against other individual rights are increasingly heard. It has become one of the most influential conservative bodies in American politics. However, the ideals and justifications behind this legal ideology did not begin with Trump's appointment of justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett. The current legal storm is the product of a legal battle settled decades ago during Ronald Reagan's administration. The nomination of Robert H. Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987 and the subsequent political battle surrounding his confirmation began a politicization of the Supreme Court that is reflected in modern nominations.

Bork came into legal and political prominence in the mid-1970s. A professor at Yale University, he entered the political sphere with his prominent philosophy in antitrust law. His opinions and later rulings on anti-trust legislation set a precedent that shifted the country out of the trust-busting progressive era following the New Deal.¹ His ideology confined legal definitions of trusts only to "horizontal" relationships between separate corporations and did not consider a company's "vertical" integration or acquisitions.² Bork's views on anti-trust legislation have become central to the Supreme Court's views on the subject.³ His growing reputation as a bright legal scholar and staunch conservative led President Richard Nixon to appoint him as Solicitor General in 1973. In that post, he served an integral role in the Saturday Night Massacre. As the acting Attorney General, he fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox after the protest resignations of two Justice

- 1 Hilary McQuilkin and Meghna Chakrabarti, "More than Money: Defining American Antitrust Law, from Bork to Khan," *On Point*, December 29, 2022, <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/12/29/more-than-money-defining-american-antitrust-law-from-bork-to-khan>.
- 2 Herbert J. Hovenkamp, "Robert Bork and Vertical Integration: Leverage, Foreclosure, and Efficiency," *All Faculty Scholarship*, 2014, https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/1848.
- 3 Mark Pulliam, "The Original Originalist," *City Journal*, Summer 2018, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/the-original-originalist-2>

Department officials. Nixon had hopes of putting Bork on the Supreme Court in part due to this display of loyalty, a goal he was unable to achieve. Bork subsequently returned to Yale Law School where he taught until President Ronald Reagan appointed him to a judgeship on the federal appellate court in 1981.

Throughout his tenure, Judge Bork was known as the father and major proponent of original intent, the philosophy in Constitutional law that attempts to interpret the intentions of the Founding Fathers through the text of the Constitution. What started as a fringe theory in constitutional law became Bork's defining ideology and the foremost legal philosophy in today's conservative majority. Proponents of originalism claim it is rooted in ideals such as those presented in Alexander Hamilton's *Federalist* 78.⁴ There Hamilton wrote of the importance of judicial rule and a Constitution that provides the basis for all law. Bork's writings similarly advocate for the literal reading of the Constitution, that the document is the immutable source of law in the nation, and the ultimate basis for all legal authority. This is one of his main arguments in the speech "Neutral Principles and Some First Amendment Problems" that presented the idea of originalism. In the speech, Bork articulated the necessity for constitutional law to be founded on the Constitution's neutral principles, or rules based in law, can then be applied to cases outside what the framers could have imagined when drafting the Constitution and the amendments that the nation added since its original ratification.⁵ Some legal scholars disagree with this claim. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 29, 1987, legal expert A.J. Richards explained why Federalists such as Hamilton opposed such strict views on the Constitution. He stated,

[t]hey do not want a bill of rights because it will be taken to be exclusive and indeed I cite Iredell's remarkable speech in the North Carolina ratifying convention where he actually says we do not want a bill of rights because someone later on—and I say it is predictive of Judge Bork—will look back and say rights are only as defined in 1787, which will corrupt and degrade our whole tradition. They want rights fully protected, as indeed, they are viewed in later contemporary circumstances.⁶

Richards argued that the Federalists were concerned, in the context of

4 Ibid.

5 Robert H. Bork "Neutral Principles and Some First Amendment Problems," *Indiana Law Journal* 47, no. 1 (Fall 1971), <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol47/iss1/1>.

6 A.J. Richards, "Hearings on the Nomination of Judge Robert H. Bork to be Associate Justice of the United State Supreme Court Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary." *Senate hearing transcripts for Robert Bork*, September 29, 1987, https://archive.org/stream/bork_transcripts/Bork-3_djvu.txt.

the Bill of Rights, with explicit statements of rights being read as absolute statements of rights. He then applied that thought to the context of originalism, implying that the Federalist viewpoint would oppose strict or absolute readings of the text of the Constitution and rather, the Federalist would favor protections to the individual.

As Richards demonstrated, the name “Original Intent” can itself be a misnomer. Writing on original intent for the *Harvard Law Review*, H. Jefferson Powell explored the historical context for the drafting of the Constitution as well as the cultural norms that influenced legal writings to show how this view is contrary to the “original intent” of the framers.⁷ “The Philadelphia framers’ primary expectation,” he wrote, “was that the Constitution, like any other legal document, would be interpreted in accord with its express language.”⁸

This philosophy was perhaps the most controversial in issues of privacy. Bork’s qualm with privacy cases such as *Griswold v. Connecticut* was neutrality. In a speech to Indiana University in the spring of 1971, Bork presented the early ideas of originalism. “If we take the principle of the decision to be a statement that government may not interfere with any acts done in private,” he said, “we need not even ask about the principle’s dubious origin for we know at once that the Court will not apply it neutrally.”⁹ He argued that without the neutral principles found in the Constitution by which laws could be evaluated, rulings would be left to the whim of individual justices and would stray from the legitimacy granted to them by the will of the people.

One of the defining legal privacy issues of the twentieth century is abortion and reproductive rights.¹⁰ In this arena, Bork did not shy away from voicing his disapproval of *Roe v. Wade*. In the landmark decision, the court held that a state could not interfere with an individual’s privacy in a medical office. In fact, in 1973, Bork called it a “wholly unjustifiable judicial usurpation” of state’s rights.¹¹ His use of a new legal philosophy to criticize individual protections cases both captured conservatives and struck fear in liberals.

Nominating Bork to the Supreme Court meant thrusting privacy issues

7 H. Jefferson Powell, “The Original Understanding of Original Intent,” *Harvard Law Review* 98, no. 5 (1985): 885, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1340880>.

8 Ibid.

9 Robert H. Bork, “Neutral Principles.”

10 David Garrow refers to *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark case in reproductive rights, as “one of the two greatest stories... in American legal history.” The second being *Brown v. Board*. David J. Garrow. Preface to *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade* (New York, NY: Open Road Media, 2015). <https://shorturl.at/f9dgT>.

11 Joe Nocera, “The Ugliness Started with Bork,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/opinion/nocera-the-ugliness-all-started-with-bork.html>.

to the center of the political landscape alongside a question of the identity of the Supreme Court. Justice Powell announced his retirement in mid-June. A Nixon appointee, Powell had a strong moderate voice on the Supreme Court and a deciding vote on many cases.¹² “Powell,” according to the *Washington Post* shortly after announcing his retirement, “generally voted with the court’s conservative wing, especially on criminal, business and other issues, joining them this term more than 80 percent of the time. But he is seen as the justice who almost single-handedly stymied the Reagan judicial revolution, consistently voting against the administration in close cases involving abortion, affirmative action and separation of church and state.”¹³ This position gave him a significant influence on the Supreme Court. Toni House, spokeswoman for the Supreme Court, had even sent Justice Powell a note following a stretch of illness calling him “the most powerful man in America.”¹⁴

Political precedent expected Reagan to add a moderate to the Supreme Court and keep the balance that had been maintained since President Franklin Delano Roosevelt expanded the Court to nine. Although Reagan had already filled two Supreme Court seats by 1987, filling Powell’s seat was an incredible political opportunity at a moment when he neared the end of his second term. The remaining Justices evenly matched the liberal and conservative wings, with Justice John Paul Stevens pulling the court to the liberal wing in some cases. Adding a new conservative Justice to the Court would secure Reagan’s political legacy. The shortlist for nominees ranged ideologically, even though all had a conservative angle. The more conservative were Pasco Bowman II and Bork and the more moderate, Frank Easterbrook and future Justice Anthony Kennedy.¹⁵ As names of candidates began to float, expressions of displeasure came from Democrats. Judge Bowman, for example, was dropped from the list after then Senator and chairman of the Judiciary Committee Joseph Biden expressed that there was “considerable opposition” among the Democrats who viewed Bowman as a “very ideological jurist.”¹⁶ The decision

12 “Lewis F. Powell, Jr.” Oyez, Accessed November 16, 2023, https://www.oyez.org/justices/lewis_f_powell_jr.

13 Al Kamen, “Justice Powell Resigns, Was Supreme Court’s Pivotal Vote,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 1987, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/supcourt/stories/powell062787.htm>.

14 Ethan Bronner and Alan M. Dershowitz, *Battle for Justice: How the Bork Nomination Shook America* (Omaha, NE: Notable Trials Library, 2012), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=VpFLtmfnRaMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=bork+nomination&ots=P9J1t05WVv&sig=xoAyrLwFu2km_5RKkQynqzOB4n0#v=onepage&q&.

15 “Raul, Alan Charles: Files, 1986-1988,” Subseries B: Supreme Court, OA 19157, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California, accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/finding_aids_pdfs/219449.pdf?VersionId=wJr1b47.tiRoJCIDYJXGJ5FxyDDmihs.

16 Staff, “KC Judge Considered for Seat,” www.newspapers.com, accessed November

came, then, to the candidate who could be pitched to the American people as a sound judge and who held a candle against accusations of politicizing the Supreme Court.

This was not the first time Bork had been considered since Nixon resigned. He had been shortlisted by President Gerald Ford. Most recently, opposition from civil rights groups encouraged Reagan to pass him over just a year earlier. For both Ford and then Reagan in 1986, a Bork nomination was a move too far into conservative territory, and it guaranteed Democratic pushback. Bork was fiercely opposed by liberal legal scholars, civil rights organizations, and the Democratic Party, all of whom painted him as a political figure and a conservative powerhouse. Notably, his previous experience in Nixon's executive branch inextricably tied him to one of the largest political scandals in the nation's history. Despite this, there were and are conservative claims that the denial of Bork was a partisan and political denial of an otherwise qualified candidate echoing Bork's own claims that the judiciary should remain an impartial body.¹⁷

Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts led a charge to keep Bork from the Supreme Court. "Robert Bork's America," he stated, "is a land in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police could break down citizens' doors in midnight raids, and schoolchildren could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists would be censored at the whim of the Government, and the doors of the Federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens."¹⁸ Without an implied right to privacy, Kennedy argued, federal courts would be permitted to overturn other major precedent cases such as *Miranda v. Arizona*. He also feared there would be little control over state governments from banning abortions or interracial marriage.

Chairman Biden pushed back the start of confirmation hearings two months, which allowed for a fundraising and lobbying campaign the likes of which had not been seen outside of an electoral campaign. Anti-Bork organizations outraised pro-Bork ones two to one.¹⁹ As the political heat ramped up and the first hearing drew nearer, the Reagan administration's

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- 17 Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America* Robert H. Bork (New York: Free Press, 1997), <https://books.google.com/books?id=jWbkvFhJStoC&lpq=PR17&ots=93w3lOmf-BW&dq=robert%20bork&lr&pg=PA2#v=onepage&q&f=false>; and Robert H. Bork, "Constitution, Original Intent, and Economic Rights," *San Diego Law Review* 23, no. 4 (July-August 1986): 823-832.
- 18 James Reston, "Kennedy and Bork," *New York Times*, July 5, 1987, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1987/07/05/780287.html?pageNumber=101>.
- 19 Calvin Chiu, "How to Lose a Supreme Court Nominee in 115 Days: The Story of the Robert Bork Confirmation and Its Legacy Today," *Undergraduate Journal of History* (Spring 2021), <https://undergradjournal.history.ucsb.edu/spring-2021/chiu/>.

calmer demeanor began to crack. White House releases and remarks from the President started to include more pointed quips criticizing the pushback from civil rights organizations. In one address, Reagan reframed Bork's infamous philosophy of original intent. He set original intent as an interpretation of law and implied that other methods of textual analysis of both written law and the Constitution would be "reshaping [the Constitution] ... according to judicial whim."²⁰ This rhetorical view allowed for the shaping of more liberal views on Constitutional law as radical without having to engage with them directly.

The press onslaught was fierce. In bold type, the *Washington Post* declared, "Robert Bork's Position on Reproductive Rights: You Don't Have Any."²¹ Democrats were fighting for the protection of legal cases that were hard-won and with hope of preventing future legislation from being overturned. Many also believed they were fighting to preserve the sanctity of the Supreme Court as an impartial body, not subject to the political whims that animated the executive and legislative branches. This aggressive campaign put on by the Democrats and liberal activist organizations continued well through the hearings themselves, when Bork faced a Judiciary Committee geared for a fight.

The abortion issue would ultimately cost Bork the confirmation.²² At the hearing, Biden opened questioning with scrutiny into Bork's statements on overturning precedent. As Chairman, he brought in the testimony of law professors who emphasized their disagreement on Bork's views of privacy as well as representatives of the National Abortion Rights Action League.²³ Democratic Senators led Bork through questions of his disagreement of prior decisions regarding civil liberties cases. Senator Paul Simon of Illinois cited the Dredd Scott decision and Justice Taney's majority opinion, stating "It sounded an awful lot like Robert Bork in terms of saying we cannot read into the Constitution what is not there, when they denied free blacks the right to be citizens."²⁴ These opening questions exemplify the aggression displayed by the Democratic committee members during the committee hearing and the Senate confirmation hearings.

The combined funding battle and rhetorical slog that had hit the American

20 "Remarks on Administration Goals to Senior Presidential Appointees," The American Presidency Project, September 8, 1987, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-administration-goals-senior-presidential-appointees>.

21 Chiu, "How to Lose a Supreme Court Nominee in 115 Days."

22 Judiciary Committee, report, 1 Nomination of Robert H. Bork to be Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States §, 86-974 (1989).

23 U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. *Hearings on the Nomination of Judge Robert H. Bork to Be Associate Justice of the United State Supreme Court Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary*. September 29, 1987, https://archive.org/stream/bork_transcripts/Bork-3_djvu.txt. 5307, 5266.

24 "Bork Nomination Day 2," C-SPAN, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?998-1%2Fbork-nomination-day-2&start=19175>. 5:11:59

people was ultimately to win the court of public opinion. The public's initial reaction was relatively neutral. A CBS and *New York Times* poll in September of 1987 showed that forty percent of respondents said they did not have enough information to form an opinion on Bork's nomination.²⁵ The influence of that forty percent helped impact the political battle with the hearings.

Despite its best efforts, the Reagan administration was unable to stop the full force campaign against Bork. A poll from the *Los Angeles Times* following the failed confirmation vote revealed that 38% of respondents, all living in traditionally conservative states, felt that the trial was fair while 29% were "unaware."²⁶ Bork ended the Senate hearings with an unfavorable review from the Judiciary Committee by a vote of nine to five. The fight had finished and, at Bork's insistence, the Senate took his nomination to a vote, which failed on October 23, 1987.

Bork responded with a fervor to correct the record established by the Democratic campaign against him. In his resignation letter to President Reagan, he wrote, "[t]he crux of the matter is that I wish to speak, write, and teach about law and other issues of public policy more extensively and more freely than is possible in my present position."²⁷ Reflecting on these events in 2018, Mark Pulliam wrote "The Senate's rejection of Bork ... did not prevent the ascendancy of his brand of 'originalist' constitutional theory and, in fact, may have bolstered it, by giving him a bully pulpit that he would use effectively for the rest of his life."²⁸ Publishing a number of books on political and legal theory, Bork frequently expressed his pessimism with US politics. One of his best-selling and defining publications *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (1996) highlights this pessimism while addressing court rulings overturning sodomy laws. Thrust into the spotlight by his confirmation proceedings, Bork became a pillar of conservative legal scholarship.

Republican senators did not soon forget the embarrassment of Bork's confirmation. Nomination proceedings have become increasingly political spectacles since 1987. Full television coverage of Senate hearings and nominees increasingly towing their decisions along partisan lines have

25 CBS News/New York Times, CBS News/New York Times Poll: Bork/Persian Gulf Survey, Question 3, USCBSNYT.092387.R02, *CBS News/New York Times* (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1987). DOI: 10.25940/ROPER-31091252.

26 Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times Poll # 1987-132: Market Fluctuation/Political Benchmarks, Question 22, USLAT.132.R29, *Los Angeles Times* (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1987). DOI: 10.25940/ROPER-31092854.

27 Ronald Reagan and Robert Bork. "Letter Accepting the Resignation of Robert H. Bork as United States Circuit Judge." Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, January 14, 1988. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/letter-accepting-resignation-robert-h-bork-united-states-circuit-judge>.

28 Pulliam, "The Original Originalist."

further transformed the nomination process into a political spectacle. Pulitzer Prize winning *Washington Post* critic Tom Shales noted, "But you could almost hear the network news departments twiddling their thumbs not long after they signed on at 2:30 p.m., having forgone a largely ceremonial morning session."²⁹ Joe Nocera stated in a 2011 opinion piece for the *New York Times* that "[t]he Bork fight, in some ways, was the beginning of the end of civil discourse in politics."³⁰

To that end, the nomination started a rampant politicization of the Supreme Court reflected in modern originalist judges. This is exemplified in twenty first century Supreme Court issues. In the Obama years, the politicization of the Supreme Court resulted in fervent battles between the White House and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, who refused to hold hearings for Obama's nominee Merrick Garland to the Court as well as for dozens of federal judiciary nominees due to the impending presidential election in 2016. In all, Obama was only able to successfully confirm two appellate court judges in his last two years as President.

Similar battles were waged with President Donald Trump's nominees Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barret. The confirmation hearings of Justice Kavanaugh were particularly reminiscent of Bork's in length and media coverage. Similar to Bork, Kavanaugh served on the United States Court of Appeals in 2003. His 2018 nomination, coincidentally, was to fill the seat vacated by Justice Anthony Kennedy, the very seat Bork would have held had he been confirmed.

In Kavanaugh's confirmation, allegations of sexual assault became the center of American politics. In his opening statement, he did not discuss his scholarly opinions in regard to the Constitution or to law. Rather, he chided Democrats and "the left," stating "[t]he behavior of several of the Democratic members of this committee at my hearing a few weeks ago was an embarrassment. But at least it was just a good old-fashioned attempt at Borking."³¹ The Center for American Progress described Kavanaugh's opening statement on the floor as "a partisan display . . . in which he put forward conspiracy theories that echoed his long career in conservative politics."³²

29 Tom Shales, "Bork and Biden, the Alphonse and Gaston of daytime TV," *The Washington Post*, in "All Bork No Bite," Pulitzer, September 16, 1987, <https://www.pulitzer.org/article/all-bork-and-no-bite>.

30 Nocera, "The Ugliness Started with Bork."

31 "Brett Kavanaugh's Opening Statement: Full Transcript," *New York Times*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/us/politics/read-brett-kavanaughs-complete-opening-statement.html>.

32 Maggie Jo Buchanan and Abbey Meller, "Brett Kavanaugh: A Representation of the Damaged U.S. Judiciary," Center for American Progress, October 1, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/brett-kavanaugh-representation-dam>

Following his confirmation hearings, eighty-three ethics complaints were filed against him. The nomination passed with a 50-48 vote along party lines, with Democrat Joe Manchin being the lone exception.

