

AMERICAN IDIOT TO THE "AMERICAN EULOGY": GREEN DAY'S ROCK OPERAS AS
APOCALYPTIC POLITICAL PROTEST DURING THE GEORGE W. BUSH
ADMINISTRATION

by

LACEY B. LONG

(Under the Direction of Michael Moran)

ABSTRACT

Green Day's first mainstream album, *American Idiot*, protests at once the Iraq War, President Bush, and American credulity and paranoia. Released mere weeks before the 2004 presidential election, *American Idiot* responds to the Bitzerian exigence of wars, media-fueled panic, and domestic oppression, with the immediate goal of swaying the presidential election away from George W. Bush. I examine this album and the later *21st Century Breakdown* in the context of its rhetorical situation as defined by Bitzer, challenged by Vatz, and modified by Consigny. Green Day constructs its argument for youth political action through three major archetypes—the credulous Idiot, the Last of the rebels, and the Faggot protester—encouraging listeners to participate in their fictive lives and learn that mass peaceful protest with the solidarity of powerful allies remains the only sustainable and honorable action in the face of wars, distortion, and injustice.

INDEX WORDS: Green Day, *American Idiot*, *21st Century Breakdown*, George W. Bush Administration, political speech, war protest, protest music, Iraq War

AMERICAN IDIOT TO THE "AMERICAN EULOGY": GREEN DAY'S ROCK OPERAS AS
APOCALYPTIC POLITICAL PROTEST DURING THE GEORGE W. BUSH
ADMINISTRATION

By

LACEY B. LONG

B.A., Winthrop University, 2009

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

© 2011

Lacey B. Long

All Rights Reserved

AMERICAN IDIOT TO THE "AMERICAN EULOGY": GREEN DAY'S ROCK OPERAS AS
APOCALYPTIC POLITICAL PROTEST DURING THE GEORGE W. BUSH
ADMINISTRATION

by

LACEY B. LONG

Major Professor: Michael Moran

Committee: Michelle Ballif
Valerie Babb

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1. "LIFE BEFORE THE LOBOTOMY": GREEN DAY BEFORE <i>AMERICAN</i> <i>IDIOT</i> | 12 |
| 2. THE "AMERICAN IDIOT,' THE "FAGGOT AMERICA," AND THE "LAST OF THE AMERICAN GIRLS: ARCHETYPES OF THE REVOLUTION..... | 17 |
| She Sings the Revolution: The Axiomatic Power of Music..... | 35 |
| 3. "MY NAME IS ST. JIMMY"/"MY NAME IS NO ONE": THE UBIQUITOUS UNSTABLE SPEAKER AS REFLECTION OF AMERICAN PUBLIC..... | 37 |
| 4. "JESUS OF SUBURBIA" TO "EAST JESUS NOWHERE": AN UNEASY RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY..... | 46 |
| 5. "MY OWN PRIVATE SUICIDE": THE STAKES AND SHAKY GROUND OF THE REVOLUTION..... | 57 |
| "See the Light": The Cyclical Renewal of Revolutionary Figures..... | 60 |
| CONCLUSIONS..... | 64 |
| NOTES..... | 68 |
| WORKS CITED..... | 67 |
| APPENDIX..... | 71 |
| Track List for <i>American Idiot</i> | 71 |
| Track List for <i>21st Century Breakdown</i> | 72 |

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

General protest songs, ranging from John Lennon's "Imagine" to Garth Brooks' "We Shall Be Free" to Bette Midler's "From a Distance" to Michael Jackson's "Earth Song" and "Man in the Mirror," meld ongoing problems of war, prejudice, poverty, and environmental degradation into coherent texts that emerge every few years and deviate little in their messages of change and hope for a better future. Songs that appear during times of major conflict tend to be much more focused and strongly worded or urgent. The Irish Cranberries' "Zombie" tells about The Troubles in Northern Ireland in the form of endlessly repeated violence: "with their tanks and their bombs/ and their bombs and their guns/ in your head, in your head they are dying" (lines 22-4); German Nena's "99 Luftballons" during the Cold War recounts a hypothetical catastrophic bombardment; and American Yellowcard's "Two Weeks from Twenty" details the lives of a dead soldier's girlfriend and mother during the Iraq War, observing that "there's still no shame from the man to blame" (line 10).

