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Bad Boys: A Study of Conservative Censorship and American Subcultures

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Ally Dellgren

Summary:

In this essay, I will examine the relationship between censorship groups and hard rock artists in the United States beginning during the Reagan administration. Conflict between these groups garnered particular media attention during the Parents Music Resource Center hearings of 1985. These hearings coincided with a rightward skew in mainstream American political opinions and the satanic panic of the eighties upon which hard rock groups capitalized.

Bibliography

Busey, Sean D. "Parental Advisory-Explicit Content: The Parents Music Resource Center, Conservative Music Censorship, and the Protection of Children." Master's thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 2018.

This master's thesis argues that The Parents Music Resource Center has been fundamentally misunderstood by most modern scholars whose only focus is the first amendment implications of the PMRC's actions. Busey, like Ruggles and England, highlights America's right wing political shift during the Reagan presidency in the 80's and how the PMRC descended from generations of conservative censorship groups. This essay is helpful in my research because Busey investigates why the PMRC targeted heavy metal from a musicological perspective instead of a constitutional one.

"Dee Snider's PMRC Senate Hearing Speech (Full)". Posted May 2012 video, 30:28.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0VyrITyITE>

This first-person video account of Dee Snider's speech to the senate during the PMRC hearings of 1985 is a vital source for anyone studying modern censorship and divisive music. While John Denver and Frank Zappa's testimonies were important in their own rights, the power of Dee Snider in full hair and makeup making his statement is immense. This video is the perfect example of Riemenschnieder's argument as it shows the shock of the representatives as Snider eloquently, effectively and respectfully refutes the claims of Tipper Gore.

D'Hont, Coco. "I Am Your Faggot Anti-Pope': An Exploration of Marilyn Manson as a Transgressive Artist." *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017).
<https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12098>.

This article, published in a journal on American popular culture, comes from Coco D'Hont, a scholar who specializes in these topics. This article is far more theoretical than the others on this list, as it explores the language used when describing subcultural identities. D'Hont seeks to redefine the word "transgressive" as reconstructive of social norms and boundaries instead of destructive of them.

England, Yvonne L. "A Punk Practice: The Development of Punk Political Activism, 1979–2004." Master's Thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2013.

All the sources I have examined explore subcultures and their portrayal in the media. Many of them zero in on the gothic groups because they are most often associated with the music of Marilyn Manson. England however, explores the punk scene. Both punk and goth came from London but started growing in the United States on the west coast in the late 70s and early 80s. Nearly every article cites how mainstream American politics skewed right during the Reagan administration. Further, they all acknowledge that music is a starting point for political movements, and England argues that perhaps that is the reason that politicians try to silence transgressive artists.

Galván, Gary. "Parent Music Resource Center." *Grove Music Online*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, Accessed 1 Nov. 2020.
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002252137>.

This is the Grove Music Online article about the PMRC. It provides basic important information on the Washington Wives and outlines their goal for a required labeling of adult content and a self-censorship within the music industry. The Grove dictionary is an essential resource for music research.

Gunn, Joshua. "Marilyn Manson Is Not Goth: Memorial Struggle and the Rhetoric of Subcultural Identity." *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (1999): 408-31.

Joshua Gunn is a professor at the University of Texas in the communications department who specializes in music and religion. This article, like the Stark, discusses subcultural identities and how the media and its portrayal of those identities helps shape the communities. However, Gunn focuses on the assimilation theory to explain why goth has survived over other subcultures. This theory says that the appropriation of elements of a subculture into the mainstream will inevitably lead to the loss of that group's transgressive power.

Manson, Marilyn. "The Dope Show (Official Music Video)" Posted October 2009, 3:57.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R682M3ZEyk&list=RDqq-sNbNeAQ4&index=23>

The music video of "The Dope Show" from the 1998 album *Mechanical Animal* is a prime example of Manson's divisive imagery and chaotic lyrics. This video is an introduction to Manson's alter ego Omega, an androgynous alien-like creature with breasts and without genitals. When this album debuted, fans and critics alike expected satanic imagery and lyrics like those in 1996's *Antichrist Superstar*. However, this album and "The Dope Show" draw more on chaotic anti-authority rhetoric described in the Stark article.

Riemenschneider, Chris. "Pop Music; Marilyn Manson and Slayer." *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, Minn), 2007.

Riemenschneider is a longtime music writer and critic for the Star Tribune who has also contributed to Rolling Stone and Billboard. He asks when and why did Marilyn Manson lose his shock appeal? Many scholars have discussed how Manson and other transgressive artists have been blamed for horrific acts like Columbine or the murder of Caylee Anthony. Riemenschneider acknowledges how when hard rock performers are given the opportunity to speak publicly, critics are often shocked at how the artists don't fit into the boxes they've been placed in.

Ruggles, Brock. "Not So Quiet on the Western Front: Punk Politics During the Conservative Ascendancy in the United States, 1980–2000." PhD diss, Arizona State University, 2008.

This dissertation by Brock Ruggles is like the one by England. They both cover the punk movement's politics in the 80's. Punk music is about democracy and nonviolent civil disobedience. This dissertation discusses how punk music in the 70s was largely an anti-capitalist response to conservative politics. Ruggles, like Stark and Gunn, acknowledges how punk and metal provide a forum for "radical" politics, particularly opposition to the nuclear arms race and military intervention in the middle east. Ruggles is a philosophy student, providing yet another perspective on American subcultural identities.

Twisted Sister. "We're Not Gonna Take it (Extended Version) (Official Music Video)". Posted August 2010 video, 6:31.

This video is an important watch, particularly after reading Tipper Gore's critique of Twisted Sister which lambasts the imagery in this video. Dee Snider says in his testimony that the imagery is based on the cartoons of Wile E. Coyote, and it is apparent when watching.

Osborne, Patrick William. "Constructing the Antichrist as Superstar: Marilyn Manson and the Mechanics of Eschatological Narrative." *Persona Studies*3, no. 1 (2017): 43. <https://doi.org/10.21153/ps2017vol3no1art651>.

This article is one of the only sources that expressly examines the relationship between conservative Christians and hard rock groups. His argument surrounds eschatology which is the part of theology which addresses death and final judgement. Osborne explains how historically Christians have used eschatology to vilify anyone who is perceived as an enemy. Although Osborne is an English professor, he provides an important theological viewpoint on the topic.

Stark, Danielle Marie. "Violence and Satanism in Heavy Metal: Real Threat or Media Construct?" Master's Thesis, Southeastern Louisiana University 2012.

Danielle Stark's thesis describes how the media portrays goths and metalheads as deviant and satanic. Are people that listen to metal more violent and aggressive? Does the media portray metalheads accurately? What separates metal from other provocative genres in the eyes of censors? Stark asks and seeks to answer each of these questions from a

criminal justice and sociological lens and puts great emphasis on labelling theory which posits that a self-identity can be influenced by the terms used to classify them.