Justice Kavanaugh does not call himself an originalist.³³ In fact, he calls himself a strict textualist who adheres to the ordinary meanings of the words of the Constitution itself. However, in his rulings, Kavanaugh has shown deference to the Court's history of implied rights. In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, Kavanaugh stated in his concurring opinion,

[t]o be sure, this Court has held that the Constitution protects unenumerated rights that are deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition, and implicit in the concept of ordered liberty. But a right to abortion is not deeply rooted in American history and tradition, as the Court today thoroughly explains.³⁴

This statement mirrors Bork's rhetoric on the very issue that stalled his elevation to the Supreme Court in 1987.

The difference between Bork's rejection and Kavanaugh's confirmation was the result of shifting Senate rules. In 2013, the Senate voted to remove the sixty-vote requirement to confirm judicial nominees. Senator Harry Reid of Nevada and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer promoted this "nuclear option" as a response to stonewalling from the Republican Party. This quickly turned into a procedural nightmare for Democrats after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The Republican Senate opened the floodgates and allowed for more than one-hundred and fifty judgeships, including thirty appellate judges and three Supreme Court Justices to be confirmed during Trump's tenure.³⁵

Even though Bork lost his chance at sitting on the nation's highest court, his nomination, and the firestorm that ensued because of it, left a mark on the Court and judicial politics in the United States. The future the Democrats warned about, of conservative ideologue judges overturning key civil rights victories, arrived. *Roe v. Wade* is dead, and the Court is stacked in a new conservative slant that ascribes to and cites Bork's philosophies. Presently, Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Clarence Thomas, and Neil Gorsuch call themselves originalists. It should be noted, as commented by Megan

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33 Emily Bazelon and Eric Posner, "Who Is Brett Kavanaugh?" *New York Times*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/03/opinion/who-is-brett-kavanaugh.html>.

34 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. (2022).

35 John Gramlich, "How Trump Compares with Other Recent Presidents in Appointing Federal Judges," Pew Research Center, January 13, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/01/13/how-trump-compares-with-other-recent-presidents-in-appointing-federal-judges/>.

Cairns for *Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy*, that modern originalism has moved away from its early rhetoric. “New Originalism,” Cairns wrote, “was no longer concerned with an empirical search for what the framers, the ratifiers, or the public actually understood the Constitution to mean.”³⁶ Rather, the philosophy became centered on how public audiences would understand the Constitution.³⁷ However, Cairns argued that both the initial and subsequent approaches to originalism grapple with the Madisonian Compromise in a similar manner.³⁸ This Borkian idea is present in a growing number of landmark cases presented by the conservative supermajority court. The majority opinion in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard College* in reference to precedent cases such as *Brown v. Board*, stated “[t]hese decisions, and others like them, reflect the core purpose of the Equal Protection Clause: ‘do[ing] away with all governmentally imposed discrimination based on race.’”³⁹ The majority, written by Chief Justice Roberts, used this established intent to strike down affirmative action as a form of discrimination on the basis of race. Mark Pulliam went as far to say that “Bork’s defeat was a watershed event in judicial politics and reverberates still—it . . . forever transformed the judicial-confirmation process into an ideological gauntlet.”⁴⁰

Judge Robert Bork was undoubtedly an influential legal scholar and a transformative mind in American judicial process. His decisions as judge and to a greater extent his writings off of the bench crafted a judicial philosophy that has now overtaken American legal politics at the national level. This amount of influence is due in part to the limelight thrust upon Bork from his temultuous confirmation trials. Bork’s political martyrdom gave him a platform to shape judicial thought long after his legal career ended. It is due to Bork, and the battle his nomination sparked, that the modern originalist Supreme Court exists.

36 Megan Cairns, “Originalism: Can Theory and Supreme Court Practice Be Reconciled?,” *Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy* 19, no. 263 (2021), <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/public-policy-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2021/09/Cairns.pdf>. 265.

37 Gary Lawson, *Delegation and Original Meaning*, 88 VA. L. REV. 327, 398 (2002).

38 Cairns, “Originalism,” 276.

39 *Students for Fair Admissions Inc., v. President and Fellows of Harvard University, University of North Carolina, et al.*, United States Supreme Court, June 2023.

40 Pulliam, “The Original Originalist.”

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Leslie Davis

World War II, The Rise of Global Women, and Their Role in Society

Women worldwide have relentlessly fought for their rightful freedoms and rights. From the historic Seneca Falls Convention to the eve of World War II, an inspiring array of women's suffrage campaigns emerged, challenging oppression and demanding equality over ninety-one transformative years. The different ladies' suffrage initiatives began to show women of all races and ethnicities around the globe that they deserved to have their rights and freedoms. The already stated freedoms included the right to live without the negative bias of society towards women in general, without regard for race or ethnicity who went against social norms.

World War II forced the world to change in various ways and for multiple reasons. The war dramatically impacted individuals of all races, ethnicities, and genders. Ladies of all races and ethnicities existed among the many groups who felt this impact during and after the war. World War II caused many nations to turn towards some ethnic and social groups which at the time were not considered necessary in previous years to fill their workforces.

Many stories of women involved in the wartime workforce have predominantly featured examples from a single country and of one race: white women from the United States. This perspective appears when showcasing the efforts of white women from the United States who were involved in the wartime labor force and examining how the war impacted them in the postwar world, providing a generalized viewpoint on women engaged in war work. Few have demonstrated the societal impacts and the impacts on the involvement of women of different races and ethnicities in the workforce on a transnational level. Women worldwide can and should have their perspectives and ideals shown. British, Australian, and Mexican women are also individuals whose stories have been hidden from the international spotlight due to the overshadowing of the stories which came mainly from the United States. Native American women have even dealt with their stories being overshadowed by the stories of white women in the United States. Sharing the ideals and perspectives of more than just a single group of women from around the world rather than just one country and from the perspective of traditionally white women can show the true impact that a world-changing

event like World War II can have on a specific societal group like women of all races and ethnicities.

Including British, Australian, Mexican, African American, and white American women is crucial to exemplify their trials and tribulations. The traditional perspective usually highlights the experiences of white American women. This narrative presents an overarching viewpoint that might lead society to dismiss the cries for recognition and equality during WWII by women other than white Americans as false. Each ethnicity and race featured throughout this paper faced challenges during WWII and the immediate aftermath. This diverse group of women highlights the trials and tribulations they faced and how they overcame these challenges to pave the way for women in the modern workforce. This group also draws attention to why society continues to see female workers from these races and ethnicities in today's workforce are treated in the manner that they are. The participation of women across nations in the wartime workforce during World War II made a significant impact on their roles in society. Their efforts improved the role of women in society worldwide and enhanced their ability to work after WWII. This essay will specifically focus on British, Australian, Mexican, African American, Native American, and white American women, providing examples through newspaper articles, interviews, and academic papers.

Research Review

World War II brought sweeping changes for everyone around the world. Women, regardless of race or ethnicity, were no exception to these sweeping changes. Globally, women finally gained opportunities to secure new freedoms. After years of being confined to roles as mothers and homemakers, women seized the chance to improve their lives. As various groups of women entered the wartime workforce, they triggered significant changes in how society viewed women and how women viewed themselves within their respective communities. These different groups of women who entered the wartime workforce triggered substantial changes in how society viewed women and how women viewed themselves within their respective communities.

World War II created a substantial labor shortage in every nation involved in the war, including the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, Canada, Australia, Germany, and others.¹ As mentioned earlier, the draft used by these nations to build large military forces compelled them to seek alternative sources of labor to keep their countries running. Each nation called upon women, including minorities, to join the workforce. Governments used various forms of propaganda to “call” women of every race and ethnicity

1 For more information on the worldwide labor shortage, see Milton Derber, *Labor Management in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

to the wartime workforce.² Much controversy surrounds how nations recruited women to assist in the wartime effort, largely due to social issues like racism and sexism, which remain central concerns in many parts of the world. A common belief holds that women's involvement in the wartime workforce did not achieve much for them. However, evidence suggests that the participation of non-white American women in the wartime effort led to significant accomplishments for women of all races and ethnicities. Women's participation in the wartime workforce paved the way for the advancements seen by women of all races and ethnicities today. A key issue is that historians often focus on the perspective of white American women while neglecting the experiences of other important groups within the United States, such as Native Americans. Much of the literature focuses on the postwar effects experienced by white women in the United States. As a result, there is a tendency to generalize and assume that all women involved in the war effort shared the same experiences as white women in the United States. However, this generalization that all women in the war shared the same experience is inaccurate. The war's impact on Native American women led to quicker changes in their societal role compared to other ethnicities. Few historians address the role of Native Americans in World War II compared to other groups involved in the war. Even less information on the role and impact of Native American women during the war.³ In her article "We Also Serve: American Indian Women's Role in World War II," Grace Mary Gouveia attributes this lack of information to gaps in Native American and women's histories. Gouveia emphasizes that Native American women experienced significant changes as efforts were made to shift them back into their traditional roles from before World War II.

This pattern can be seen in other countries worldwide, specifically Great Britain, Australia, and Mexico.⁴ Showcasing the perspectives and impacts on groups other than white women in the United States is essential for shaping a well-rounded view of the role of women in the wartime workforce during and

2 For more information on the government's propaganda, see Susan Carruthers, "Manning the Factories": *Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939–1947*, *Journal of Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1990).

3 For more information regarding the impact and aftermath of the war on Native American women, see Gouveia, "We Also Serve": *American Indian Women's Role in World War II*.

4 Monica A. Rankin, *Mexicanas En Guerra: World War II and the Discourse of Mexican Female Identity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Dorothy Sheridan, "Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939–45 War in Britain (Hertfordshire: Oral History Society: 1990); Gail Reekie, *Industrial Women in Western Australia during World War II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 1985).

after World War II.⁵ Dorothy Sheridan's "Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939-45 War in Britain" offers a perspective that presents a more realistic view of British women's lives during World War II. She highlights the war's impact on British women due to their involvement in the wartime workforce. For example, Sheridan discusses how the family dynamic changed for many British women after the war. Sheridan also addresses the many issues British women faced during and after the war. She provides valuable information on how British women used the opportunities they gained from working in the wartime workforce to improve their lives. However, Sheridan does not compare the experiences of British women in the wartime workforce to those of women in other countries, despite discussing specific images and propaganda from other nations that influenced British women. Sheridan exhibits some bias in her article, which may lead readers to question the validity of certain points.

In Monica A. Rankin's "Mexicanas En Guerra: World War II and the Discourse of Mexican Female Identity," she explores the impact of World War II on Mexican women and their identity.⁶ Mexico's role in World War II is less frequently discussed than others. Rankin identifies a central debate concerning the evolving issues of Mexican female identity. She presents a clear, unbiased argument that addresses the postwar impact on Mexican female identity and the roles of Mexican women.

Gail Reekie provides insight into the experiences of Australian women in her article "Industrial Action by Women Workers in Western Australia during World War II." She discusses how Australian women working in various industries during World War II fought for better working conditions.⁷ Reekie argues that the efforts of women in the Australian wartime workforce successfully brought valuable improvements for future generations of Australian women in the workforce and society. Reekie exhibits some bias that influences certain statements and facts throughout her article. Reekie's work shows her bias through her phrasing, which is highly favorable toward Australian women in the wartime workforce.

Historians Polly Reed Myers and Deborah Hirshfield have explored one of the many ways women were employed in the wartime workforce: factory work. In Polly Reed Myers's "Manpower versus Womanpower during WWII," she examines the airplane industry and the treatment of whites, African Americans, and women of other ethnicities in the workplace, focusing

5 Rankin, *Mexicanas En Guerra: World War II and the Discourse of Mexican Female Identity*; Sheridan, *Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939-45 War in Britain*; Reekie, *Industrial Women in Western Australia during World War II*.

6 Rankin, *Mexicanas En Guerra*, 8.

7 Gail Reekie, *Industrial Women in Western Australia during World War II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 1985).

on Boeing, a company that manufactures airplanes.⁸ Myers details how Boeing attempted to integrate white women and minorities into its workforce with minimal issues. In Deborah Hirshfield's "Gender, Generation, and Race in American Shipyards in the Second World War," she discusses the factors affecting the worksite for white women and minorities. Hirshfield argues that the government did not do enough. Hirshfield offers a perspective that shows some bias but supports most of her points with evidence. Hirshfield addresses one of the critical industries of the time, highlighting its impact on the war and women's contributions. Several other articles present arguments similar to those of Myers and Hirshfield, making them worth comparing.⁹

Many people have tried to address the historical issue and debate surrounding women in the wartime workforce in various ways. The previous statement does not imply that we should ignore this topic. Evaluating it again is worthwhile because we can gain a lot of information. Much of the literature tends to focus on one particular angle. As time progressed, more literature revealed a new side to this debate and uncovered previously silenced voices.¹⁰ This writer hopes that evaluating the existing literature will help future researchers and generations gain a more well-rounded view of this topic. To properly understand the struggles and reasoning behind why women entering the wartime workforce was so important and why societal views were how they were, we must first look at the history behind the struggles with women entering the workforce. We can understand the history of women's struggles in the global workforce and the societal views affecting them in many ways. This approach will show how examining the world events of the time helps us understand why women of all races and ethnicities started working in such large numbers despite negative societal views on women working. A major global event occurred amid the changes in women's lives. World War 2, or WWII, is the critical and world-changing event that sets the background for the issue of women in wartime work and the societal views of women

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- 8 Polly Reed Myers, *Manpower versus Womanpower during WWII* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 2015).
 - 9 For more information on women working in industry during WWII, see Deborah Hirshfield, *Gender, Generation, and Race in American Shipyards in the Second World War* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.: 1997); Jayson A. Altieri, *Government Girls: Crowd-Sourcing Aircraft in World War II* (Maryland: Air Force Historical Foundation: 2020); Carruthers, "'Manning the Factories', 232; Amy E. Platt, *Go into the Yard as a Worker, Not as a Woman': Oregon Women during World War II a Digital Exhibit on the Oregon History Project* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society: 2015), 234-248.
 - 10 For more information, see Tiffany Baugh-Helton *A Woman's Place Is in Her Union: The UAW's 1944 National Women's Conference and Women's Labor Activism* (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University: 2014); Claudia D. Goldin, *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment* (Nashville: American Economic Association: 1991); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Changing the Shape of the Workforce* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press: 2018).

during this time. WWII played a significant role in defining the role of all women in society in the 1930s and 40s. Also, it made substantial changes that permanently shaped women's lives throughout the postwar world.

Cause of Labor Shortage that Resulted in Women Having the Opportunity to Work

As WWII intensified, nations pulled as many men as possible from the home front labor force into their militaries. Many countries began drafts for any males within a specific age range to become a part of the military and join the fight in Europe. The downside to the institution of drafts was that nations lacked workers to work in the industries that supplied essential materials for the war, such as airplanes and weapons. The solution that many countries decided to utilize was getting as many women as possible to join the workforce. The indicated nations, such as Great Britain and the United States, employed a variety of means to encourage women to enter the workforce, including creating posters and propaganda.¹¹ One of the most famous images used to recruit women was Rosie the Riveter.¹² A song written in 1942 first introduced Rosie the Riveter to the American public.¹³ Another famous image that was widely published was Winnie the Welder. Like Rosie the Riveter, Winnie the Welder was meant to encourage women to join the wartime workforce. Another way that countries got women involved in the wartime workforce was to conduct labor drafts. Labor drafts involved "drafting" any non-disabled women into the wartime workforce. An article published in the Dallas Morning News on July 20, 1943, discusses the German labor draft.¹⁴ The German authorities drafted all non-disabled women under the age of forty-five into the labor force. Countries with stricter and more controlling governments, like Nazi Germany, conducted labor drafts more often. The labor shortage created new opportunities for women who had never before entered the labor force. For example, a woman named Ann Darr became a pilot like other family members due to the need for pilots. In a magazine interview, Ann says, referring to her interest in becoming a pilot, "But flying was in my blood. I was raised in Iowa, a prairie child: All we had was the sky."¹⁵ Ann

11 For more information regarding WWII propaganda, see. Dorothy Sheridan, *Am-bivalent Memories: Women and the 1939-45 War in Britain* (Hertfordshire: Oral History Society: 1990) 36; Susan Carruthers, *Manning the Factories': Propaganda and Policy on the Employment of Women, 1939-1947* (Online: Wiley, 1990).

12 For more information on Rosie the Riveter, see. Karen Anderson, *Teaching About Rosie the Riveter: The Role of Women During World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1988) 35-37.

13 Lorraine Sorrel, "Rosie the Riveter," (Arlington: Off Our Backs, Inc: 1981).

14 "Women in War Work," (Dallas: Dallas Morning News: 1943).

15 Ann Darr, *The Long Flight Home* (Washington D.C: U.S News and World Report: 1997).

valued her chance to become a pilot like the rest of her family and appreciated the opportunity.. If nations involved in the war had not needed women in wartime work, Ann might never have fulfilled her dream of becoming a pilot.

Role of Women in American Society Before World War II

The world changed in the few years between the First and Second World Wars. The Women's Suffrage Movement contributed to this change.¹⁶ The Woman's Suffrage Movement gave women the right to vote. It also made women want to break the traditional role they usually played in society. The Women's Suffrage Movement aimed to inspire women to break away from their traditional roles. The movement occurred because several women started to see the value of having their rights and freedoms, which the crusade for women's rights pushed for. Traditionally, women of all races and ethnicities played the roles of homemakers and mothers. Society expected women to keep their houses prim and proper. People expected women to keep everything perfect and nonchaotic for their husbands. Society viewed unmarried women as strange and improper..¹⁷ Flappers were white women who typically had shorter hair and wore shorter dresses. They were typically unmarried and frequented dance halls and bars. People considered flappers to be very scandalous. Flappers were very different from the traditional women of the 1920s.¹⁸ Flappers brought new ways to express themselves, and society started to learn to accept these women. They also helped push the idea of feminism, as many flappers were considered to be feminists due to their eagerness to get more rights for women.¹⁹ The changing views came with the new freedoms that flappers ushered in which led to the rise and change of women's role in society both during and after WWII.

The View of the Media on Women in Wartime Work

Women of all races and ethnicities in wartime work had their issues that they were dealing with while coping with the dramatic changes that were occurring worldwide both during and after WWII. The ongoing solutions to various problems have changed women's lives forever to help them reach where they are today in having both rights as workers and as individuals. One issue was the media's attacks and negative press that targeted women challenging their traditional roles in society to support the war effort." One news source that was bashing wartime women was *Life Magazine*. In his

16 Patricia F. Dolton and Aimee Graham. *Women's Suffrage Movement* (Chicago: American Library Association).

17 Estelle Freedman, *The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1974).

18 Freedman. "The New Woman: Changing."

19 Freedman. "The New Woman Changing," 373.

article, "A Woman's Place....": 'Life's' Portrayal of Women, 1943 and 1945,"²⁰ Bob Agnew discusses the magazine's stance against working women. At the beginning of his article, Agnew mentions a photo essay *Life* did called "Occupation Housewife." According to Agnew, "Occupation Housewife" was focused on the "prevailing public image of women in the pre-war USA."²¹ The depiction of so-called "proper" women being housewives and mothers helped push along the negative connotations that surrounded women who were involved in the war effort by shaming them. Another example comes from a newspaper article that appeared in *The Plain Dealer*, which featured a woman who was obeying her traditional role as a housewife and bashed women who were involved in the war effort. A newspaper article from the time reported, 'When I read some of the stuff about girls in defense plants, I gag.'²² This quote was from a man who felt that women should not be allowed to work because it is improper. Another article opposing women breaking their traditional roles in society was titled 'Mr. Average Wonders About Women After War.'²³ The article featured many quotes from an interview with a man called "Mr. Average," who makes many comments that essentially showed that he hoped women would return to their traditional roles after WWII. The aforementioned examples demonstrate that media perceptions of women who worked during and after the war were not particularly positive. The previously mentioned point also helped shape the narrative that entering the wartime workforce did essentially nothing to help change women's role in society. Instead, it sent all women back into their traditional role in the home until the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s.