Every year, protest songs of some stripe or other reach mainstream radio, some crossing oceans, cultures, and languages to do so. But from September 2001 through the first decade of the new millennium, a massive wave of protest songs hit American radio and music television, among them Green Day's album *American Idiot*,¹ a rock opera that broke into the mainstream and wove anti-war protests with the album's narrative of teenage rebellion. Whereas other artists protested the war itself, and some protested then-President George W. Bush, Green Day made both of these critiques along with a further condemnation of ignorance and hysteria in the American public. The appearance of *American Idiot* in 2004 transformed the band from a

familiar act in the pop punk scene to a mainstream phenomenon. A previously nonpolitical band, Green Day joined the wave of protest music following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq during the first George W. Bush administration. While dozens of other artists, many of them much more well known at the time, also contributed to this wave, Green Day emerged as one of its dominant voices. The goal of this work is to examine not only what the band said in *American Idiot* and its followup *21st Century Breakdown* but to gain an understanding of the social, political, and cultural context that created it. To this end, I will begin with an exploration of what Lloyd Bitzer termed the “rhetorical situation” in his 1968 article of the same name, major reactions to and modifications of that theory, and then apply it to the situation Green Day found themselves in in the early 2000s.

Bitzer opens “The Rhetorical Situation” with a complaint that, while audience and the process of creating rhetorical speech has been widely studied, little attention has been given to the situations that prompted the gathering of those audiences and the creation of that speech (2). He defines rhetorical works as those that “produce action or change in the world...by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (4), and the situations that produce them

“natural context[s] of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character” (5).

Bitzer breaks down any given situation to three basic components: 1), exigence, “a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done” (6)--essentially, a problem that needs solving; 2) audience, which has to be real, “capable of being influenced by discourse,” and in some power to respond, to modify the defect (8); and 3), constraints on the rhetor “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations” such as “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, and motives” (8).

Under this definition, artifacts that would otherwise be classified solely as works of art may be considered rhetorical speech acts, particularly when those works convey overt political messages. In Green Day's case, we may say that their exigence was the popular support of the overseas wars, based on fearmongering by the government and mass media and aided by a wave of hyperpatriotic and militaristic music. To correct this defect, they aimed to change the minds and voting habits of their audience, both fans or casual listeners, all of whom exist in the real world and millions of whom were capable of voting. Key constraints include the power structure in place at the time in the form of a growing covert governmental office, Homeland Security, and the draconian Patriot Act; recent events like the Dixie Chicks/Toby Keith feud that resulted in their genre's ostracization of the Chicks for speaking negatively about the president; the tradition of protest music and Green Day's own tradition of non-politicization but general antiestablishmentarianism, the growing wave of contemporary protest music into which they could disappear, and the general atmosphere of fear and patriotism of the time.

While identifying and exploring the complex web of factors creating this rhetorical situation by Bitzer's definition would be a complex undertaking in itself, problems arise in Bitzer's very definition of rhetorical situation, that it itself demands a particular response, one that comes “naturally” from the given situation. In his example of a group of fishermen, for

instance, utterances are called for at particular times and in predictable patterns in order for the outing to be successful; the same is true with his example of the then-recent Kennedy assassination: it is true that a specific order of events was called for (breaking the story over mass media, creating eulogies, staging a funeral, etc). But these particular events require rigid adherence to tradition: in the course of burying a president, there's little room to waver from a set script. For instance, though there exists a choice of who eulogizes the leader, there's no real choice *not* to eulogize him. Richard Vatz, in his 1973 response to Bitzer, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," points out the difference between examples Bitzer gives: "that the obvious positive modification of pollution of our air is 'reduction of pollution,'" wryly adding, "One wonders what the obvious 'positive modification' of the military-industrial complex is" (156). In the complex moment of 2004, with two wars under way and a presidential election looming, there is no clear fitting response, even if it could be objectively affirmed that the wars needed to end and the president needed to leave office. Any range of responses on the part of Green Day could "fit" the situation: they could have kept their politics to themselves, as they had generally done before; they could have instructed people not to vote; they could have reverted to their punk roots and encouraged rioting and government overthrow; they could have recorded one song of their sentiments, as several other artists elected; instead of any of these options, they recorded an entire album in a format they hadn't previously used, changed their sound to more mainstream pop rock, and peppered the tracks with biting political statements.