Women in Wartime Industries

The many industrial jobs necessary to the war effort were the most common fields that employed women across the board during wartime. The opportunity to work in different industries allowed women to change not only society's views on them but also on minorities. One article that specifically talks about women in the airplane industry is Polly Reed Myers' "Manpower versus Womanpower during World War II."²⁴ Myers discusses how Boeing changed how it ran its company to reach its women and minority workers successfully. Boeing took full advantage of having women workers and found

20 Bob Agnew, *A Woman's Place....: 'Life's' Portrayal of Women, 1943 And 1945* (Australia: Australia New Zealand American Studies Association: 2001).

21 Agnew, "A Woman's Place....": 'Life's' Portrayal of Women, 1943 And 1945."

22 J.A. Wadovick, "Rosy the Riveter Lost Her Halo in Down-to-Earth Appraisal of Defense Plant Glamour Girls" 15 (Cleveland: *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: 1943).

23 Alice Kay, "Mr. Average Wonders About Women After War" (Cleveland: *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: 1943).

24 Polly Reed Myers, "Manpower versus Womanpower during WWII," (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 2015).

a way to keep the company going and maintain peace among its workers. Myers' article shows how women of all races and ethnicities contributed significantly to the war effort and gained previously inaccessible freedoms. Myers's depiction of these women who worked for Boeing demonstrates how some companies that heavily employed women in the war effort were able to take advantage of the opportunity and fight for themselves as workers. A lady named Frances Ellis said in an interview about her time working with Boeing during WWII about the treatment and importance of her work and the work of others, "Your lunch pail- I mean if anything suspicious went on, they were right on it. There wasn't any messing around about stuff like that either because we had security at that time; we had to because we had the Japanese. Of course, that was our main concern, one of them."²⁵ Another more specific example of women working in one of the significant wartime industries was women involved in the shipbuilding industry. In Deborah Hirshfield's "Gender, Generation, and Race in American Shipyards in the Second World War,"²⁶ she discusses the struggles that white women and minorities faced working in shipyards. The government did very little to help and protect white women and minority workers. Employers mistreated white women and minority workers, prompting them to push for more rights. Women across the board began to demonstrate that they deserved the same workers' rights as men and should receive equal treatment. They did so by orchestrating strikes and protests. Women in these demonstrations began advocating for their rights and forming unions. There were many other instances of different groups of women rising and being a part of workers' unions. Wartime women got some of their ideas from other women around the globe who were involved in the Women's Suffrage Movement in some of the ways that they protested for their rights. In Tiffany Baugh-Helton's "A Woman's Place Is in Her Union: The UAW's 1944 National Women's Conference and Women's Labor Activism," she discusses the impact that the organization United Automobile Workers had on women's involvement in unions both during and after the war.²⁷ The UAW, one of the major unions at the time, stubbornly resisted treating or paying women equally with men. The UAW's leaders made many remarks defending their point of view, which were published in a newspaper called The Dallas Morning News. The UAW leaders said, "Rosie the Riveter expects a man's pay but expects the industry to treat her like a lady in all that."²⁸ The previously mentioned quote sums up the consensus of media and industry

25 Kirsten Kelly, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*.

26 Ibid.

27 Tiffany Baugh-Helton, *A Woman's Place Is in Her Union: The UAW's 1944 National Women's Conference and Women's Labor Activism* (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University: 2014).

28 "Rosie the Riveter Seeks Pay Equal to Man's, UAW Learns" (Dallas: Dallas Morning News: 1944).

leaders at the time who felt that women, in general, could not have things both ways. Women could not treat women like a lady is traditionally treated and still give them equal pay, as that would have been unfair to the men.

Personal Stories of White American Women Involved in Wartime Work

Countless accounts from all over the United States of women demonstrate that their respective worlds essentially turned upside down due to being involved in the war effort and deciding not to go back to how things were previously. Marc Miller details how women made sacrifices with their way of life due to involvement wartime work in his article “Working Women and World War II,” where he describes the lives of working women at a textile mill in Lowell, Massachusetts.²⁹ Miller also digs deeper into the many different domestic effects that working in the wartime workforce had on these women. Miller mentions how Lowell differed from other places at the time because the majority of women there were working women rather than just housewives.³⁰ The depiction of most women in the town working shows how many different groups took advantage of opportunities to get out of the house and earn wages. The reader can find another example in an article by Amy E. Platt called “Go into the Yard as a Worker, Not as a Woman’: Oregon Women During World War II, a Digital Exhibit on the Oregon History Project,”³¹ She discusses the impact of the war effort on white women in the state of Oregon. Platt outlines how the number of white women workers jumped dramatically. She also provides many examples that suggest that many white women were working before the war because they were already much more skilled at specific trades than white women from other states. The demonstration of professional work and motivation allowed white women workers in Oregon to progress much further into their careers, which was a rarity at the time. The reader can find another example of this concept in an interview with a woman named Bonnie Gifford, who talked about how she moved from rural Michigan to Muskegon, Michigan, to join the war effort.³² Bonnie discusses in detail how she and her friends were eager to participate in the war effort and help however they could. Bonnie’s perspective helps provide insight into how some women from different groups viewed the war effort as an opportunity to change their lives.

29 Marc Miller, *Working Women and WWII* (Massachusetts: New England Quarterly, 1980).

30 Miller, *Working Women and WWII*, 43.

31 Amy E. Platt, *Go into the Yard as a Worker, Not as a Woman’: Oregon Women during World War II a Digital Exhibit on the Oregon History Project* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society: 2015), 234-248.

32 Anne de Mare and Kirsten Kelly, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*.

Native American Women in Wartime Work

Another significant group of women that contributed to the war effort in the United States and was affected significantly by the changes for women in the United States was Native American women. Native American women contributed very strongly to the wartime workforce. They took advantage of the opportunity to work alongside others they had not previously worked with due to being considered a minority group. In Grace Mary Gouveia's "We Also Serve": American Indian Women's Role in World War II," she discusses how involvement in the wartime workforce enabled Native American women to take higher-up jobs that were better than what was offered to them previously.³³ In an interview with a Native American woman veteran named Grace Powless, Grace served as a part of the Women's Army Corps, or WAC. Grace talks about how badly she wanted to participate in the fight overseas and was trying to find a way to get sent over. Grace decided that the WAC was her best shot. She said about her experience, "I won't be a rookie either. I attended Haskell Institute, an Indian school in Lawrence, Kansas, for five years. In summer, we wore white linen uniforms; in winter, we wore blue uniforms. We were subjected to military discipline and drill. The courses were for ten months, and several of our teachers were Indians. Other than my home economics and academic course, it was just like the basic training in the Army."³⁴ Grace was very proud of her time serving her country and felt that her experience in the wartime workforce vastly improved her life and the lives of native women in the aftermath of WWII. Another Native American woman veteran, Ruth Ann Waters, talked about her experiences in being involved in the wartime workforce and her motivations for doing so in an interview with *Cherokee Phoenix* staff writer Will Chavez. Ruth Ann said that patriotism was one of her main motivations for joining the military. She talked about how the news of the Pearl Harbor attacks pushed her to get involved. Ruth Ann told Chavez that she signed up as soon as she could even though she was "...just a country girl from Cherokee County who had never been anywhere." She told Chavez, "So many of my friends and classmates signed up. It was our patriotic duty. I never regretted it."³⁵ Ruth Ann talked about how being involved in the war effort heavily inspired her to keep helping people after the war. Ruth Ann's experiences in WWII helped her gain new freedoms in the aftermath of the war. The long-term result was that Native American women took complete advantage of the opportunity to have new freedoms and continue to work and participate in their new role in society long after WWII was over and into today.

33 Ibid.

34 Grace Powless, interviewed by Pamela Bennett, May 2, 2023.

35 Ruth Ann Waters, interviewed by Will Chavez, June 6, 2002.

African American Women in Wartime Work

African American women were also key participants in the wartime workforce. African American women dealt with discrimination in multiple forms throughout their participation in the wartime workforce. The discrimination for them lies in both racial and gender discrimination. An African American lady who participated in the wartime workforce discusses in an interview the racial segregation that she dealt with at a company called Eastern Aircraft in Baltimore, Maryland.³⁶ Ms. Susan Taylor King discussed how segregation affected everything, including the training schools.³⁷ The interview with Ms. Susan Taylor King provides a look into the proper treatment and experience of African American women involved in the war effort. Another example can be seen through the eyes of Ms. Angeline Fleming, a teacher and riveter as well.³⁸ Ms. Fleming talks about the segregation she experienced in both jobs during the war. An African American woman by the name of Ethel Bell experienced her form of discrimination by white factory owners despite the desperate need for workers. When Ethel “responded to a newspaper advertisement seeking workers for jobs at a plant in St. Louis, Missouri, a guard made it clear to her that she wouldn’t be considered for employment because she was black.”³⁹ The mistreatment of African American women prompted the federal government to implement new protections for workers of all minorities.⁴⁰ African American women benefited more from the changes that happened in general for women than from the small changes occurring for African Americans at the time. African American women were treated slightly better because of their involvement in the war effort.⁴¹ Black Rosie, the Riveters, made their mark on the war effort. The story of one brave and resilient woman is the story of Mary Newson, who quickly made her mark on the war effort. Mary spent her early days in the war effort cleaning trail cars. She eventually earned the right to be a riveter in a naval yard.⁴² Mary made a name for herself by being a hard worker and incredibly resilient. A couple of other ladies were Fannie Currie and Hattie Alexander, who worked on the railroad in Chicago, Illinois. A quote from Fannie on her efforts that she said to someone from the *Chicago Defender* was, “My arm gets a little sore slinging a shovel or a pick, but then I forget about it when I think about all those boys over in the Solomons. Women must pitch in now and do our men’s

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid

38 Ann de Mare and Kirsten Kelly, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*, (2 May 2023).

39 “I Stood in Line With the Others,” *Afro American*, 8-12-1944.

40 “President Roosevelt Became Involved,” *Chicago Defender*, 12-25-1944.

41 Myers, “Manpower versus Womanpower during WWII”

42 Cheryl Mullenbach, *Double Victory: How African American Women Broke Race and Gender Barriers to Win World War II* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 20.

work until they come home.⁴³ Hattie's quote on her efforts is: "I never get tired and like being out in the open. I enjoy shoveling. I always say a heavy hand with a shovel and a light hand with a biscuit."⁴⁴ Another African American woman who made great strides in the war effort in her work for women was Rebecca Eaton. Rebecca was able to set up the Domestic Workers Alliance, a labor union/employment agency. Eaton's organization worked to "improve wage levels and working conditions... also helped women who wanted to leave domestic service to find jobs in industrial plants."⁴⁵ African American women's efforts were crucial to the success of women in the workforce during and after the war.

Mexicanas in Wartime Work

The same story cannot be said for all women in other parts of the world involved in wartime work. Women in neighboring Mexico also experienced dramatic changes. In Monica Rankin's "Mexicanas En Guerra: World War II and the Discourse of Mexican Female Identity," she discusses how the war caused women in Mexico to change from their traditional role in society into what they are now. She also mentions how the overall involvement in the wartime workforce resulted in a shift in the view of the Mexican female identity. An interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez with U.S. Marine Corps veteran Consuelo Mary Hartsell sheds light on the experience of being a Latina woman during WWII who participated in the war effort. Consuelo talks about her motivations for joining the war effort; when the attack {Pearl Harbor} happened, "We didn't know what to think because war was foreign to us. Mom was worried, concerned about my brother," she said. "Many of the men, from my class especially, were being drafted. "This is ridiculous," she said to herself. "I'm joining the Marines. I'm sure they'll find something for me," she announced to Juanita. "The next day, she said, 'That's a good idea.'"⁴⁶ Consuelo got a job overseeing the shipment of supplies overseas. Consuelo earned American Campaign and World War II victory medals and recognition for her honorable service.⁴⁷ During the war, women were even encouraged to break from their traditional societal roles through propaganda, which was universal worldwide, as many nations featured their own versions of Rosie the Riveter.⁴⁸ An opposing perspective to Consuelo Mary Hartsell's experience is provided by Aurora Estrada Orozco, interviewed in 2003 by Desirée Mata

43 Ibid, 22-23.

44 "In Some Cases, Auxiliaries were Formed" *Chicago Defender*, 11-27-1943.

45 Ibid, 25.

46 Consuelo Mary Hartsell, interviewed by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Thursday, 26 March 2015, at noon.

47 Ibid.

48 Monica A. Rankin, *Mexicanas En Guerra: World War II and the Discourse of Mexican Female Identity*

about her home front experiences. Orozco said, "Because Mercedes lacked enough men to complete all the necessary work, Orozco and her sisters began taking on various jobs. Among the work she recalls being available was making buttons from seashells and stitching uniforms for the military."⁴⁹ She talked about how many men from Mexico came illegally to work in the United States. Orozco also discussed the different levels of discrimination that she faced both during and after the war. Stories of women like Hartsell and Orozco represent just a few of the thousands of brave Mexicana women who stepped up when called and worked to improve their lives. As a result, they were able to provide a better future for themselves and generations of both Mexicana women and women of other minorities.

Australian Women in Wartime Work

Another nation that was not as well-known for its involvement in WWII but still went through some dramatic changes for women in their society was Australia. Australian women took full advantage of the opportunities that arose with joining the wartime workforce, such as getting involved in various industrial jobs and engaging in various secretarial work within the armed forces. They even began pushing for labor rights they had never received. Women in Australia who worked in multiple industries took advantage of wartime stress to push for better working conditions and pay because they knew their employers were more likely to meet their demands due to desperately needing workers. In Monica Rankin's "Industrial Action by Women Workers in Western Australia during World War II," she discusses in detail the efforts of women who were a part of the crusade by workers to improve their working conditions and rights. Rankin discusses one issue in particular that women experienced which was that they were "intensely dissatisfied with their respective employers' refusal to pay them the ninety percent of the rate of male pay to which they were entitled."⁵⁰ The fight for more rights for workers that shape the lives of Australian women and just workers in general in the many years that followed after the war.

British Women in Wartime Work

In Great Britain, on the front lines of war, British women had their lives and societal roles changed in more ways than one. British women were significantly impacted and inspired by different types of propaganda that were put out to encourage women to join the wartime workforce. They were affected because the British focused on hatred towards the Axis powers rather

49 Aurora Estrada Orozco, interviewed by Desiree Mata, Friday, 17 October 2003.

50 Ibid.

than encouraging people to get involved for the sake of patriotism.⁵¹ The aforementioned pieces of wartime propaganda that are targeting women to join the workforce include even Rosie the Riveter, who made her first appearance in the United States. The British utilized images of women in specific military roles in their propaganda posters rather than a particular figure like Rosie the Riveter. The primary purpose of British propaganda was to anger their citizens and motivate them to join the cause. For example, the Careless Talk campaign posters encouraged people to engage in activities and conversations promoting the war effort to save lives. Feminist Dorothy Sheridan says “that the social dislocations caused by war provide opportunities for hitherto subordinated groups to strengthen and develop their positions.”⁵² Sheridan refers to how the different changes that occur in society during a war can cause other social groups, like women and minorities, to have an opportunity to better their lives and positions in society. One specific minority group that made significant contributions is from the Caribbean and West Indies. Many Caribbean and West Indies women volunteered to join the various British military branches.⁵³ Another specific minority group that aided the British was individuals from various African colonies. African women actively engaged in multiple jobs, such as nursing and secretarial work, for the British.⁵⁴ Her ideas strongly support the idea that a significant event like WWII could have resulted in significant changes to the lives of women in the aftermath of WWII that helped push them to where they are today.

Negative Attitudes Towards Women Involved in the Workforce

The experiences of women involved in wartime work were no different from those of others who found their way into the workforce previously had been dealing with. In an article called “Changing the Shape of the Workforce” by Alice Kessler-Harris, she mentions in one section the differing viewpoints people had about women working during the Great Depression and WWII. She describes the negative attitudes toward married women who worked during the Great Depression. Kessler-Harris describes the benefits that employers received by employing women during WWII.⁵⁵ All of previously mentioned factors demonstrate how women were able to resist the negative attitudes toward them while working to gain and keep their new freedoms.

51 Jo Fox, *Careless Talk: Tensions within British Domestic Propaganda during the Second World War* (Britain: Journal of British Studies, 2012).

52 Ibid.

53 *Women in War - West Indian History, Heritage and Culture* (West Indian History, Heritage and Culture: 2020).

54 Dr. Kate Law, *Black Women in Wartime Britain 1939-45* (Women History Network, 2020).

55 Alice Kessler-Harris, *Changing the Shape of the Workforce* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press: 2018).

Postwar Effects on Women Involved in the Workforce

Many people during that time felt that the gains women made during the war would not be long-lasting and that society would return to the “normal” women experienced before the war. In Claudia Goldin’s article “The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women’s Employment,” she mentions several individuals who doubted that the changes in women’s roles during WWII would be permanent and believed that women would return to their traditional roles as housewives and mothers.⁵⁶ The previous statement was false, as many women liked returning their wages. Plenty of evidence supports the idea that many women even began to push for equal rights as workers. The push for equal rights as workers by women comes amid a pushback by many companies to get rid of women in the workforce in the aftermath of WWII.⁵⁷ Many companies wanted to free up space for the men to return to work for them by encouraging women to leave the workforce. Not all companies behaved in the manner previously mentioned, though, as they thought that their women workers had earned the right. A newspaper article in 1946 that the *Dallas Morning News* published mentioned some companies in Texas that would let women keep their jobs if they wanted them because they were good workers.⁵⁸ The newspaper article mentioned shows the change in attitude towards women in their societal role because people were becoming more accepting of women in the postwar Workforce. The overall shift in attitude towards women in the workforce and societal views of women evolved into what they are today.

Conclusion

“The lasting effects of wartime workforce involvement have transcended generations of women.” Women of different ethnicities, races, and genders made their mark on history through their involvement in the wartime workforce. The stories presented in this paper provide evidence that women’s lives and societal roles improved due to their WWII involvement. From the women in Britain who took advantage of the opportunity to work through using the opportunity as a platform to push for more rights. To the women in Australia who participated in many demonstrations themselves to get themselves more rights and freedoms. The Native American women whose lives were changed permanently due to getting new job opportunities and an increased sense of respect in their communities. The African American women and white women worked in the many wartime industries and pushed to

56 Claudia D. Goldin, *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women’s Employment* (Nashville: American Economic Association: 1991).

57 Ibid, 154.

58 “Women Offer Stiff Competition in Postwar Scramble for Jobs” (Dallas: Dallas Morning News: 1946).

keep their jobs after WWII was over. The Mexicans whose lives and even their respective identities changed directly as a result of their involvement in the wartime workforce. The indicated stories help showcase WWII's profound impact on changing women's lives worldwide at this time.

We need to recognize the impact of women being involved in the wartime workforce on a transnational level because showcasing a single central perspective on an issue can cause errors and lead to generalizations that may harm studies on the topic. It is essential to showcase the stories of all races and ethnicities to ensure everyone has their voice heard. Hearing from people worldwide about a massive event like WWII, which affected them differently, can help provide valuable insights. Women worldwide finally had a real opportunity to work and change their societal role during and after WWII. This paper showcases the evidence quite well. Women's involvement in WWII permanently changed their lives and greatly benefited future generations of women.

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Tameshia Glass

Never Mind, I'm Bored: An Examination of the History of Punk Rock in New York City During the 1970s

"Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue" was released by the Ramones in 1976, but New York punk rock music was already influencing the youths of the world, less than five years after its creation. Journalist Lisa Robinson wrote in the *Chicago Sun Times*, "In England, Parliament has suggested that a sudden outbreak of glue-sniffing deaths is due to the song, 'Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue,' sung by New York's premier punk rock band. The Ramones."¹ With no internet to depend on, the music of the Ramones traveled over the Atlantic Ocean to London the old-fashioned way, by word of mouth and touring. The Ramones were a quintessential punk rock band. They followed their own rules, played hard, and lived fast. Likewise, their music was short, fast, and full of energy. Punk rock spread quickly across the globe, after its birth in New York City.

Punk rock was different from mainstream musical culture of the 1960s. Author Roger Sabin proclaimed,

Philosophically, it had no 'set agenda' like the hippie movement that preceded it, but nevertheless stood for identifiable attitudes, among them: an emphasis on negationism (rather than nihilism); a consciousness of class-based politics (with a stress on 'working fires credibility'); and a belief in spontaneity and 'doing it yourself.'²

No matter if the impact was positive or negative, the New York punk scene manufactured a space for young Americans to be creative and try new things in music.

Scholars Alan Levy and Barbara L. Tischler asserted, "Generations of historians in the 19th and early 20th centuries, attuned neither to the complexities of musical structure nor to the importance of music as a key to understanding American culture."³ American music was not recognized as a

1 Lisa Robinson, "Rock Talk Autumn Albums," *Chicago Sunday Sun Times*, Sept 12, 1976, 13.

2 Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock : So What?* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2-3.

3 Alan Levy and Barbara L. Tischler, "Into the Cultural Mainstream: The Growth of American Music Scholarship." *American Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1990): 63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2713225>.

viable source of notable music during this time or as a way of comprehending American intellectual achievement. Not until European classical and African American blues merged to create jazz music did the world take notice of what America could offer to the world musically. Popular music genres enjoyed across the world, like jazz and rock 'n' roll were created on American soil. However, like U.S. history, U.S. music theory was new compared to European countries like England, Germany, and France. Music critic Virgil Thomson contended that the United States required, "a looser tie to European musical models as a necessary stage in America's growth. The emergence of a national style could then occur, as American composers reach the point at which they needed neither to be devoted to Europe nor to rebel against it."⁴

During the jazz era, American musicians were able to share their music through movies, radio, and touring. Americanization of global culture increased once the United States joined the Allies in World War II, aiding in their triumph over the Axis. People around the world saw the strengths and influence of the United States. Innovations in American music continued with the creation of rock 'n' roll music. Rock was a major force in spreading American culture. American rock musicians like Little Richard and Elvis Presley influenced bands around the world to expand upon the foundations of American rock music in the 1950s. Scholar Bruno Nettl concluded, "The 20th century has been different in several ways; one music was brought to all others, and thus the world becomes a laboratory in which we can see how different cultures and musical systems respond to what is essentially the same stimulus."⁵ Similarly, punk rockers like the Ramones influenced a new generation of rockers in the 1970s.

There are countless books, movies, articles, and academic journals about punk rock. Some offer historical timelines for important figures and events as well as musical styles and instruments. Autobiographies like Richard Hell's *I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp* and Debbie Harry's *Face It* supply firsthand accounts of life as a punk in New York.⁶ Books such as Legs McNeil's and Gillian McCain's *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk Rock* and Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* offer an origin story of punk in New York.⁷ Although these sources are

4 Ibid., 64.

5 Bruno Nettl, "World Music in the Twentieth Century: A Survey of Research on Western Influence," *Acta Musicologica* 58, no. 2 (1986): 362. <https://doi.org/10.2307/932821>.

6 Richard Hell, *I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp: An Autobiography* (New York: Ecco, 2014); and Debbie Harry, et. al, *Face It* (New York: Dey Street, An Imprint of William Morrow, 2019).

7 Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 2016); and Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002).

informative, they do not offer an academic review of the era. Music related academic journals and literature of music critics, theorists, and historians provided additional data.

Proto-Punk Inspires

The peak of the New York punk rock scene lasted less than ten years. Beginning in New York City in the early 1970s, it quickly spread to cities like London and Los Angeles. When some people think of punk rock, they usually visualize an angry teenager with facial piercings and spiked hair. However, there were many personalities that embodied the genre. Artists, intellectuals, experimental musicians, and others knowledgeable of the underground scene could be found listening to or taking part in punk rock.

The *New York Times* used the term “punk” to recognize delinquents and criminals who were frightening New York in the 1960s.⁸ Punk was not used to identify the music being made in New York City until the mid-1970s. Roger Sabin contended, “‘punk’ is a notoriously amorphous concept. At a very basic level, we can say that punk was/is a subculture best characterised as being part youth rebellion, part artistic statement.”⁹ According to Debbie Harry, lead singer of punk rock band Blondie, she began seeing flyers around the New York Bowery neighborhood that read “Watch Out! Punk is coming” that year.¹⁰ Harry took part in the New York punk scene early on, before it was named as such. Formed in 1974, Blondie is one of the most successful punk rock bands. Their music, with its pop flair, has entertained millions around the world. Songs like “Call Me” and “One Way Or Another” reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 charts.¹¹ Their album *Parallel Lines* received an A- from preeminent rock critic Robert Christgau, who wrote, “What seems at first like a big bright box of hard candy turns out to have guts, feeling, a chilly center, and Deborah Harry’s vocal gloss reveals nooks of compassion. Plus, the band really New Yawks it up.”¹²

The flyers Harry saw promoted a fan magazine of the New York punk rock scene. *Punk* was rough, refreshing, distinctive, and pulsating, just like the music. In her autobiography, *Face It*, Harry recalled, “We felt we were bohemians and performance artists, avant-garde. And when you add to the

8 Emanuel Perlmutter, “Serious Crime on Subways Increased 29% in a Year . . .” *New York Times*, July 8, 1964, 1.

9 Sabin, *Punk Rock*, 2.

10 John Holmstrom and Bridget Hurd, foreword to *Punk: The Best of Punk Magazine*. (New York: It Books, 2012).

11 “Blondie,” Billboard Online, Accessed August 1, 2024. <https://www.billboard.com/artist/blondie/>.

12 Robert Christgau, *Rock Albums of the 70s A Critical Guide*. (New York: Da Capo Press Inc., 1981), 51.

mix this very New York DIY street-rock attitude that we had, you got punk. Nobody was called punk yet. But I was a punk. I still am.”¹³ This is important as it established that punk rock was happening in New York prior to its official naming. Punk rock was more than music; it was artistry inspired by a self-positive outlook and confidence of being capable of great things.

Three proto-punk bands were significantly influential on punk rock music. Music historian Clinton Heylin affirmed the beginnings of punk could be discovered in America’s musical underground with principle American bands like the Velvet Underground, the Stooges, and the New York Dolls.¹⁴ Each band was starkly distinctive and exhibited themselves in different ways. They were part of separate crowds that sometimes merged, showing unity in alternative music. Many punk rock bands were inspired aesthetically and musically by them. Each group personified the punk rock lifestyle and attitude.

In 1967, The Velvet Underground, led by the “Godfather of Punk” Lou Reed, released their first album *The Velvet Underground and Nico*.¹⁵ The album’s innovative musical techniques and occasionally dangerous subject matter made the band underground legends in New York, where they were based. Melodic songs like “Heroin” and “Venus and Furs,” spoke about drug addiction, BDSM, and difficulties of living in a big city.¹⁶ Such topics were not usually sung about in the late 1960s. Legendary rock critic Lester Bangs claimed, “Modern music begins with the Velvets, and the implications and influence of what they did seem to go on forever.”¹⁷

Famous twentieth century American artist Andy Warhol mentored the Velvet Underground. He aided them in obtaining a record deal, was a producer on their debut album, and designed the cover art for the album.¹⁸ Warhol created multimedia events called the Exploding Plastic Inevitable around the Velvet Underground. These performances facilitated alternative artforms, combining visual art with music and dance. The Velvet Underground provided live music for these performances, subsequently gaining notability and a following of misfits.

David Johansen, lead singer of the New York Dolls, was one of the misfits who liked the Velvet Underground. The New York Dolls were visually

13 Harry, *Face It*, 103.

14 Clinton Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidoids: The Birth of American Punk Rock* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 1993) xi.

15 Aidan Levy, *Dirty Blvd: The Life and Music of Lou Reed* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press Inc., 2016), 235.

16 The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, Verve, 1967, compact disc.

17 Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidoids*, 1.

18 The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, Verve, 1967, compact disc.

and musically quite different from the Velvet Underground, but Johansen and fellow band members were inspired by them.¹⁹ The New York Dolls had a loyal local following of fans that expanded nationally and internationally with tours across America and their first tour in Europe in the early 1970s.

The New York Dolls were not professionally trained musicians. They learned to write songs and play instruments on their own. Two years after starting the band, they released their first album *New York Dolls* in 1973.²⁰ The album has songs that are loud and catchy like "Personality Crisis" and "Looking For A Kiss." These songs discuss bipolar disorder and the simultaneous search for love and drugs. The New York Dolls were tough, straight men who wore makeup and dressed in women's clothes and shoes. This was considered eccentric at the time since it was uncommon for men to dress as women publicly for fun. Celebrity music photographer Bob Gruen proclaimed they, "[They wore] cellophane tutus with army boots. They mixed genders."²¹

The New York Dolls were known for being heavily intoxicated and disorderly while performing. In 1972, original drummer Billy Murcia died of a heroin overdose while on tour with English band the Faces.²² While the Faces continued their European tour, the New York Dolls returned to the United States devastated. Regrettably, Murcia died before recording sessions began for their first album. Unfortunately, his death did not stop his bandmates, other proto-punk bands, and future punk bands from taking drugs and drinking heavily. Quickly, Murcia was replaced by drummer Jerry Nolan, who fit in effortlessly with their sound and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the band was short-lived, breaking up in 1976, after recording only two albums.

Iggy Pop was the lead singer of the Stooges. Although the rest of the band members were visually tame, usually wearing jeans and t-shirts, Pop would occasionally sing with white paint makeup on his face like a mime and his chest and abdomen covered in glitter.²³ He rarely wore a shirt while performing, swinging from rafters, climbing tall amplifiers, and crawling on the stage floor, or stage diving into audiences. Sometimes, he physically hurt himself, purposely cutting his chest with broken glass as part of the show. Formed in 1967 and disbanded by 1974, the Stooges released three albums together. Pop created mayhem while singing, as the band played their instruments impetuously. Most songs were fast paced, wild, and thunderous with screeching guitar solos. "I Wanna Be Your Dog" from their first album

19 Bob Gruen, *New York Dolls Photographs* (New York: Abrams Image, 2008), 17.

20 New York Dolls, *New York Dolls*, Mercury, 1973, compact disc.

21 David P. Szatmary, *Rockin' Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll*, 4th Edition (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1987), 211.

22 Richard Nusser, "Once more, death in threes," *Village Voice*, November 16, 1972, 33.

23 Holmstrom and Hurd, *Punk*, 76-81.

Stooges and “Search and Destroy” from their third album *Raw Power*, have been dubbed two of the greatest songs of all time by *Rolling Stone*.²⁴ Rock critic Christgau wrote, “The side openers ‘Search and Destroy’ and ‘Raw Power’ voice the Iggy Pop ethos more insanely (and aggressively) than ‘I Wanna Be Your Dog.’”²⁵ With their albums and Pop’s showmanship, the Stooges made an enormous impact on nonconformists. Alan Vega, lead singer of Suicide insisted,

When I saw Iggy I realized that this man had changed my whole perception of the world at that point, and me as an artist. He changed my life. Like the first time you heard the Velvet Underground.²⁶

Blank Generation

Prominent devotees of proto-punk bands included future members of New York punk bands like the Ramones, Blondie, Television, and Suicide. They learned it was not necessary to be traditionally talented in musical ability to succeed. It took passion and determination. Many followers saw proto-punk bands as more innovators than masters of their instruments. There was also an attitude of, if they can do it, so can I. Common musical instruments needed for a punk band were guitar, bass, and drum set. Also, a vocalist who is unafraid to get in the face of audiences and screech without diffidence.

At the height of New York punk rock and before many bands had record deals, groups like the Ramones, Patti Smith Group, Blondie, and Television got together and played concerts around New York City. Venues such as Max’s Kansas City, CBGBs, Mercer Arts Center, and Club82 were common places to hang out and showcase new songs. Punk bands were allowed to perform their weird and crazy melodies to a mixed crowd of nonconformists. A few famous people from the literary world and other music genres would hang out too. People like jazz legend Miles Davis, music chameleon David Bowie and author of *The Basketball Diaries* Jim Carroll would mingle. Bridget Berlin, an Andy Warhol “superstar,” would poke people with needles filled with methamphetamines.²⁷

Drugs and alcohol were easily found inside these venues and out on the streets. These locations were a haven for free spirits and those living alternative lifestyles. It was common and acceptable to find drag queens, prostitutes, artists, derelicts, or other nonconvention people in these places. Most who were part of the punk scene partook of alcohol, drugs, or both.

²⁴ “The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, September 15, 2021, 43.

²⁵ Christgau, *Rock Albums of the 70s*, 377.

²⁶ Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidoids*, 67.

²⁷ “A Beautiful Bouquet of Rebelliousness: Ten Things You Need to Know About Artist and Former Andy Warhol Superstar Brigid Berlin,” *Autre Magazine*, October 21, 2015, 14.

Several proto-punk and punk rockers, like Pop and Harry, developed heroin addictions in the 1970s. Terry Ork, benefactor of the band Television, claimed Carroll was the person to shoot him with heroin for the first time. In turn, Ork introduced heroin to Television members Richard Lloyd and Richard Hell.²⁸ Dee Dee Ramone, bass player for the Ramones, confessed he had different friends in the punk scene to do different drugs with because while he did most drugs, his friends were finicky.²⁹ On the stage and in the crowd, most knew one another and there was a sense of camaraderie. This was important, because it allowed musicians to network and have an informal safety net in case of emergencies. Many punk rockers had auditioned for each other's bands when they were getting started. Musicians allowed one another to borrow instruments when they broke or were stolen. If homeless, someone would offer a place to stay. And if there was a lack of money, they would offer their own to friends in need. They supported one another. Clem Burke, drummer for Blondie, affirmed, "When I see people from that period, it's like seeing friends I went to high school with."³⁰ Burke invoked a feeling of nostalgia when thinking back on these times.

Punk magazine documented these relationships, performers, and music. Created by lovers of punk rock music, writers John Holmstrom and Edward "Legs" McNeil, the magazine featured punk musicians in various settings. Photographer Roberta Bayley captured many of the visuals of punk rockers playing live shows, standing around looking cool, or hanging out with laughing friends. The staff of *Punk* magazine was friends of many punk musicians, which made it easier to get interviews and set up photoshoots. Cartoons were featured heavily in the publication. Often, depicting the derelict surroundings of 1970s New York City and members of the punk rock scene.

There were countless interviews spotlighting notable musicians of the punk scene like Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, and Joey Ramone, lead singer of the Ramones. Blondie's Harry was a recurring figure in the magazine as well. The cover of the first publication from January 1974 presents Reed as a cartoon caricature of himself. The related interview has become legendary, because of his use of profanity to perform his New York punk persona and discuss his dislikes, especially of interviews. "They don't mean shit! They do not sell records."³¹ Most issues featured a combination of handwritten dialogue with observations from the interviewer, black and white photographs, and comic strips. Former deejay, Gary Storm emphasized, "*PUNK* magazine was a creation of friends for friends in a particular scene that turned out to be the

28 McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 187.

29 Ibid, 199.

30 Holmstrom and Hurd, foreword to *Punk*.

31 McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 19.

vanguard of American pop culture."³²

The most popular bands in the New York punk scene included the Ramones, Blondie, Television, and the Talking Heads. Some of the lesser-known New York punk bands were the Dictators, the Dead Boys, Jayne County and the Electric Chairs, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids. All these bands maintained the punk rock attitude and spirit. Writer and musician Richard Hell took part in this fellowship and became a punk rock icon.

Richard Hell believed, "Rock and roll was a way of life."³³ He was known for his individualism, unkept short haircut, attitude against authority, party lifestyle, torn clothing, leather jacket, and minuscule guitar ability. In the late 1960s, Hell dropped out of high school and moved to New York in hopes of becoming a poet. Amusingly, he became a foundational punk rocker. He played guitar, wrote metrical songs, and sang off key. He was in several punk rock bands, including the Neon Boys with musician Tom Verlaine, who taught Hell how to play guitar. The Neon Boys morphed into the band Television in 1973. Together, they attended a New York Dolls concert and were quickly inspired. Hell confirmed, "The Dolls had a lot to do with me wanting to start a band. There was just so much more excitement in rock & roll."³⁴

They were not afraid to try new musical ideas and expanded on what a musician could be. Hell left Television due to artistic differences before the band gained critical acclaim with songs like "Marquee Moon" and "See No Evil" from their debut album *Marquee Moon*, which was released in 1977. Hell went on to join the Heartbreakers, a punk rock band with former members of the New York Dolls, Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan. Quitting that band less than a year later, he created Richard Hell and the Voidoids soon after. Although the New York punk rock scene was lively, it did not gain mainstream attention from the public. It was an underground phenomenon during its early existence.

McClaren Transforms Punk in the U.K.

Author Scott Stalcup did not agree with this version of the beginnings of punk rock history in his essay *Noise Noise Noise: Punk Rock's History Since 1965*. "A big misconception about Punk is that it first happened in America, then crossed over to Great Britain when the Ramones played there on America's bicentennial. The truth is Punk on both sides of the Atlantic arose at the same time."³⁵ Stalcup referenced the London punk rock band the Sex Pistols' lead singer Johnny Rotten as proof of this. Rotten (a.k.a. John Lydon) wrote in his

32 Holmstrom and Hurd, *Punk*, xvi.

33 Hell, *I Dreamed I Was*, 182.

34 McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 186.

35 Scott Stalcup, "Noise Noise Noise: Punk Rock's History Since 1965," *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, no. 3 (April 2001): 51-64.

autobiography *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, that he had not heard of Richard Hell until after the breakup of the Sex Pistols in 1978.³⁶

Yet, this cannot be true. Rotten was friends with fellow Englishman Malcolm McClaren. McClaren was a businessman that sold clothing and managed musical acts in the United States and United Kingdom. He was an advocate of Hell's, forming an association as early as 1974. McClaren conceded, "the Sex Pistols weren't happening I thought, oh, maybe I'll get Richard Hell to come over and join the Sex Pistols."³⁷

In 1973, McClaren made his first business trip as a fashion designer to New York City. While there, he met the New York Dolls.³⁸ He became their manager towards the end of their career, changing their androgynous image. Photographer Bob Gruen captured this transformation in his book *New York Dolls Photographs*.³⁹ McClaren believed shock was key to success. His relationship with the band made him known in the New York punk rock scene and he became familiar with several punk rockers. After the New York Dolls broke up, McClaren was determined to manage a new band led by Richard Hell, but Hell declined.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, McClaren left New York inspired by the music, aesthetic, and clothing of punk rockers. He returned to the United Kingdom with the idea of creating a band to manage in his native land. He would go on to manage one of the most popular punk bands, the Sex Pistols.