With Bitzer's notion of exigence destabilized, Vatz points out that even facts aren't absolute or uniform, that "we learn of facts and events through someone's communicating them to us" (156), leaving us with their interpretation of events which may or may not be actually factual. In 2003, for instance, Americans were told the "fact" that Saddam Hussein was creating

Weapons of Mass Destruction (solemnly abbreviated as WMD's) to threaten American freedom and lives, “facts” that have since gained the quotation marks denoting untruths.

Even assuming the information we receive is true, Vatz argues that context can never be fully explored, that, far from the facts of a situation absolutely determining the response in the fashion Bitzer argues, the rhetor controls the situation by choosing which elements to emphasize at his or her own discretion (157). Vatz posits, “No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it” (154); to apply this to one of the major events preceding the albums and the situation they respond to/are a part of: when Alan Jackson watched the Twin Towers collapse, he saw a tragedy; when Toby Keith witnessed the same thing, he saw a need for revenge. It's the difference between “9/11 was the day nearly 3,000 people died” and “9/11 was the worst terrorist attack ever on American soil”: one invites mourning and remembrance while the other invites outrage. Green Day, meanwhile, was watching the news reporters and gullible viewers and sought neither mourning nor revenge but media and political reform. In each artist's view, different elements are presented as “salient,” and the construction of an interpretation around those elements effectively creates different stories (157). So while Bitzer argues that the meaning of a situation is provided by the discrete factual elements thereof, which prompts a particular and “fitting” response (Bitzer, 10), Vatz claims the rhetor is the creator of meaning by interpreting parts of the situation, sometimes even manufacturing major situations like the Vietnam War and Cuban Missile Crisis--and recently, he notes in an anniversary article, the Iraq War and War on Terror (Mythical Status 4). In his 2009 revisit of the debate, Vatz notes that Bitzer's views are the more popular of the two but pose a threat to rhetors: namely, that if a situation dictates a

response, there is no room for the rhetor to be a rhetor (4), leaving him or her a simple transmitter of the “correct” response.

Though Bitzer and Vatz speak directly against each other, I find value in both of their discussions: while Vatz points out the massive role interpretation plays in the response to an event (I'll avoid calling it a rhetorical situation here because Bitzer would say the situation has already been established by the time reporting occurs, while Vatz argues the reporting creates the situation), Bitzer's attention to the constraints on a response are useful in exploring a speech act's complexity and context. So while the term “rhetorical situation” is torn between the two, I consider it not a containable set of circumstances (as Bitzer does) or the creation of the rhetor (as Vatz does); rather, I am interpreting “rhetorical situation” as a complex of events that occur both before a rhetor makes a speech act, the act itself, and the resulting complex of events: that is, a rhetorical situation is fluid, changing, both acting upon the rhetor and being acted upon. The identification of exigence is, as Vatz points out, particular to the interpreting individual; events, however, are easier to identify if not describe: for instance, on September 11, 2001, did about 3,000 people die, or were they murdered? Was the number “nearly 3,000” or “less than 3,000”? Was this a problem of national importance or regional security? Was Al-Qaeda attacking American freedom, an evil empire, or a country's infrastructure?

My views correlate with Scott Consigny's 1974 treatment of the debate in “Rhetoric and Its Situations”: Bitzer is right in arguing that “particularities” construct a situation but is wrong in calling that situation determinant, and Vatz's point about the rhetor's creative power is well-founded but not absolute, that Bitzer's constraints must be considered (176). I diverge from Consigny's thinking, however, when he argues that a rhetor must be a universal artist with tropes for all situations “irrespective of subject matter” (181). In my mind, that lessens the importance