McClaren began a career as a fashion designer with his wife, English fashion mogul Vivienne Westwood. Alternative youths like Rotten and Siouxsie Sioux of the London punk band Siouxsie Sioux and the Banshees frequented their stores. Sioux often wore Westwood's early fashions in the streets of London, promoting the punk clothing style. This was important because they helped create a new visual identity for punk rockers in England that became popular around the world that was based off a more intense version of New York punk. Sioux eventually became a gothic music icon in her own right, with hit songs such as "Cities in Dust" and "Spellbound."⁴¹ With assistance from Westwood and McClaren, Rotten and Sioux became noteworthy in their homeland and internationally.

Nearly three months after their debut album was released, the Ramones played their first concert in the United Kingdom on July 4, 1976. They brought with them a New York punk rock attitude, leather jackets, and music. According to Hell, the Ramones started wearing their trademark black leather

36 John Lydon with Keith and Kent Zimmerman, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Blacks, No Dogs* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 102.

37 McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 269.

38 Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 221.

39 Gruen, *New York Dolls Photographs*, 144-45.

40 Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 146.

41 Siouxsie Sioux and the Banshees, *The Best of Siouxsie and the Banshees*, Polydor, 2002, compact disc.

jackets because of him.⁴² While in England, the Ramones gave advice to English fans like Rotten and Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols as well as members of London punk rock band the Clash. Alan Vega, from Suicide, was there too. He pointed out, "Johnny Rotten asked me if he could meet the band. 'If they don't like me will they beat me up?' He thought the Ramones were a real gang."⁴³ The Ramones' tough punk rock image arrived in England before they played their first concert there. Members of the Ramones encouraged their English fans to play music and not wait for their skills to improve.

In his autobiography, *I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp*, Richard Hell provided further proof of his influence on English punk rock. He explained when he first heard of the Sex Pistols in the summer of 1976, after seeing a picture of them in a magazine. Co-founder of Blondie, Chris Stein, pointed out how much the Sex Pistols looked like Hell. Hell remembered, "I looked closer at the text and saw the name Malcom McClaren."⁴⁴ Hell had influenced McClaren's new band without him even knowing it. McClaren and Westwood used the swagger of New York punk rock and eccentric fashions to create a personality and image for the Sex Pistols. Like New York, the London punk rock music scene formed around young friends with little musical aptness, who wanted to start bands. Unlike New York, the London scene received national attention from British masses.

On December 1, 1976, the Sex Pistols were interviewed on Great Britain's national television program *Today*. By this time, the Sex Pistols had a loyal following of English fans, a record deal, but no album. They went against the norm with their clothes and use of profanity. Viewers watching at home were outraged. And the Sex Pistols reached a new level of fame.

The following day, the Sex Pistols were featured in several English newspapers. The front-page headline for the *Daily Mirror* read, "The Filth and the Fury: A pop group shocked millions of viewers last night with the filthiest language ever heard on British television."⁴⁵ The Sex Pistols presented punk to the public as weird, cheeky, and obnoxious. The interview has become a legendary punk event since its airing, since this was the first-time punk rockers were on national television. This is important because New York punk rock never received the same amount of mainstream media attention as those in London. The face of punk rock was forever changed with the publicity the Sex Pistols received.

New York Punk's Pinnacle Ends, Yet Punk Continues to Spread

Bringing attention to the London punk rock scene and away from New

42 Hell, *I Dreamed I Was*, 129.

43 McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, 253.

44 Hell, *I Dreamed I Was*, 197.

45 Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 257-64.

York's, the Sex Pistols were the most famous punk band in the 1970s. New York punk bands were opening for English punk bands. By the time Richard Hell released a hit song "Blank Generation" with the Voidoids, they had to open for the Clash. Hell's old band the Heartbreakers, opened for the Sex Pistols. Blondie opened for the English band Squeeze also. Some novice listeners and observers believed that punk rock was brought over from England to America because of this.

Most major media outlets were not interested in covering the exploits of New York punk rockers. However, New York punk bands spread their music and culture by touring and getting their songs played on alternative radio stations. This allowed their music to be influential and reinvented by fans that wanted to play punk rock music too.

Many punk bands formed in southern California. Jeffrey Lee Pierce, president of Blondie's fan club, would go on to start the Gun Club.⁴⁶ The Germs were featured in the movie *The Decline of Western Civilization*, which documented the L.A. punk rock scene of the late 1970s.⁴⁷ Journalist Robert Palmer proposed that "punk bands have consciously rejected the complexity and artistic pretensions of much 60's and 70's rock in favor of 50's standards. Their songs are short, brutally fast, and relentlessly rhythmic."⁴⁸

By 1980, the initial New York punk rock scene was over. Some musicians and bands tried to continue, and many others quit. Some, like the Ramones and Blondie, decided to push forward, changing with the times and updating their musical style as well. A few people died from alcohol and narcotics abuse like members of the Stooges Zeke Zettner and Dave Alexander. With the arrival of the Sex Pistols in the United States for their only American tour, it made some Americans take on the view that the English public had about punk rock; it was dangerous and self-indulgent. After the band broke up in January of 1978, bass player Sid Vicious was accused of murdering his girlfriend, American Nancy Spungen in October of that year at the famous Chelsea Hotel in New York City. He died of a heroin overdose soon after.⁴⁹

Interest in American music theory developed in the early twentieth century. New York punk rock was a vehicle for the continuance of American influence on worldwide music. Although the New York punk rock scene ended shortly after it began, its effects on the world remain. Scholars Peter McLaren and Jonathan McLaren concluded, "Punk is increasingly becoming a hybrid, multicultural, and potentially revolutionary form of human

46 Harry, *Face It*, 149.

47 Penelope Spheeris, VHS, *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Culver City: Media Home Entertainment, 1981).

48 Robert Palmer, "Punk: Re-forming rock: Pretensions rejected," *New York Times*, July 8, 1981, 3.

49 Associated Press, "Punk rocker Vicious dead," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 3, 1979, 2.

expression.”⁵⁰ The idea that if they can do it, so can I still ring true. Millions of DIY musicians create and release their own music on the internet, which can reach an international audience. Having little to no actual music ability is acceptable to be successful in the music industry. Well-known rock bands like Nirvana, Green Day, and Blink-182 owe a debt to punk rock for creating a blueprint to follow musically for nontraditional musical talent. To live fast and play hard is no longer cool, but to be oneself always is.

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- 50 Peter McLaren and Jonathan McLaren, “Afterword: Remaking the Revolution,” *Counterpoints* 223 (2004): 124, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42978335>.

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Eurocentric or Child-Centered? A History of Education in the United States in the Twentieth Century

Historically, authorities on education in the United States have made changes to the public education system for a variety of reasons. In some cases, educational authorities have changed curricula to expand justice and to acknowledge the contributions of important individuals in the United States. In other cases, authorities have minimized the contributions of important individuals based on their race, sexuality, gender, or political ideology. The latter has unfortunately more often been the norm. Public education has devolved into a political battleground where public officials, such as governors and legislators, have tried to force their own ideals on the children of their constituents. Trying to foster inclusivity, the state of Illinois produced a law pertaining to educational curriculum in 2020 that mandated educators include the contributions of LGBT individuals in the teaching of United States History.¹ Conversely, the state of Texas has allowed a 1991 law, which forces educators to deride homosexuality as a lifestyle that is unacceptable in the eyes of the general public, to remain in place.²

The most conservative and liberal states in the nation have locked themselves into a battle of ideologies for their own benefit and at the detriment of the nation's youth. Many children in the United States have been taught the importance of contributions made by LGBT individuals, and equally large portions have been taught that it is completely unacceptable to be LGBT. In any case, individuals who identify as LGBT have made valuable contributions to the United States. Inadequately discussing their contributions, as with other minority groups, has constituted a failure at painting the most complete picture of United States history as it pertains to education.

Many states have had a hard time incorporating modern attitudes towards race and social justice or reform in their classrooms. Florida's current governor, Ronald DeSantis, is often the one who is front and center, spearheading many efforts against such reforms. DeSantis's election in 2018 and his assumption of office in 2019 served as key events in the history of education in the United States. Though important in modern educational history, conservatives and liberals alike have condemned DeSantis's changes. DeSantis has ignored

1 Illinois General Assembly, *HB0246*, 2020.

2 Texas 72nd Legislature, *Health and Safety Code*, 1991, Chapter 163, Section 163.002.

recent historiographic trends to push his own narrative regarding the history of the United States. The governor is noted as an individual who has desired to suppress education on the Trail of Tears, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and Jim Crow legislation.³ This suppression of important history has been a recurring theme as public education has grown and evolved alongside society. In any case, DeSantis's desire to dictate curricula ranges from primary schools to universities. Political appointments further showcase his views and ideologies. Commissioner of Education, Manny Díaz, stated that "Florida's colleges and universities should concentrate on providing students with a world class education, not indoctrinating them with critical race theory or other anti-historical nonsense."⁴ Such a comment demonstrates fundamental misunderstandings of what critical race theory is⁵, what it has to do with the study of history, and how it fits into the debate of education vs indoctrination.

Therefore, changes throughout time to public education have placed a greater emphasis and value on white, Eurocentric history and culture, denying all students the opportunity to learn valuable lessons, and denying minority students the opportunities to learn about their cultures in a classroom setting and to see them represented to the same degree as the cultures of their white peers. The work that follows contains a review of scholarly literature pertaining to education, how it has changed over time, and the debates and discussions held by earlier historians regarding those changes and whose history has mattered the most. Additionally forthcoming is original primary source research to accurately detail historical problems with education, such as the presence of racism, the practice of lying by omission, and the failures of the public education system to adjust to calls for reform.

Historiographic Analysis of Literature Regarding Education

Just as the United States has grown and evolved since its founding, its educational institutions have too. The literature documenting differing aspects of the education system and views on curriculum throughout time is extensive and at times overwhelming. The largest of changes have tended to be few and far between; for instance, Herbert Kliebard noted that curriculum revision as a statewide effort occurred for the first time in 1931.⁶ Prior to the 1930s,

3 Renée Graham, "Ron DeSantis — White Supremacy's Helicopter Parent: Why Stop at Banning American History? Florida Governor Ron DeSantis Now Wants to Outlaw White 'Discomfort' and 'Guilt,'" *Boston Globe*, January 26, 2022.

4 Manny Díaz Jr, @CommMannyDiazJr, January 6 2023, <https://x.com/CommMannyDiazJr/status/1611435294263230464>.

5 Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?" *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 1 (1998): 10-13.

6 Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1995), 191.

curriculum was generally managed below the state level. This changed with projects like the Virginia Curriculum Project invited all 17,000 of the state's teachers to engage in a study program, which about 15,000 accepted. Such practices became increasingly common as their success became apparent, and it was understood that those who would have a hand in implementing and teaching curriculum should have a hand in deciding what was important.⁷ While this helped create more unified learning experiences for students within a given state, the effects were not entirely positive or unified nationally.

Much of the scholarly literature on educational topics spanning from 1890 through the 1940s has noted large changes to education in American culture as philosophies towards education shifted. Scholars such as John Dewey noted that as a society becomes more advanced, a widening rift occurs between the inborn capabilities of that society's youth and that of society's oldest members who have spent entire lifetimes learning. He further argued that a degree of danger emerges as subject matter in schools becomes separate from students' daily life experiences. This danger was greater than ever due to the explosive growth of society's collective knowledge occurring in prior centuries.⁸ The danger resulting from this separation was more multifaceted than it appeared. In the United States, the lived experiences of white children were—and still continue to be—often different from those of minorities.

In 1986, Herbert Kliebard noted that around 1890, a belief in the doctrine of mental disciplinarianism dominated education. Adopters of this philosophy argued that the mind is like a muscle, and that the study of particular academic fields would strengthen specific mental faculties. By 1945, a new educational philosophy had captured the attention of the education community: life adjustment education. This philosophy centered around the belief that the primary function of schools should be to educate students to be successful in "real life" situations.⁹ In any case, different student demographics, especially in regard to race, have always reflected different real-life situations.

The scholarly literature from the 1950s through the 1990s demonstrates a changing education system, marked by failures to address racial issues in the shadow of an uncertain and dynamic world order. Kliebard discussed the decline of life adjustment education, arguing that its popularity declined after 1958, as blame fell on the public education system for the federal government's lack of immediate response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik. The satellite's successful launch, the first by any nation, created a mirage that

7 Ibid., 187.

8 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 10-11.

9 Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, see page 5 for doctrine of mental disciplinarianism; and pgs. 206, 212, 216 for life adjustment education.

the American education system was soft relative to the system in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ The eventual answer as argued by Kliebard came in the form of the National Defense Education Act, which framed education as a matter of national defense. The Act emphasized curriculum revisions in mathematics and science fields to dramatically increase class rigor.¹¹ It did not, however, emphasize any curriculum revisions for fields such as social studies and its subcategories, including history.

Scholars such as Charles Clarke argue that a problem with education between 1950 through the 1990s was that content taught in different subjects had largely developed through processes of "internal expansion," referring to older curriculum being used to build new curriculum. Curriculum was not built up as it related students' lived experiences or the teachings of other subjects. This, according to Clarke, limits the ability of curriculum to best enable societal adjustment.¹² Scholarly literature written by Robert Jennings discussed the role that changes to curriculum should have in education. Jennings discussed curriculum revision as a process through which the values of a community can be influenced. The work of Clarke also attested to this concept. Clarke argued that an essential area of social learning is developing an "understanding of and allegiance to the essential ethics in the Judo-Christian tradition" and "characteristic behavior among others consistent with these ethical ideas."¹³ Despite Clarke's noted concern for societal adjustment among youth, his allegiance to Judo-Christian tradition was fundamentally Eurocentric, and arguably racist when accounting for the minimal attention paid to the traditions of other cultures in public education.

Beginning in the 1990s, the scholarship on education has noted changes to educational theories, school organization, and standardization. In the 1990s, educators began to deploy culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), a theory and practice developed by the scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings. CRP, she argued, consists of three pillars. Those pillars state that students must experience academic success, must develop and maintain cultural competence, and must develop a critical thinking consciousness that they must then put into practice in challenging "the status quo of the current social order."¹⁴ Ladson-Billings

10 Ibid., 226.

11 Fred D. Carver, "School Organization and Curriculum Change," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 4, no. 1 (1970): 80. Also see Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 226-228 for National Defense Education Act.

12 Charles M. Clarke, "Organizing the Social Studies Curriculum," *The High School Journal* 35, no. 5 (1952): 148.

13 Robert E. Jennings, "The Politics of Curriculum Change," *Peabody Journal of Education* 49, no. 4 (1972): 296 in reference to roles of curriculum change. See Clarke, "Organizing the Social Studies Curriculum," 26 for Judo-Christian tradition as an essential area of social learning.

14 Gloria Ladson-Billings, "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *Theory Into Practice* 34, no.3 (1995): 159 and 160.

also cited research that speaks to negative experiences of different minority groups in school, such as hostile attitudes among school staff towards African American students in their “styling and posturing.” Ladson-Billings concluded that this is a particularly poor practice in an environment where children should feel comfortable being themselves; the children are punished for self-expression, not because something is wrong with their behavior.¹⁵ The scholarship of Ladson-Billings and others who share similar philosophies represented a renewed fight against an improved education system that still had roots in Eurocentrism, maintained to this day.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 was noteworthy as it demanded higher mathematics and literacy competence from American students. The effect was two-fold; mathematics and reading received more attention in schools, as intended. What wasn’t intended was for social studies topics to be taught solely as they related to literacy and for the benefit of literacy, not for their own inherent value and important lessons.¹⁶ As argued by Joe Kincheloe, NCLB reduced student success to memorization of loosely related facts, and was not at all indicative of real thinking or learning.¹⁷ Reforms such as those imposed by the right in Kincheloe’s example instigated a dumbing-down of social studies curricula. Scholar Clifford Rosky detailed, many anti-LGBT curriculum laws in force around 2017, referencing states like Texas and Alabama in which teachers were required to paint homosexuality in a negative light, as a concept and lifestyle unacceptable to the general public.¹⁸

Further attesting to inhospitality towards minority groups, Justin Krueger argued that social studies in its current state and the broader education system misrepresent many different Native American groups. To many people who are not citizens of Indigenous communities, indigenous people in the U.S. are a monolithic group, often seen as caricatures or understood purely through popular media. Social studies curriculum has generally discussed topics pertaining to nonwhite people through a lens that is distinctly white.¹⁹ This has resulted in history lessons that note that African victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade should be counted among “immigrants,” as if to imply an element of choice.²⁰ It is this distinctly white lens that forces “all students”

15 Ibid., 161.

16 Margit E. McGuire, “What Happened to Social Studies? The Disappearing Curriculum.” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 88, no. 8 (2007): 621.

17 Joe L. Kincheloe, “The Curriculum and the Classroom,” *Counterpoints* 491 (2016): 611-12.

18 Clifford Rosky, “Anti-Gay Curriculum Laws.” *Columbia Law Review* 117, no. 6 (2017): 1470.

19 Justin Krueger, “To Challenge the Settler Colonial Narrative of Native Americans in Social Studies Curriculum: A New Way Forward for Teachers,” *The History Teacher* 52, no. 2 (2019): 291 and 299.

20 Ibram X Kendi Interview by Jericka Duncan, *CBS Mornings*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-american-pageant-map-in-widely-used-us->

to gaze into a Eurocentric world, when Eurocentric values are not supreme and not all students are European. This was especially problematic, as history textbooks at this moment in time were lying through omission at best, and flagrantly racist at worst.

Race and Education in the United States Prior to 1940

In 1947, the scholar Harold Rugg wrote, "In 1890, our America was still a land of little things – little farms, little towns, little factories, little houses, little schools, little colleges."²¹ Herbert Kliebard, in a similar fashion, attested to the fact that education prior to the 1940s was much simpler. Throughout the 1800s, education centered on the teacher. By the 1890s, Kliebard noted that the "educational center of gravity" shifted from the teacher to the curriculum and the knowledge embodied within it. What was once "From the teacher to the student" transitioned to "from the curriculum, through the teacher, to the student."²² Science would inevitably prove this incorrect, and a new philosophy came to dominate education in the United States: the Life Adjustment Education (LAE). It entailed a belief that all American students deserved the best possible chance at adjusting to adult life in an increasingly complicated world.