of the “particularities” that constitute a situation; and without these particularities, responses become generic and less effective. In protest music, at any rate, generalized calls for peace and understanding begin to sound the same, whereas a demonstrated familiarity with the minutiae of the problem creates a tighter bond between the rhetor and audience. For instance, the Cranberries' mention of 1916 in “Zombie” marks the song as a protest of The Troubles in Ireland, while Bette Midler's observation about enemies looking like friends from a distance is so generalized, it's nearly meaningless, and the central image of Melissa Etheridge's “Scarecrow” resounds more strongly against homophobia than Garth Brooks' line, “When we're free to love anyone we choose” (“We Shall be Free,” 18). And in the case of Green Day, rather than taking a side on the major issue of violence versus peace, they chose a violent peace; and instead of simply arguing whether war is good or bad, they emerge a few years after the contemporary debate began and argue that the whole display is idiotic, refusing to play the game as it had been set up. This is what set them apart from other protest musicians of the time, helped make them household names, and earned them political influence with their listeners.

Therefore, when I use the term “rhetorical situation,” I refer to a complex of Bitzer's particularities that prompt some sort of response, but not a specific one; that response then becomes a particularity within the evolving situation and can itself prompt further response, like Dixie Chick Natalie Maines responding to the actions of President Bush, which prompted an immediate response by Toby Keith and the genre at large which, a few years later, prompted the Chicks' indignant return. Rhetors have some control over defining and interpreting a situation but generally cannot invent one (Saddam Hussein's nonexistent weapons of mass destruction provide a good exception). Green Day, rather than finding exigence in the war itself, found it in the

media's presentation, criticizing it as a promotion of “paranoia” and “propaganda,” tools the presidential American idiot used on his constituents.

II. Argumentative Layout

Whereas the particularities of the historical moment of *American Idiot*—the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the media-hyped Terror Alert System, falsified evidence of weapons of mass destruction, the impending presidential election—prompted Green Day to advocate pacifism and political action in the form of rallies and voting against George W. Bush in the 2004 election, the absence of a major election in 2009 created a different political situation for *21st Century Breakdown*, prompting it to focus on domestic issues and favor insurgency imagery in the face of the Great Recession.

After an initial consideration of Green Day's seventeen-year career prior to *American Idiot* and their emergence from the pop punk genre into the mainstream, a closer look at the legacy of *American Idiot* will testify to that album's continuing cultural impact, arguing that, while it was a composition of its historical moment, it has withstood the passage of that moment and maintains a presence in American popular culture.

Following that is an exploration of three key archetypes that populate the landscape of *American Idiot*: the "American Idiot," which may refer to both President George W. Bush and the average American of 2004; the "faggot America," war protesters who embrace and empower the pejorative; and the "last of the American girls," a category of revolutionary figures in both albums that lead the protest movement. Rather than simply stating that one archetype is superior to the others, Green Day explores each personality and its actions, modeling them for the audience. This way, the band avoids telling listeners what to do, which would counter their anti-

authoritarian image, and lets the audience weigh each character's personality and behavior and choose which ones to admire or condemn. By guiding listeners through each character's life, Green Day projects possible routes of action for audience members themselves, letting listeners journey with the characters and potentially emulate them in the real world. The "American idiot" is unequivocally condemned for its gullibility and thoughtlessness, but the "faggot America" and the "last of the American girls [and boys]," though both threatened groups, emerge as admirable figures, ones the band explicitly identifies with and, by extension, ones fans will admire and emulate. The stability of these various characters and personas is explored in the third chapter, "My Name is St. Jimmy," with particular emphasis on the frequent uncertainty of the speakers' identities and the argument that such instability indicates a shifting, uncertain speaker, weighing the attributes and defects of each character's personality and choices in an effort to decide where s/he should stand in relation to the revolution. The often anonymous speakers, I argue, are invitations for the audience to participate in the action and eventually learn to avoid the violence that destroys each revolutionary.

This uncertain weighing of pros and cons of the characters is further explored in chapter four, "'Jesus of Suburbia' to 'East Jesus Nowhere': An Uneasy Relation to Christianity." Though Green Day appears to attack the religion in several songs, key revolutionaries--the Jesus of Suburbia, St. Jimmy, Christian, and Gloria--take their names from Christian figures and concepts. A clear appreciation for martyrdom and glory, along with a condemnation of hypocrisy that echoes the band's critique of mass media, suggests that Christianity serves as a lens to view religious Americans, considering more than three-quarters of Americans self-identify as Christian, mixing concessions with criticism to further their project of reform. And, as

Christianity is a dominant discourse in America, along with political propaganda, Green Day warns listeners away from both as largely empty, if grand-sounding, systems of belief and action.

Finally, the stakes of a revolution (and the stakes of the album) are explored in "My Own Private Suicide," the title taken from a line in "Homecoming" that details the death of *American Idiot's* major revolutionary in a warning to listeners of the dangers of losing hope. While the characters of the albums risk defeat, arrest, and their very lives, Green Day risked their careers with *American Idiot*, particularly in the wake of the Dixie Chicks' ostracization from country music following a disparaging remark about President Bush. In the hyperpatriotic years following 9/11, if one of the most successful bands could fall in a night, a less popular band like Green Day could easily have met the same fate. And while the band survived the risk and became megastars, the album as political speech ultimately failed to sway the presidential vote against Bush, contributing to a new rhetorical situation for *21st Century Breakdown*, a situation of continued risk but less overt danger, prompting a lyrical exploration of self-destruction as an option but not as a destiny. Whereas *American Idiot's* story ends in abandonment, death, and defeat, the uncertainty of *21st Century Breakdown's* closing and a pointing towards a third wave of revolutionaries suggests an ongoing struggle against evolving injustices, fueled by a grounded hope and generational renewal, paralleling the the ever-evolving rhetorical situation they react to and help define.

Considering the recency of the albums, little outside of interviews or music reviews exists on *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown*. The broader category of protest music is a well-established one, and there are multiple works on individual songs from several languages and cultures, spanning several decades, in print, including Dorian Lynskey's 2011 catalog of interviews and histories, *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie*

Holiday to Green Day. Work on former President Bush is growing daily, but considerations of his appearance in music is sparse: George Fish, in "Blues Against Bush," remarks that anti-Bush sentiment is "so evident in rap and rock" that he needed say nothing more on it (149), perhaps explaining the dearth of relevant studies in these genres. When mainstream rappers like Eminem yell, "Fuck Bush!" in a song, Fish implies, there's little more to say regarding their position.

One essay, however, stands out: Lisa Chuang and John Hart, in their study of "Jesus of Suburbia," consider identification between the speaker and listener in the context of suburban punk music (183). Drawing on theorists Langer, Sellnow, and Sellnow, Chuang and Hart's discussion of identifying with the music differs from my own in that they discuss Jesus' disidentification with his own suburban life as illusory (193); and where they discuss congruent and incongruent messages among the movements as hooks for listeners (196), my focus is on identifiable and unidentifiable speakers as an invitation to listeners to imagine themselves part of the revolutionary group. Overall, Chuang and Hart's focus is on the suburban and punk experience, notably of boredom and hypocrisy, and Green Day's broadening of audience through the musically dynamic song (198), whereas my attention to hypocrisy is decidedly political, to the extent of reading religious messages as secular. And where Chuang and Hart give considerable attention to the melodies of "Jesus of Suburbia," my focus is lyrical and visual. Hence, most of my material outside of the primary sources of the albums will come from contemporary news pieces and interviews with band members rather than published works on Green Day itself.

Through *American Idiot* and the later *21st Century Breakdown*, Green Day established itself as a mainstream rock protest band with varying degrees of social and political influence over millions of listeners. Their increased fame and participation in Rock the Vote encourages

young people to participate in United States democracy, and their repeated critiques of the political and media establishment and the modeling of revolution in archetypal characters encourages young adults to become socially and politically active, demanding accountability from the media and elected officials and protesting unjust wars.