With this shift came a flurry of critiques of education in the United States, with more of them being related to social issues than ever before. As early as the 1930s, the renowned scholar and historical figure W. E. B. Du Bois was giving speeches and producing writings that critiqued public education. Du Bois noted in a 1935 speech that public education could never be a means to "wholly settle or [meet]" the needs of black children.²³ A reasonable assertion, but one that detracted from the good that education could do. Just three years earlier, in 1932, Dr. Carter G Woodson made the claim that educational reform relating to racial topics "is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom."²⁴ Such a claim spoke to both the necessity of educational reform and the ability of education to be used to spread hate. Woodson continued, "The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them

history-textbook-refers-to-enslaved-africans-as-immigrants-cbs-news/.

21 Harold Rugg, *Foundations for American Education* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1947), 237.

22 Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 1-6.

23 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Curriculum Revision*, ca. 1935. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 1.

24 Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Kindle ed. (Wilder Publications, 1933), 106-107.

and now segregate them.”²⁵ This was to say that not only could the public education system be utilized as a weapon, it was largely in the hands of those who have historically been oppressors. Moreover, when accounting for the obliviousness towards racial issues among many educational reformers, education became an even more powerful weapon when maleficence ran amok. It is less useful to imagine battles in public education as between forces of good vs bad, than it is to imagine those same battles happening between forces that are disinterested vs bad.

Public education has drawn criticism from all parts of society and the political spectrum. Among the most common arguments against reforming public education was that such reforms would bring the United States closer to communist or socialist ideals, as argued by Du Bois. This has been an argument since socialism and communism existed, it remains an argument at the time of writing and editing this paper, and there is no sign that it will cease to be an argument any time soon. Nevertheless, it has also been demonstrated through arguments from Du Bois that fears of social reform in education are unfounded. Citing similarities between Soviet and United States “flood control” planning, it is apparent that Du Bois believed “social medicine” would look similar in the United States and Soviet Union. A key visit Du Bois made to the Soviet Union in the 1920s gave him a new frame of reference to which U.S. education could be compared.

In a speech draft regarding education in the Soviet Union, Du Bois recalled spending a period of weeks in the Soviet Union in 1928, in a variety of cities, both inside and outside of Russia proper, from Moscow to Kyiv. Following “ten years of war on Russian soil” in the Russian Revolution, organized by “16 civilized nations of the world including our own,” Du Bois took particular note of what he called the “literally tens of thousands of . . . homeless, crippled, and wild children from Russia.”²⁶ Referring to the children as a “terrible sight,” that crawled from sewers and swarmed cities, Du Bois quipped that the children had “in them the making of a criminal class [that] might haunt Russia for generations.” He took a “natural interest” in these children, and noted how they reminded him of black children in the Charleston slums and Atlanta jails.²⁷

Despite similarities, differences were also bountiful, particularly in regard to the social treatment of children. While police would occasionally stop fights between these youths in the Soviet Union, they were not harassed, arrested, or otherwise attacked by those with authority. As another key point, Du Bois

25 Ibid., 295-97.

26 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Education in the Soviet Union*, April 5, 1952. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. 4-5.

27 Ibid., 5.

cited the differences in schooling in the U.S. and USSR as being critical. Du Bois was surprised to see the school appears to be a normal building with no gates. The children could come and go when they please, and food and lodging was provided, with the condition being that if one stayed, they had to work and study. Following subsequent trips, Du Bois noted in 1936, despite traveling 3500 miles from Moscow to Manchuria, that he saw no sign of the children and did not ask about them. Only following another trip in 1949 did Du Bois come to the realization that he saw no sign of the wild children because, at least to some extent, the Soviet experiment in education worked. Du Bois realized the ordinary and orderly people he saw during his visit were the former "wild children of Russia," their lives restored through education and government planning.²⁸ The Cold War era critiques of U.S. education from Du Bois were heavily rooted in his older critiques on education, but his experiences in the Soviet Union appear to have given him a new model by which U.S. education could be compared and evaluated.

While Du Bois spoke to this Soviet experiment, Woodson detailed public education in the United States. Woodson raised a variety of concerns with public education that the Soviet Union appeared to do better, per the account of Du Bois. In addition to his claim about the root of lynching, Woodson asserted:

At a Negro summer school two years ago, a white instructor gave a course on the Negro, using for his text a work which teaches that whites are superior to the blacks. When asked by one of the students why he used such a textbook the instructor replied that he wanted them to get that point of view. Even schools for Negroes, then, are places where they must be convinced of their inferiority.²⁹

Woodson categorized public education as an agent of indoctrination, not social change. Even beyond public education and into higher level training, Woodson noted that in medical and law schools, black students were reminded of their roles as "germ carriers" and criminals.³⁰ Woodson took great care to not denounce public education outright, arguing that education is "the most important thing" when it came to uplifting black American children.³¹ The source of regret, for Woodson, was the control of black education by those who segregated and enslaved African Americans for generations.

The Prosser Resolution

While not exclusively referring to African American children or minorities,

28 Ibid., 8-9.

29 Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* 92-95.

30 Ibid., 269-77.

31 Ibid., 295-97.

educational authorities made an effort to do better for larger numbers of students. In January of 1944, the Office of Education began the chain of events that led to the introduction of life adjustment education (LAE).³² The Vocational Education Division of the office began a study that examined the future of vocational education in the United States. When concluded, the government sponsored study culminated in a final conference held on May 31 and June 1, 1945, to discuss the findings. At the close of the conference on June 1, Dr. Charles A. Prosser delivered a keynote address referred to as the Prosser Resolution. Dr. Prosser, a champion of public education, was also known for his contributions to the rehabilitation of disabled World War I veterans and for his efforts to assist such veterans in entering the vocational education industry.³³ Prosser noted that by following guidelines set in the report, vocational schools and high schools could effectively render 20% of students as skilled laborers and prepare another 20% for college. Though these figures represented an improvement on instilling technical and intellectual skills, the figures did not account for 60% of children in terms of life preparedness.³⁴

Prosser believed these 60% of students deserved better educational opportunities, and called upon educational leaders to better account for the needs of the majority. Specifically, Prosser requested that the Commissioner of Education and the Assistant Commissioner for Vocational Education call one or more conferences to consider the unmet needs of the majority. After representatives for both branches met in conference, they adopted the Prosser Resolution unanimously. The representatives then sent the Resolution to the Commissioner of Education, who created a new division of the Office of Education: the Division of Secondary Education.³⁵

Unfortunately, what would happen in practice was different from what was supposed to happen on paper. Prosser did not account for the topic of race and neither did the commissioners or conferences his work established. The result was a changing education system that remained stagnant on the topic of race. Donald Yacovone notes that the history textbook *American History*, first published by Thomas Maitland Marshall in 1930, “embodied the assumptions and biases that characterized nearly all American history textbooks published before the 1960s,” effectively covering the entire period of United States history that LAE lasted.³⁶ The very first page of the book drew

32 Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 212.

33 “Charles Prosser, Educator, 81, Dies: Leader in Vocational Training Was Ex-Head of U.S. Board in Rehabilitating Veterans,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1952.

34 United States Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, *Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth*, no. 22, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1951), 16-17.

35 United States Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, *Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth*, 1951, 16-17.

36 Donald Yacovone. *Teaching White Supremacy: America's Democratic Ordeal and the*

particular attention from Yacovone, as it claims to begin with “THE STORY OF THE WHITE MAN.”³⁷ Though LAE represented a significant chapter in the history of education in the United States, one worthy of a more in depth discussion featured below, the relics of its existence are largely confined to the government agencies that continue to oversee public education to this day. As per the writings of Yacovone, the contents of “nearly all” history textbooks throughout the entire period of LAE did nothing but maintain if not further racial divisions. Not only does Yacovone show this through *American History*, but he cited several other history textbooks and critics of them. Author and critic James Baldwin, born in 1924, recalled history textbooks as teaching that “Africa had no history and that neither had I.”³⁸ Author Toni Morrison is cited by Yacovone as referring to history textbooks as a “perfect vehicle” for cementing black inequality in favor of white Americans.³⁹

The Origins of Life Adjustment Education

Between April and November 1946, joint planning between the divisions of secondary and vocational education culminated in a series of five regional conferences and a national conference. Building on the Prosser Resolution to foster inclusivity for a greater number of students, the regional conferences arrived at a consensus consisting of nine points, with the first four being particularly relevant to this work:

1. That secondary education today is failing to provide adequately and properly for the life adjustment of perhaps a major fraction of the persons of secondary-school age.
2. That public opinion can be created to support the movement to provide appropriate life adjustment education for these youth.
3. That the solution is to be found in the provision of educational experiences based on the diverse needs of youth of secondary-school age.
4. That a broadened viewpoint and a genuine desire to serve all youth is needed on the part of teachers and of those who plan the curriculums of teacher-training institutions.

As noted in point 1, secondary education at the time failed to ensure a sufficient degree of life preparedness for many secondary-school aged children. It was known that public opinion could be worked on, and that educational experiences should be as diverse as the students being educated, with teachers broadening their viewpoints also being key.⁴⁰ Not only were the

Forging of Our National Identity, Kindle edition (Knopf Doubleday), 7.

37 Ibid. 17.

38 Ibid., 13.

39 Ibid., 14.

40 United States Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, *Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth*, 1951, 18.

problems known, but their solutions largely were too.

In May 1947, participants gathered in Chicago for the national conference. Much of the work performed during the conference became a blueprint for the execution of LAE. Following the national conference, Commissioner of Education John Studebaker created a Commission on Life Adjustment Education. Much like Prosser, Studebaker dealt extensively with veterans, and was one of the individuals responsible for enshrining educational opportunities in the G.I. Bill of Rights.⁴¹ The stated goal of the commission was to increase the effectiveness of educational efforts to meet the needs of the majority of students. It met for the first time in December 1947.⁴² The commission believed it had a method for increasing the reach of the public education system, and its *Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth* bulletin detailed every step the commission had taken and what it thought the United States should be doing.

Life Adjustment Education: Goals, Difficulties, and Decline

Life Adjustment Education was concerned with better preparing children for adulthood. Notably, the Commission acknowledged it could only function in cooperation with State level Departments of Education throughout the country.⁴³ In an effort to accomplish this, the Commission proposed the following means to accomplish its goal of providing an adequate education to the greatest number of American students:

1. To stimulate the development of programs of education more in harmony with life adjustment needs of all youth by encouraging in each State the organization of a selected group of secondary schools which will make cooperative efforts to improve
2. To locate effective instructional materials prepared to meet needs which have been revealed in actual situations, and cooperate in the development of additional materials
3. To identify schools already serving in a comprehensive way the great majority of youth in their communities and study their administrative practices, instructional techniques, and the quality and character of the learning activities
4. To keep the educational profession and the general public continuously informed of the significant activities and findings of the Commission and cooperating groups.⁴⁴

41 Alfonso A. Narvaez, "John W. Studebaker Dies at 102; Developed Educational Programs," *New York Times*, July 28, 1989.

42 United States Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, *Life Adjustment Education for Every Youth*, 1951, 7.

43 *Ibid.*, 7.

44 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

The Commission acknowledged that their job was not easy. Cited difficulties included high school teachers being confined to one specialty and the constant interjection of public opinion on schools and curriculum. Finally, the Commission noted that traditional programs often failed due to “the character of the school population and conditions of living” changing after the programs were initially established.⁴⁵ Those traditional programs were dated and needed replacement.

As the Commission was putting forth its prospectus of action, cracks in its foundation were already apparent. The Commission noted that other nations had more carefully considered their educational programs, implying a greater understanding of the importance of a nation’s youth. Also noted was the Commission’s belief that present issues of the day would only grow in severity over time.⁴⁶ Those issues indeed grew worse, and the careful considerations made by other nations seemed to pay off. Notably, the Soviet Union beat the United States in sending a satellite to space. As noted by Kliebard, this created the sentiment among the American public that the Soviet education system was more rigorous than the system in the United States. There was concern that the Soviet system’s rigor would propel the Soviet Union to victory in the Cold War. Less than a year later, the National Defense Education Act served as the last nail in the coffin for LAE.⁴⁷

Educating for National Defense, Not the Youth

If LAE provided hope for social reform in education, particularly regarding race, what came next largely dashed that hope. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 contained many findings and provisions. Among the findings were that Congress determined the United States needed to better educate a greater percentage of its student population in mathematics, science, and foreign language. The findings also noted a greater need to train students to utilize modern technology. One particularly important provision to be referenced later is section 102, which noted that the Act should not be interpreted as giving the federal government or any extension of it control over matters of curriculum, instruction, or administration.⁴⁸ There could be many reasons for this provision, but a particularly likely culprit is the widely held belief at the time that sweeping reforms from the top down were often associated with communism or socialism. Furthermore, the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision had just happened in 1954, and multiple states were still actively fighting desegregation efforts, representing another

45 Ibid., 12.

46 Ibid., 13.

47 Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 226-28.

48 United States Congress, *National Defense Education Act of 1958*, September 2, 1958, section 102 for limited federal controls and section 101 for educational changes.

probable reason for the addition of this provision.

The Act went on to detail available funds and rules for allotment. Equipment, educational materials, and textbooks were all provided. The Act contained few provisions for social studies and the individual subjects that fall under its umbrella like history or geography. Funding from the Act could only be used in these areas if the benefit from doing so extended to foreign language development, and only if adequate instruction in those fields did not already exist.⁴⁹ The government set the stage for a more intense mathematics and science experience for American students, with little regard to subjects that enabled social learning.

Just a few years earlier, in 1952, W. E. B. Du Bois compared education in the United States to education in the Soviet Union, in the full context of the Cold War, and noted that a common criticism of social reform in the United States was that such reforms were tied to socialist or communist ideals. Nevertheless, Du Bois asserted that flood control looked similar in the Soviet Union and United States, and that the United States had a pressing need for a dose of "social medicine."⁵⁰ In the eyes of Du Bois, just because the nation was battling Chinese communism, that did not also mean that the United States had nothing to learn from China. He argued that old age security in a nation with an increasing lifespan did not constitute giving into any kind of enemy, no matter the similarities between national policies governing retirement. The education system in the United States, Du Bois asserted, had made an intelligent nation stupid in the face of its social woes, outright ignoring the lessons of history.⁵¹

Growing Troubles in Public Education

In 1975, a resolution was passed by the National Council on Education Research requesting an inquiry into curriculum change. The goal of the inquiry was to better inform the federal government on how future educational funding should be allotted. Later in 1975, the National Institute of Education (NIE), a branch of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare interviewed 72 individuals representing over 60 organizations. The findings were published in a report titled *Current Issues, Problems, and Concerns in Curriculum Development* in 1976.⁵²

The NIE asked interviewees a variety of questions, including about their concerns regarding curriculum development, federal involvement,

49 Ibid., section 601 for use of funds on social studies subjects and sections 301-303 for allotment of funds.

50 Du Bois, *Education in the Soviet Union*, April 5, 1952. 1-2.

51 Ibid., 2.

52 NIE Curriculum Development Task Force, *Current Issues, Problems, and Concerns in Curriculum Development*, prepared by John Schaffarzick et al., Washington D.C., 1976, 1.

and the efficacy of curriculum development at improving education. Participant's responses were highly varied, but several overarching themes emerged. Recurring questions plaguing educational leaders included: should educators, administrators, or state and local governments shape curriculum development? And, should the federal government be involved, and if so, to what extent? One additional question emerging from the inquiry involved particularly problematic logic when dealing with education, especially the education of children raised with values that are not traditionally American. The question, phrased as follows, occupied the minds of educational leaders: "in situations where values conflict, whose values should be embodied in the curricula of the schools, and how should this be decided?"⁵³ Such a question did nothing more than create inequality in terms of who was best served by the education system. It was no different than asking whose values should be left out or ignored in curricula, and how it should be decided. Embodiment of one person or group's values to the detriment of everyone else's constituted indoctrination, not education.⁵⁴ Additional problems with education were showcased in experimental curricula undergoing evaluation around the same time.

A document titled *Directory of Social Studies Curriculum Projects* from the state of Illinois' Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction provides a useful lens to look at experimental social studies curricula that were being explored in the 1970s and subsequently the priorities of those tasked with curriculum development. The directory was not noteworthy with regard to what it discussed; it contained no groundbreaking curricula that dramatically altered the conduct of educators in the classroom. Instead, the document was noteworthy in looking at what it failed to discuss. Not once in the directory are the words "minority," "minorities," project as "Indians." "Hispanic," "Latino," and "Latina"⁵⁵ used, even though there were projects pertaining to Latin America. The word "Africa" appears throughout the document and the word "African" appears once, which did nothing to represent individuals who identified as black but are not necessarily African. Asia and its many different peoples that span the continent are represented throughout the directory, with some experimental curricula providing introductions to Chinese and Japanese literature and a discussion on modernization in China, Japan, and India.⁵⁶ Such omissions spoke to what educators and curriculum designers of the time were not thinking about; more representation for certain minorities

53 Ibid., 3.

54 Ibid., 1-3.

55 It is important to note that "Hispanic" refers to someone from a predominantly Spanish speaking country; "Latino/Latina" refers to someone from Latin America.

56 The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois, *Directory of Social Studies Curriculum Projects*, prepared by Leslie Balk, 197, 1-55.

in public education.

Two Roads Diverged: Different States Approach Education Differently

In the twenty-first century, public education has still struggled to adequately serve the needs of all students. Federal involvement in curriculum matters outside of sciences or math never caught on; therefore, education and often minority representation in education, vary dramatically across states. The state of Illinois passed a law in 2020, commonly referred to as the Inclusive Curriculum Law, which mandated that the roles and contributions of LGBT individuals must be studied as a part of United States history.⁵⁷ Simultaneously, other states have enacted laws that differ dramatically from recent developments in Illinois. In Texas, a 1991 education law mandated:

Emphasis, provided in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal Code.⁵⁸

The law remained in force as of 2023, though “homosexual conduct” is no longer a criminal offense in that state or any other. The varied and disjointed education American students have received has been perpetuated by the failure of the federal government to create a unified curriculum for social learning. Minority students have remained underrepresented in education, and in some cases have remained vilified, such as LGBT students in Texas.

Conclusion

As noted, individual States have chosen to go about educating their children in dramatically different ways. In the Illinois example, the State required educators teach about the contributions of LGBT individuals to United States History. In the Texas example, the State required that educators denounce homosexuality as an unacceptable lifestyle. Ronald DeSantis, Governor of Florida, has been described in this paper as desiring to censor and suppress history education. Such stances have always been highly problematic in the context of education, for reasons poetically summed up by the talented African American Journalist Reneé Graham in a *Boston Globe* article:

Devoid of ideas beyond control and power, the GOP is all-in on a platform of culture wars that coddles white fragility at the expense of truth and facts. In contorting himself to out-Trump former president Donald Trump by equating Americanness with whiteness, DeSantis believes he’s giving his base what it wants.

That poses a grim outlook for anyone who believes in education, frank

⁵⁷ Illinois General Assembly, *HB0246*, Springfield, Illinois, 2020.