CHAPTER 1

"LIFE BEFORE THE LOBOTOMY": A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO GREEN DAY BEFORE
AMERICAN IDIOT

Although Green Day had been a well-known, award-winning punk rock band throughout the 1990s,² it was the release of *American Idiot* in 2004, seventeen years after their formation as a band, that brought the band superstardom, particularly with its title track, the irreverent anthem denouncing the hysteria of post-9/11 America. Prior to *American Idiot*, however, the band avoided politics and social issues, their most successful albums the sophomorically titled *Dookie* and *Nimrod*. Few of their early songs, like the major hit "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" broke into the mainstream;³ so while Green Day was well-known to rock audiences, the mainstream knew them, if at all, from "Good Riddance," a song that, despite its biting title, is remarkable for its melancholy guitar, subdued vocals, and nostalgic lyrics--in short, for not sounding punk and being generally non-representative of the band's music. "The Grouch," also from *Nimrod*, better represents of Green Day's mid-90's work than "Good Riddance": whereas the chorus of "Good Riddance" closes with "it's something unpredictable but in the end is right/I hope you had the time of your life,"⁴ the corresponding lyrics of "The Grouch" read, "life's a bitch and so am I/the world owes me, so fuck you."⁵ During the 1990s, Green Day generally kept to its genre and bad kid image and well away from politics, though there were, as always, foreign wars and domestic injustices they could have protested if they had had any inclinations to activism.⁶

This band, which didn't speak out against the first Gulf War, chose to denounce the second in the early 2000s, having shown little previous interest in politics. Green Day had been successful in its genre and had no commercial reason to deviate from its established form of writing and recording, but

the national dialogue following 9/11 and the beginning of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars became a Bitzerian exigence for the band, a complex situation of events (9/11, the wars, the opposing waves of musical protest), persons (especially President Bush and the news media), and rules (of genre constraints, of popular pressure to praise the government and risk of being maligned and cast out, both as individuals and as a band, for openly opposing it). This complex created the rhetorical situation that Green Day, particularly lead singer and writer Billie Joe Armstrong, felt compelled to respond to, eventually producing *American Idiot*, a thematic and formal break from the band's established discography. Unaccustomed to creating protest music and emerging three years after the debate began, Green Day developed a unique character-driven album, each figure representing a different major personality and route of choices available to their listening audience: the Idiot follower, the Faggot protester, and the Last of the American rebels. While being an Idiot is by far the easiest life to live, the band's sustained condemnation of this figure encourages listeners to scorn it both in effigy and in its millions of embodiments; and while the Last of the freedom fighters appear glamorous and righteous, Armstrong is sure to tell us each of the five major rebels is doomed; and while the Faggot protester faces the greatest opposition and abuse, Armstrong's pointed personal identification with this figure ensures that his audience will recognize its superiority to the others and choose to emulate both it and the lead singer. By conveying their argument through the lives of these characters, Green Day avoids directly telling their listeners what to do, which would contradict a major constraint of their genre, the opposition to authority embodied by the president and other national leaders.

The band that would later join the nonprofit group Rock the Vote,⁷ an organization dedicated to encouraging young people to vote, first spoke out against the George W. Bush administration with *American Idiot*, breaking into the musical mainstream with a voice advocating political action not only in the voting booth but in the streets, a new kind of music and message for the band. When *American Idiot*'s major goal to vote Bush out of office in 2004 failed, the following album, *21st Century*

Breakdown, looked ahead to the next administration and largely refocused its attention on domestic issues brought about by the Great Recession of 2008. By that point, the rhetorical situation had been modified in several major ways: Bush could no longer be president, the wars had become fixtures, the growing recession, with constant news of business failures and job loss, had become the major issue of the day, and for Green Day, not only had they not committed musical suicide with *American Idiot*, they had actually come to the height of their popularity and influence. Interestingly, it was only after the release of *American Idiot* that Green Day became mainstream, suggesting something in the cultural moment of its recording, the *kairos*, was actually perfect. The otherwise abrasive single, “American Idiot,” written to insult the majority of Americans, caught the attention and favor of millions of others, suggesting the minority of dissenting voices had needed a powerful ally, one that Green Day was able to provide.