⁵⁸ Texas 72nd Legislature, *Health and Safety Code*, 1991, chapter 163, section 163.002.

discussions about history, and a nation where teachers won't get in hot water for talking about the impact of James Baldwin's sexuality on his writing. It's no coincidence that current calls for "parents' rights" echo 19th-century cries of "states' rights" to protect slavery. Racism is America's original remix.⁵⁹

Stances such as those held by Governor DeSantis are controversial because censorship is counterintuitive to proper historical discussion and education. Even among members of his own political party, the views of DeSantis as they pertain to the intersection of race and education are viewed as problematic. Black Congressman and veteran John James (R-FL) engaged DeSantis on race in 2023, citing what reporter Marc Caputo referred to as "personal benefit language" regarding slavery. James informed DeSantis that slavery was not career and technical education and that "400 years of evil" were not a "net benefit" to James's ancestors, before finally quipping that DeSantis had dug a deep hole and "needed to put the shovel down."⁶⁰ Critiques of DeSantis's educational policy are plentiful from historians and scholarly figures, but criticisms from black members of his own political party regarding the issue of slavery is perhaps a bit more telling. Around the same time, then-Vice President Kamala Harris (D) issued a similar critique, echoing the language of James and Caputo in noting that there were "no redeeming qualities of slavery" in response to DeSantis's policy decisions.⁶¹ Statements from Democratic and Republican politicians alike about Florida's educational policies show that racial issues can transcend and overpower party lines. It speaks to the fact that even in 2023, issues related to race can divide more powerfully than political alignment can unite.

Children in States where censorship is prominent have received education in history and social studies that is at best incomplete, and at worst inaccurate. While DeSantis's policies have benefited his standing among his base, the same stances are completely to the detriment of the students in the state of Florida, and the U.S. as a whole. In a society that has been increasingly divided since the mid-2010s, a culture war that has permeated public education serves only to fan the flames of division in the United States.

59 Graham, "Ron DeSantis — White Supremacy's Helicopter Parent," *Boston Globe*, January 26, 2022.

60 John James, @JohnJamesMI. July 28, 2023, https://x.com/johnjamesmi/status/168502044169222536?s=46&t=KlXW-4hwT_vePiV3HsNOQw.

61 Kamala Harris, @KamalaHarris. August 2, 2023, <https://x.com/KamalaHarris/status/1686862209232650240>.

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Keen Simpson

Harmony or Anarchy? Punk's Legacy in Protest Music

In 1980, some 300 punks and young radicals from Austin, Texas, joined forces to confront fifty members of the Ku Klux Klan who had planned a march in the city. The coalition of radicals intervened in the march by throwing stones at the hooded klansmen, forcing the klan to end their march and retreat to their vehicles. Among the punks present that day was Dave Dictor, singer of the band Millions of Dead Cops (MDC). A few days later, Dictor wrote the song “Born To Die,” with lyrics of

I live in a world of hate,
With no regret, a nazi state,
A racist dream, a world of hate,
With no regret, a nazi state,
No war! No KKK! No fascist USA!

in response to the encounter with the Klan.¹ At the American Music Awards on November 20, 2016, over three decades after Dictor penned “Born to Die,” Green Day frontman Billie Joe Armstrong shocked listeners by leading the crowd in an impromptu chant. This chant featured an alteration of Dictor’s iconic line, aimed at the newly-elected president, Donald Trump, who has gained popularity with protestors since Trump’s election: “No Trump! No KKK! No fascist USA!”² These instances demonstrate punk music’s ongoing legacy as a potent means of challenging authority and expressing societal dissent, bridging individuals across generations in the pursuit of societal change.

Throughout the twentieth century and earlier, various social groups in the United States, including African Americans and the working class, have wielded music as a powerful tool of resistance against inequality and oppression. From labor struggles to the civil rights era, music has played a documented role in amplifying the voices of marginalized communities seeking justice beyond conventional power structures. This essay explores the pivotal role of music in social movements, illustrating how it empowers marginalized groups to articulate grievances and aspira-

1 Dave Dictor, *MDC: Memoir From a Damaged Civilization* (San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2016), 38.

2 Kory Grow, “‘No Trump! No KKK! No Fascist USA!’ The Punk History,” *Rolling Stone*, November 21, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/no-trump-no-kek-no-fascist-usa-the-punk-history-123861/>.

tions. Drawing on historical essays, biographies, and song lyrics, the paper examines how different movements utilized music as a form of protest. It argues that music serves as a powerful means of resistance, transcending mere entertainment to foster social change.

In the labor movement, radical pro-labor musicians such as Joe Hill gave voice to exploited industrial workers, challenging capitalist exploitation through song. Similarly, in the civil rights movement, freedom songs like “We Shall Overcome” became anthems of resilience against Southern segregation and racial discrimination. While the use of music as resistance is well-established in these collective movements, its role in more individualistic cultures like punk rock is nuanced. Punk rock emerged as a counter-cultural phenomenon that defied societal norms and gave voice to diverse voices within the working-class youth. Despite the outward appearance of homogeneity, the punk culture encompassed a spectrum of political ideologies, from anarchism to conservatism, all united under an anti-establishment ethos. Unlike the collective chants of earlier movements, punk music emphasized individual dissent and personal resistance against societal norms and authority.

This essay does not aim to argue the superiority of collective versus individualistic approaches but rather to demonstrate that both modes used music as a form of resistance. Whereas labor and civil rights artists like Pete Seeger rallied for collective action, punk bands such as Discharge proclaimed individual resistance through lyrics like “I won’t subscribe to the system.”³ Additionally, within the punk community, moments of collective organization and activism also emerged, adding depth to its portrayal as a form of resistance. By analyzing song lyrics, fanzines, and interviews with punk artists, this essay illustrates how punk music provided a platform for individuals to express dissatisfaction with society and forge a culture of resistance. It explores the contrast between individualistic resistance in punk and collective protest in other social movements, ultimately highlighting the enduring power of music to challenge the status quo and inspire change.

How Protest Music Has Been Studied Thus Far

The historical works on the use of protest music as a form of resistance can generally be divided into two categories: works that study protest music within major social movements and biographies of musicians who wrote protest music. These biographies typically explore the entire lives of the musicians, although their music and involvement in social movements are usually a focal point.⁴ For instance, Franklin Rosemont’s and William Adler’s biographies on singer and songwriter Joe

3 Discharge, “I Won’t Subscribe,” track 5 on *Hear Nothing, See Nothing, Say Nothing*, Clay Records, 1982.

4 For biographies on musicians involved in US labor and civil rights movements, see Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, *Bound for Glory: The Hard-Driving, Truth Telling Autobiography of America’s Great Poet-Folk Singer* (New York: Plume, 1943) and Pete Seeger, *Pete Seeger in His Own Words* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012).

Hill focus extensively on his music and his contribution to the labor movement, especially because little is known about Hill's personal life beyond his music.⁵

Other historical works on music as a form of resistance focus on protest music from specific major social movements, typically either the labor movement or the civil rights movement.⁶ Focusing on these two movements is understandable given the large number of protest songs that came out of both of these movements. Furthermore, it is clear that freedom songs and union hymns, which are directly associated with the civil rights movement and the labor movement respectively, are also forms of resistance. These works aim to document protest songs, contextualize them within the broader social movements from which they originated, and describe how the songs were utilized within those movements. In doing so, historians demonstrate how the songs functioned as forms of resistance.⁷ However, what historians have overlooked is protest music that was not connected with a specific social movement, namely punk rock.

Punk rock gave a voice to formerly apathetic and marginalized youth, allowing them to express their dissatisfaction with both their lives and society. Unlike the organized and collective nature of the labor and civil rights movements, punk rock was more about individual resistance than creating a cohesive social movement. The ideals and politics within punk culture were often inconsistent, as the music reflected personal struggles as much as political ones. This lack of association with a major social movement has contributed to punk rock being largely ignored in historical studies of protest music. While historians have written works specifically about punk rock, these usually focus on the evolution of the music and the scene, often treating the protest aspect as peripheral.⁸ This is unfortunate because punk rock produced a wealth of protest songs that follow the tradition of using music as a form of resistance, similar to the civil rights and labor movements. These songs gave a voice to groups who had little political power otherwise, but they did so on an individual

- 5 Franklin Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW & the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2003) and William M. Adler, *The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill, American Labor Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2012).
- 6 David C. Hsiung, "Freedom Songs of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 4 (2005): 23-26; David Spener, "From Union Song to Freedom Song: Civil Rights Activists Sing an Old Tune for a New Cause," in *We Shall Not Be Moved/No Nos Moveran: Biography of a Song of Struggle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 62-76; Terese M. Volk, "Little Red Songbooks: Songs for the Labor Force of America," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 49, no. 1 (2001): 33-48.
- 7 Hsiung, "Freedom Songs of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," 22-26; Spener, "From Union Song to Freedom Song: Civil Rights Activists Sing an Old Tune for a New Cause," 62-76; Volk, "Little Red Songbooks: Songs for the Labor Force of America," 33-48.
- 8 For more information on the history of punk rock, see Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (Feral House, 2001); Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2001); Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

level rather than through collective action.

One notable exception is the anthology *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, edited by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay. This work provides a history of punk music using race as the central lens, exploring how race, especially whiteness, both divided and brought its audience together.⁹ The essays within this anthology delve into the complexities of race in the punk scene, examining how punk music challenged racial norms while also grappling with its own racial dynamics. For example, contributors discuss the influence of bands like Bad Brains, an all-black punk band that challenged the predominantly white punk scene, and how punk's DIY ethic and anti-establishment stance created spaces for racial minorities.¹⁰ By focusing on the role of race in punk rock, *White Riot* offers a unique perspective on how the genre served as a form of resistance, not only against mainstream society but also within its own community.

This essay illustrates how punk music provided a platform for individuals to express dissatisfaction with society and forge a culture of resistance. It explores the contrast between individualistic resistance in punk and collective protest in other social movements, ultimately highlighting the enduring power of music to challenge the status quo and inspire change. This paper will show that punk music continued the civil rights and labor movements' tradition of using music as a form of resistance, albeit on an individual level rather than a collective level.

Music as a Form of Resistance in the Antebellum United States

The labor and civil rights movements are connected through their use of music. Various social groups historically used music as a form of protest in the United States. It has long been used by working class people, including African Americans, to build communities and protest against the injustices they faced. Enslaved African Americans created religious folk songs called spirituals that related the hardships of slavery to their desire for escape and freedom.¹¹ The spirituals were mainly used as work songs to improve the morale of the enslaved people, but they also built solidarity among the slaves and awakened them to the injustices of slavery. In his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Former Slave*, Frederick Douglass recalls that "every tone (of the spirituals) was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains... To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery."¹² Douglass's reflection on the spirituals highlights their significant role in shaping

9 *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, ed. Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (London: Verso, 2011).

10 Darryl Jennifer, "We're That Spic Band," in *White Riot*, ed. Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (London: Verso, 2011), 206-212.

11 John White, "Veiled Testimony: Negro Spirituals and the Slave Experience," *Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 2 (1983): 261.

12 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Former Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 12.

his awareness of the injustices he and his fellow slaves endured. The spirituals' messages of defiance and hope resonated deeply with him, igniting his understanding of slavery's fundamentally dehumanizing nature. Through these songs, Douglass and many others found a voice and a sense of solidarity, laying the groundwork for the larger abolitionist movement that would eventually challenge and dismantle the institution of slavery.

Like the freedom songs of the civil rights movement, which will be discussed later, the spirituals took inspiration from hymns and scripture, especially the Old Testament. The enslaved took inspiration from scripture due to the parallels between the slavery of African Americans in the United States with the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, as well as the fact that the Bible was one of the only works of literature they had access to.¹³

The spiritual "Go Down Moses" references the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt as a metaphor for the enslaved African Americans' desire for freedom. The line, "Let my people go," can be interpreted as God's command to Moses to free the Israelites or as God commanding the United States to emancipate the African slaves.¹⁴ Another way to interpret the line is that it is the enslaved author's own cry for his/her liberation. Sarah Bradford's biography of Harriet Tubman, *Scenes From the Life of Harriet Tubman*, describes another way the song "Go Down Moses" was used to resist slavery. According to Bradford, while Tubman was rescuing slaves through the Underground Railroad, she sang the song to communicate with runaway slaves to let them know the path was clear.¹⁵ The spiritual "Go Down Moses" stands as a powerful example of how enslaved African Americans used music to communicate, inspire, and resist. The song's reference to the biblical story of the Exodus provided a framework for expressing the deep yearning for freedom and justice. By drawing parallels between the plight of the Israelites and their own suffering, enslaved individuals found a way to articulate their hopes and demands for liberation in a manner that was both spiritually uplifting and subtly defiant. Spirituals like "Go Down Moses" not only provided solace and solidarity but also served as a covert means of resistance for enslaved Africans. This foundational use of music as a form of protest paved the way for future generations to use music to voice their dissent, as seen in the individualistic expressions of punk music.

Music as a Form of Resistance during the US Labor Movement

The next popular use of protest music in the United States was during the labor movement as early as the 1870s. At the turn of the twentieth century, the average industrial worker's working conditions were unbearable. Most of the only available city jobs required workers to work ten-to-twelve-hour days for insubstantial wages.

13 White, "Veiled Testimony," 261.

14 Fisk Jubilee Singers, "Go Down Moses," 1872.

15 Sarah H. Bradford, *Scenes From the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W.J. Moses, 1869), 26-27.

Workplace accidents caused by unsafe working conditions regularly killed or injured miners, railroad workers, and factory workers.¹⁶ Songs became a form of resistance to spread awareness about the social problems created by capitalism and the industrial revolution and to build solidarity amongst the working class.

One of the earliest examples of a popular pro-labor song is “Eight Hour Strike,” by Billy Pastor, written in 1872 to spread the idea of an eight-hour workday. The eight-hour work day was one of the main goals of the early labor movement.¹⁷ However, protest music really became popularized within the American labor movement with the publication of the Industrial Workers of the World’s (IWW) collection of songs titled *IWW Songs—To Fan the Flames of Discontent*, which came to be called the “little red songbook.”¹⁸ The subtitle, *To Fan the Flames of Discontent*, succinctly summed up the songbook’s purpose: to agitate and rally the working class against an exploitative system. The first edition of *IWW Songs* was released as a pocket-sized volume in 1908. This format made the Songbook ideal to be carried and distributed by members of the union, many of whom were migrant workers who traveled the United States. This “little red songbook,” which contained mostly new and original songs written by members of the IWW, quickly became the IWW’s most popular publication and most effective piece of promotion.¹⁹ Many of the most popular songs found in the “little red songbook” were parodies of popular songs from the time or church hymns, especially hymns played by the Salvation Army. Parodies were especially efficient for publicity because many people were already familiar with the songs they were based on, which made them very easy to share and play. Unlike the slave spirituals which used religious symbolism in a way that honored the Christian religion, the IWW’s union songs flipped the meanings of church hymns, as well as other popular songs. IWW songwriters did this to satirize American society and the capitalist system.

One of the most popular songs to appear in the “little red songbook” was “The Preacher and the Slave,” written by Joe Hill in 1911. The song parodied and followed the tune of S. Fillmore Bennet and Joseph P. Webster’s 1868 hymn “In the Sweet By-and-By.”²⁰ While the lyrics of “In the Sweet By-and-By” told listeners about the blessings awaiting them in Heaven, Hill’s version mocked the idea of waiting for rewards in the afterlife. The chorus

You will eat, by and by,
In that glorious land in the sky (Way up high),
Work and pray, live on hay,
You’ll get pie in the sky when you die (That’s a lie)

16 Volk, “Little Red Songbooks: Songs for the Labor Force of America,” 34.

17 “Songs of Unionization, Labor Strikes, and Child Labor,” *Library of Congress*, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200197381/>.

18 Rosemont, *Joe Hill*, 53.

19 Ibid. 55.

20 *IWW Songs: To Fan the Flames of Discontent*, various eds. (Chicago: IWW, 1923), 36.

poked fun at clergymen who make empty promises of rewards in Heaven to destitute workers.²¹ To Hill, preachers and religious organizations only distracted workers from the exploitation of the capitalist system with promises of “pie in the sky.” Placating the working class in this manner was the opposite of what the IWW was trying to accomplish.

Another line in the song mentions the Salvation Army, ridiculing them as the “Starvation Army.” The original version of “In the Sweet By-and-By” and other songs that were parodied by the IWW, were often played by the Salvation Army. Playing parodies of Salvation Army songs specifically posed an additional benefit to IWW agitators. When the Salvation Army congregated on the same streets as the IWW, the Salvation Army tried to drown the union out with religious music. In response, IWW members sang along, swapping the religious lyrics for their own radical lyrics.²² This tactic effectively drew crowds away from the Salvation Army and toward the IWW. One worker in 1908 observed, “It is really surprising how soon a crowd will form in the street to hear a song in interest of the working class, familiar as they are with the maudlin sentimental music of the various religionists.”²³

Another way that music was used during the US labor movement was to memorialize or to pay tribute to the movement’s martyrs. Among the movement’s most famous martyrs was Joseph Hillström, better known as Joe Hill, an IWW singer and songwriter who wrote many of the most popular songs found in the “little red song-book.” In January 1914, Joe Hill was arrested in Utah and charged with the murder of a former policeman.²⁴ Despite a total lack of evidence linking Hill to the crime and a massive campaign to free him, the State of Utah ordered Hill to be executed by a firing squad on November 19, 1915.²⁵ At a funeral service for Hill in Chicago, several thousand working people attended and sang Hill’s songs in many different languages.²⁶ Other pro-labor musicians also memorialized Joe Hill in numerous songs that celebrated Hill and his songs. Most note-worthy is Alfred Hayes and Earl Robinson’s 1936 ballad “Joe Hill,” which helped to ingrain Hill into American culture.²⁷

Throughout the years, “Joe Hill” has been sung by countless other leftist artists including Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger, and Utah Phillips.²⁸ In 1968, Phil Ochs released his own song about Hill, also titled “Joe Hill.”²⁹ The songs written about

21 Ibid.

22 Adler, *The Man Who Never Died*, 12.

23 Rosemont, *Joe Hill*, 55.

24 Ibid., 103.

25 Ibid., 137.

26 Ibid., 147.

27 Ibid., 199.

28 Paul Robeson, “Joe Hill,” track 16 on *The Collector’s Paul Robeson*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Monitor Records, 2004; Pete Seeger, “Joe Hill,” track 6 on *If I Had a Hammer: Songs of Hope and Struggle*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1998; Utah Phillips, “Joe Hill,” track 13 on *We Have Fed You All a Thousand Years*, Utah Phillips, 1983.

29 Phil Ochs, “Joe Hill,” track 4 on *Tape From California*, A&M Records, 1968.

Joe Hill portrayed him as a working-class hero who was killed by the government and capitalists for his radical songwriting and union organizing. In Hayes and Robinson's "Joe Hill," the author is visited by the ghost of Hill who says "I never died," suggesting his legacy was carried on by his songs and the labor movement.³⁰ The "Joe Hill" songs honored the songwriter who ultimately gave his life to the labor movement and spread awareness about how the legal system was unjust to the working class. The songs also increased the popularity of the great pro-labor songs Hill wrote himself. The labor movement's protest songs were integral in rallying workers against exploitation and uniting them in a common cause. This collective musical activism finds its echo in punk music, where the themes of resistance and dissent are personalized, yet similarly powerful in challenging societal norms.

Music as a Form of Resistance during the US Civil Rights Movement

In the South during the 1950s, at least 75 percent of black men in the labor force were employed in unskilled jobs. In the cities, most Blacks worked the lowest-paying and dirtiest jobs available. Nationally, nonwhite families earned only 54 percent of the median income of white families. Laws in the South segregated Black Americans from white facilities like schools, buses, restaurants, and parks. White Southerners implemented poll taxes and literacy tests and used violence to prevent Black people from voting, leaving African Americans few options to improve their situations.³¹ Amidst these oppressive conditions, a newly invigorated civil rights movement emerged across the United States. This movement sought to challenge and dismantle systemic racism and promote equality and justice for Black Americans

Similar to the labor movement, civil rights activists used music to protest the injustices that African Americans faced in the United States and to improve the morale of other activists involved with the movement. According to musician Guy Carawan, "freedom songs" were sung "at mass meetings, prayer vigils, demonstrations, before Freedom Rides and Sit-Ins, in paddy wagons and jails, at conferences, workshops, and informal gatherings... to bolster spirits, to gain new courage, and to increase the sense of unity."³² Many freedom songs were also inspired by spirituals and hymns.³³ Generally, the freedom songs had much more in common with the deeply religious slave spirituals than the satirical and irreverent songs of the "little red songbook."

The song "We Shall Overcome" is a befitting example of how hymns and religious symbolism were used during the civil rights movement. "We Shall Overcome" was adapted from an African American hymn "I'll Overcome Someday," by Charles Tindley³⁴ "We Shall Overcome" took the themes from Tindley's song about over-

30 *IWW Songs*, 53.

31 Aldon D. Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 1.

32 Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, *We Shall Overcome!: Songs of the Southern Freedom Movement* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963), 7.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, 11.

coming sin and reaching Heaven, and expanded it to represent overcoming oppression on Earth. According to Carawan, the song became an unofficial anthem of the civil rights movement, likely due to how it beautifully represented the themes of the movement.³⁵ Wyatt Tee Walker observed about the song—

One cannot describe the vitality and emotion this one song (“We Shall Overcome”) evokes across the Southland. I have heard it sung in great mass meetings with a thousand voices singing as one; I’ve heard half a dozen sing it softly behind the bars of the Hinds County Prison in Mississippi; I’ve heard old women singing it on the way to work in Albany, Georgia; I’ve heard the students sing it as they were dragged away to jail. It generates power that is indescribable.³⁶

Wyatt Tee Walker’s observations capture the profound emotional and unifying power of “We Shall Overcome.” The song’s ability to evoke strong feelings and a sense of solidarity across different settings—whether in large mass meetings, behind prison bars, on the way to work, or in moments of confrontation with authorities—demonstrates its versatility and deep resonance with those fighting for civil rights. Its capacity to generate an indescribable power and emotional connection among those who sang it made it an essential tool for maintaining hope and determination in the face of adversity.

Bob Zellner describes a specific incident in which another freedom song was used to empower protestors at a march in Alabama against police violence.

The march was stopped about a block and a half from the campus (Talladega College) by 40 city, county, and state policemen with tear gas grenades, billy sticks, and a fire truck. When ordered to return to the campus or to be beaten back, the students, confronted individually by the police, chose not to move and quietly began singing “We Shall Not Be Moved.”³⁷

In this instance, “We Shall Not Be Moved” helped activists resist adversity, even when threatened with violence by public authorities. When confronted by a formidable police presence armed with tear gas, billy sticks, and a fire truck, the students’ decision to sing “We Shall Not Be Moved” instead of retreating illustrates the song’s function as a form of peaceful resistance. The quiet singing of the song not only demonstrated their resolve but also served to unify the protestors and strengthen their collective courage in the face of potential harm.

In addition to freedom songs, prominent artists, including white artists like Bob Dylan, played a valuable role in the movement. Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” directly addressed the violence and racism in the South, capturing the frustration and urgency felt by many activists. In the second verse, Simone mentions

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 21.

that “Hound dogs on my trail... School children sitting in jail,” referring to the May 1963 protests in Birmingham, Alabama, where the police deployed hound dogs to disrupt peaceful protests and arrested students.³⁸ Popular newspapers like *The New York Times* featured photographs of these abuses and quickly generated support for the Birmingham activists. Simone’s powerful song similarly amplified these injustices and galvanized support for the civil rights movement.

Bob Dylan also utilized his musical platform to address issues of racial injustice, crafting songs that brought attention to profound social issues. “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” told the true story of Hattie Carroll, a poor black barmaid who was murdered by William Zanzinger, a wealthy young white man. The song critiqued the systemic racial inequities in the legal system, highlighting the disparity between the harsh realities faced by marginalized individuals and the leniency afforded to the privileged.³⁹ Dylan’s poignant lyrics and somber tone underscored the injustice of Carroll’s murder and challenge listeners to confront uncomfortable truths about racial inequality. Similarly, “The Death of Emmett Till,” addressed the brutal lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi. Dylan’s song captured the horror and outrage of the incident, memorializing Till and drawing attention to the violent racism that fueled such tragedies.⁴⁰

By recounting these stories through his music, Dylan not only highlighted the pervasive nature of racial injustice but also played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and inspiring activism. Through these powerful narratives, Dylan’s songs served as vital tools for social commentary and human rights advocacy. The freedom songs of the civil rights movement, along with the contributions of influential artists like Simone and Dylan, were crucial in galvanizing activists and providing a sense of unity and purpose. These musical expressions demonstrated the potent role of music in social movements, a role that punk music later adopted and adapted to articulate individual resistance and challenge the status quo.

Punk Rock as a Form of Resistance in the 1980s United States

Punk rock emerged almost simultaneously in the United States and the United Kingdom at the end of the 1970s. The States had the Ramones, while the UK had the Clash and the Sex Pistols. The rough and unrefined form of rock n’ roll often featured provocative lyrics. Members of punk bands were rarely professionally trained musicians. In the case of the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, they were actual teenagers. The lack of expertise and youthful exuberance blurred the lines between

38 Hailey Foster, “Dogs and Hoses Repulse Negroes at Birmingham,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 1963, 1. Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” track 7 on *Nina Simone in Concert*, Phillips Records, 1964.

39 Bob Dylan, “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” track 9 on *The Times They Are a-Changin’*, Columbia Records, 1964.

40 Bob Dylan, “The Death of Emmett Till,” track 13 on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 9: The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964*, Columbia Records, 2010.

artist and audience, encouraging rebellious teens to start their own bands.⁴¹ While early punk bands like the Sex Pistols flirted with political messages in songs like “Anarchy in the UK,” which seemed to view anarchism more as an aesthetic rather than an ideology, punk music became overtly political with bands like the Dead Kennedys.⁴² The Dead Kennedys’ lyrics openly called for the lynching of landlords and compared US politicians to fascist dictators. Governor Jerry Brown of California was criticized in “California Über Alles,” and later President Ronald Reagan was also criticized in an updated version of the same song titled “We’ve Got a Bigger Problem Now.”⁴³

In the early eighties, as major labels tried to soften punk’s image and market it to mainstream audiences as “new wave,” a new faster, harsher form of punk called hardcore emerged in American cities, like Los Angeles and Austin.⁴⁴ Hardcore punk brought with it a reinvigorated underground scene which kept the “do-it-yourself” ethos and rebellious nature of punk alive. The new hardcore punk scene had all kinds of new social issues to respond to, a few of which are especially relevant to this essay.

Ronald Reagan became President of the United States in 1980, ushering in the most conservative administration in decades. Reagan greatly expanded the war on drugs, which started under President Nixon. Reagan’s focus on criminal punishment, as opposed to rehabilitation, led to a massive increase in incarcerations for nonviolent drug offenses. When Reagan took office in 1980, the total prison population was 329,000, and when he left office eight years later, the prison population had essentially doubled, to 627,000⁴⁵. Reagan justified these policies in speeches about being “tough on crime.”⁴⁶ These changes created a new political atmosphere in the United States that the new hardcore punk scene was ready to respond to.

While punk music undeniably served as a form of resistance for its youthful audience, it diverged from other protest music discussed in this paper by lacking a cohesive ideological framework akin to the “freedom songs” of the civil rights movement or the labor anthems of the IWW. Instead, punk’s political landscape was diverse and often contradictory, reflecting the individual perspectives of its artists and listeners. Some bands embraced explicit political agendas, while others remained apolitical, focusing on personal rather than political issues. It’s worth noting

41 Steven Blush, *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 12.

42 Sex Pistols, “Anarchy in the U.K.,” track 8 on *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols*, Warner Records, 1977.

43 Dead Kennedys, “Let’s Lynch the Landlord,” track 4 on *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*, Alternative Tentacles 1980; Dead Kennedys, “California Über Alles,” track 8 on *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*, Alternative Tentacles, 1980; Dead Kennedys, “We’ve Got a Bigger Problem Now,” track 7 on *In God We Trust, Inc.*, Alternative Tentacles, 1981.

44 Blush, *American Hardcore*, 14–15.

45 James Cullen, “The History of Mass Incarceration,” *Brennan Center for Justice*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/history-mass-incarceration>.

46 Ibid.

that even apolitical punk bands viewed their music as resistance, however they spoke about issues in their own lives rather than political issues. As Bad Posture singer Jeff Miller so eloquently put it in an interview with *Maximum Rockroll* (MRR), “We like to sing about the things that happen to us, day to day, everyday... We don’t sing about politics because if you’re a punk and you don’t know you’re getting fucked in the butt by the government, then why the fuck are you here?”⁴⁷ Of course, other punk bands viewed political issues as things that happened to them “day to day, everyday.” Despite not being overtly political himself, Miller goes on to acclaim the Dead Kennedys for their political content in the same interview, stating “The DK’s (Dead Kennedys) are one of my favorite bands. Jello (singer of DK’s) gets up there and talks about Reagan and all that, and I’m glad he does. The DK’s, that’s their trip and they are really good at it. They believe in it, so that is fine.”⁴⁸ Essentially, bands and individuals were empowered to choose their own stances. As long as the band spoke from the heart and played good music, other punks usually respected it. Dave Dictor, singer of MDC, a forcefully political band, gives a similar explanation in his own interview with MRR:

Yeah, the whole nucleus of why we formed was for political reasons. I don’t try to preach to people, I’m just laying on them where I am coming from. I don’t go around saying ‘do this, do that,’ or tell them how to vote... Everyone has their way of conveying their messages. Coming from their hearts and their spirit. The Fuck Ups reflect sociological views, combined with their emotions. With each song I might not share every exact emotion, but I know it’s coming from a place deep inside.⁴⁹

The punk counterculture’s decentralized and often confrontational approach led to internal conflicts and debates, particularly around issues of identity and ideology. DC hardcore punk band Bad Brains were devoted Rastafarians, a religion that holds negative opinions towards homosexuality.⁵⁰ In 1989, the band faced criticism when they released the song “Don’t Blow Bubbles,” which contained lyrics such as “Don’t blow no bubbles (that’s the way we can stop the AIDS)” and “In time before there was no cure, now through his will it’s healed for sure.” Listeners interpreted these lyrics as saying that the AIDS virus was a punishment from God for homosexuality.⁵¹ While Bad Brains singer HR claimed the song was about the risks of shooting heroin, guitarist Dr. Know once said the meaning was “kind of an angry warning to homosexuals.”⁵²

Years before the release of “Don’t Blow Bubbles,” Bad Brains got into another

47 *Maximum Rockroll*, no. 001 (July 1982): 29.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 30.

50 Andersen and Jenkins, *Dance of Days*, 67.

51 Bad Brains, “Don’t Blow Bubbles,” track 6 on *Quickness*, Caroline Records, 1989.

52 Andersen and Jenkins, *Dance of Days*, 291.

dispute with other punk bands over the Bad Brains' homophobic views. In 1982, Bad Brains offered MDC a spot on their tour. MDC accepted and set up a gig in Austin that featured both bands, as well as Texas punk bands Dicks and the Big Boys. The Big Boys even allowed all the band members to stay at their homes. Unbeknownst to Bad Brains at the time, Dicks and Big Boys each had an openly gay member, Gary Floyd and Randy Biscuit respectively, and MDC singer Dave Dictor was known to cross-dress at shows. When HR became aware of their sexualities he became furious and referred to the bands as "blood clot faggot bands." Dictor and HR had a heated argument that night, but neither of them would compromise their views, and MDC ultimately left the tour after only playing three shows.⁵³

MDC responded to the incident with the song "Pay to Come Along," a play on the Bad Brains song "Pay to Cum." "Pay to Come Along" called out the bigotry of Bad Brains with such lyrics as "When people gave you homes and love, you gave back hate from high above" and "We don't need your Jah's fascist doctrine."⁵⁴ The controversies surrounding Bad Brains show that while the punk counterculture was one of resistance, it was not an organized political movement and did not adhere to a single set of ideals. Additionally, MDC's decision to respond to the controversy with Bad Brains through song once again demonstrates how punk serves as a form of individual resistance. The music represented whatever message the band wanted it to, and it was through the music that revolutionary, or reactionary, ideas were shared. As stated by one *MRR* contributor, "In a basically illiterate society such as ours, music is one of the only ways new ideas get disseminated, and it is within this sphere that the real battles for minds are being fought."⁵⁵

While the punk counterculture lacked a strictly defined political structure, it still fostered shared ideals among its participants. One predominant value embraced by most punks was anti-authoritarianism, which naturally extended to a stance against fascism. In the early days of punk, rebellious punks with no coherent political ideology sometimes wore nazi symbols to be intentionally offensive. In a 1978 interview with Julian Temple, Sid Vicious, bassist of Sex Pistols, can be seen wearing a red tank top featuring a large swastika.⁵⁶ Most punks who embraced such symbols did not actually hold anti-semitic views and simply saw it as a way to break social boundaries. The 1981 documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization* includes an interview with a teenager wearing a shirt with a swastika who explains that he's not going to go "kill a jew."⁵⁷ Dead Kennedys spoke out about punks using nazi imagery

53 Dictor, *MDC*, 67-69.

54 MDC, "Pay to Come Along," track 23 on *Millions of Dead Cops - Millenium Edition*, Beer City Records, 2014.

55 *Maximum Rocknroll*, no. 001 (July 1982): 2.

56 Anti Bonez, "Sid Vicious - Hyde Park Interview (August 17th 1978)," Youtube Video, September 17, 2021, 4:59, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ChCp43IHAY&ab_channel=AntiBonez.

57 Penelope Spheeris, dir., *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Los Angeles: Spheeris Films, 1981).

in the song “Nazi Punks Fuck Off,” saying “You still think swastikas look cool... In the real fourth Reich you’ll be the first to go.”⁵⁸

Still, there were so-called punk bands that legitimately held fascist or white supremacist views, but they were ostracized by most of the punk culture. For example, the English band Skrewdriver, whose first album *All Skrewed Up* could certainly be considered punk, released another EP in 1983 literally titled *White Power* with songs that expressed explicitly white supremacist and far-right ideas. A review of the EP in *MRR* states—

Well, these lunkheads have finally come out of the closet and revealed themselves to be blatant neo-fascists on vinyl. Unlike many others, I don’t use the term “fascist” lightly, but Skrewdriver are fascists, pure and simple... The fact that they’ve written three catchy Oi chants is unfortunate, because some misguided souls will pick this up just for the music and inadvertently support these regressive attitudes.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, while punk was used as a tool of individual resistance, that also meant the style of music could be used to express some abhorrent ideas as well. However, some punks had their own ways to deal with fascists infiltrating the scene. One example of this is the Baldies, who formed the organization Anti-Racist Action (ARA) in 1987. An *MRR* interview with a member of ARA explains the group’s history. The Baldies were a multiracial group of skinheads from Minneapolis who were apolitical until nazi skinheads started appearing in their scene.⁶⁰ To clarify, the term “skinhead” on its own does not refer to neo-nazis, but rather a subculture of punk which originated in England and takes inspiration from Jamaican music like ska and reggae. The Baldies physically confronted the White Knights, a group of nazi skinheads, at hangouts and venues in Minneapolis until the nazis essentially disappeared. The remainder started going one town over to St. Paul. The Baldies then formed ARA to involve not only anti-racist skinheads, but all types of youth across various American cities. The ARA continued to fight nazi skinheads, hold demonstrations, and paint over racist graffiti. Individuals from the organization also participated in other political demonstrations, such as those against police brutality and rape.⁶¹ While this battle did not take place through music directly, it exemplifies how the punk scene’s ethos of individual resistance could galvanize collective action when faced with threats, demonstrating the adaptability and unity within the punk culture in the broader tradition of using music-centered movements for resistance.

Moreover, punk rock’s capacity for collective political action was exemplified by events like the 1983 “Rock Against Reagan” tour. The tour was organized by a

58 Dead Kennedys, “Nazi Punks Fuck Off,” track 6 on *In God We Trust Inc.*, Alternative Tentacles, 1981.

59 *Maximum Rocknroll*, no. 010 (December 1983): 70.

60 *Maximum Rocknroll*, no. 078 (November 1989): 63-66.

61 *Ibid.*

coalition of radical activists called the Youth International Party, also known as the Yippies, some of whom were fans of hardcore. The Yippies' goal with the Rock Against Reagan tour was to promote the legalization of marijuana and to register apathetic, marginalized youth as voters to help vote President Reagan out of office in the 1984 election. The tour featured two of the biggest political punk bands at the time, Dead Kennedys and Reagan Youth, as well as MDC, Dicks, and Crucifixes to name a few. At shows, the Yippies threw handfuls of joints into the crowd. The final show of the tour took place in Washington DC on July 3rd, at the Lincoln Memorial, at the same time Ronald Reagan was having an Independence Day party a couple hundred yards away. At least 10,000 were present at the show in DC. While the tour did not accomplish getting marijuana legalized or ousting Reagan from office, it was widely popular and succeeded in getting thousands of young voters registered and thinking about political action.⁶²

Through the analysis of punk rock's development, lyrical content, and influence on youth culture, it becomes clear that punk served as a unique platform for expressing dissatisfaction with societal norms and political structures. While it differed from other protest movements in its lack of a unified ideological framework, punk's raw and rebellious energy provided a means for individuals to articulate personal and political grievances, contributing to a broader culture of resistance. The punk scene's emphasis on anti-authoritarianism and its ability to galvanize collective action, even amidst internal conflicts, highlights the power of music as a tool for challenging the status quo. This examination of punk rock illustrates how music can foster a sense of community and solidarity among disparate groups, underscoring that music remains a potent force for social and political change.

Conclusion

Just as the civil rights movement and labor movements before it, the hardcore punk scene of the 1980s wielded music as a formidable weapon of resistance. Punk rock became a rallying cry for disillusioned youth, offering a platform to fiercely critique societal injustices. Unlike the unified political anthems of the civil rights "freedom songs" or the labor movement's rallying cries from the "little red song-book," punk music defied categorization under any single ideology. Instead, it provided artists with the freedom to convey their personal beliefs, while audiences could find resonance with bands that reflected their own perspectives or challenged their existing views. This divergence from collective action underscores punk's unique ethos—unapologetically provocative and refreshingly unfiltered.

Where freedom songs sought harmony in collective struggle, punk reveled in its role as a disruptor, unafraid to provoke, challenge, and confront. Punk bands used their music not merely to entertain, but to provoke thought, ignite debate, and unsettle complacency. Despite these contrasts, the essence remains the same: music

62 Dicator, *MDC*, 87-92.

as a force of resistance, a megaphone for the marginalized, and a catalyst for change. Whether through collective unity or individual defiance, music transcends its role as mere artistry to become a potent force for social critique and transformation. In examining these diverse manifestations of musical resistance, this essay emphasizes the enduring relevance of music as a tool of empowerment and dissent. From the cotton fields to the mosh pits, from the picket lines to the underground clubs, music continues to amplify voices that challenge the status quo and envision a more just world.

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