Background on the Plots of *American Idiot* and 21st Century *Breakdown*

A concept album and rock opera written almost entirely by Billie Joe Armstrong,⁸ *American Idiot* traces the story of a young man, Johnny, coming of age in a counterculture, a stand-in for the majority of Green Day's audience. Johnny, finding suburban conservatism and conformity unendurable, adopts a title of martyrdom and calls himself the Jesus of Suburbia, running away from a broken home to a city, where he meets another boy called St. Jimmy and becomes involved with a girl whose name is obliterated from the album and is only known as Whatsername. The three start an urban revolution as a band, but it quickly becomes clear that Jesus is no one's savior and that St. Jimmy and Whatsername are the true heroes. As Jesus' apathy and cowardice become apparent, Whatsername informs him he's not the messiah and that Jimmy, who is otherwise presented as an individual, is actually a figment of

Johnny's imagination; Whatsername breaks up with Johnny, Jimmy kills himself, and Johnny returns to his broken home, letting the revolution die and forgetting Whatsername.

But while the album can be summed up in a few lines concerning a few characters' personal lives, the political views espoused by these characters help shape their story lines, especially considering the moment of the album's writing and release, a little more than a month before the 2004 elections.⁹ If read against the American political landscape of 2004, the media-fuelled mass support of two real wars and draconian domestic policies in the name of the War on Terror becomes Green Day's Bitzerian exigence, and Bush's closing term of office and looming reelection becomes their *kairos*, the perfect moment for action. The Jesus of Suburbia and his split mind becomes symbolic of a split nation, caught both in a religion that popularly denounces revenge and a national discourse awash in violence, his available choices those of the listening audience: rebel, obey, or self-destruct.

The 2009 album, *21st Century Breakdown*, the band's second rock opera, again follows a small set of characters, exploring their minds and actions in a unique moment of American history. New heroes, Christian and Gloria, renew the revolution, Gloria replacing Jimmy and Whatsername as the sainted vigilante, while Christian, the new Jesus, suffers the outrage and breakdown of American domestic policy during the second Bush Administration and the onset of the Great Recession of 2008. In this modified situation, the particularities of some new and familiar people and problems prompt a new response: the commercial success of *American Idiot* prompted the band to reuse the rock opera format, but the shifting of national attention away from elections and wars to the growing recession prompted a reevaluation of the archetypal album characters. Whereas St. Jimmy dies in protest, Gloria loses her way and her leadership of the urban rioters and leaves the movement for others to head; but unlike *American Idiot's* catastrophic ending, a door is left open for the next generation of revolutionaries to respond to their own ever-evolving and emerging situations. The listening audience, who had followed the five major revolutionaries to their various downfalls, finds itself back in the real

America with the choice to conform and obey, fight and die, or protest and withstand the abuse, thereby becoming actors in the ongoing social, political, and rhetorical situation; with the albums now part of the dialogue, the audience becomes the new speakers and participants in the national debate.

CHAPTER TWO

THE "AMERICAN IDIOT," THE "FAGGOT AMERICA," AND THE "LAST OF THE AMERICAN GIRLS": ARCHETYPES OF THE REVOLUTION

With any rhetorical situation, especially one of great political moment, the immediate history of the concerned parties must be taken into account, particularly the major players in those parties. The single biggest event at the dawn of the new millennium in America: the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the mass response to this event, both in politics and American society, created the conditions, the exigence, for 2004's *American Idiot*. In this album appear three major archetypes that, while fictive, respond to common characters in post-9/11 America: the American Idiot, which in its singular form may correspond to then-President Bush and in plural to his followers; the "Faggot" protester-pacifist who must combat the slander and abuse of fellow citizens in addition to the wars; and the "Last" of the freethinkers and rebels, those able to participate wholeheartedly in the ongoing struggle against uniformity and injustice. But while Green Day's take on the post-9/11 situation was unique, it wasn't the first in the musical community to help create the zeitgeist following 9/11, and the exigence for each artist, as Vatz would point out, was subjective, ranging from a need to mourn to a need for revenge to a need for mocking the entire debate.

One of the first major musical responses to the triggering event of 9/11 was Alan Jackson's "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?," which he debuted at the November 2001 Country Music Association award show. His somber song reflected the national mourning of that moment, when the situation demanded remembrance and solemnization of the deaths of nearly 3,000 people. Though Jackson mentions anger and patriotism, the chorus says "I'm not a real political man"

and concludes with “Faith, hope, and love are some good things He gave us/ And the greatest is love” (lines 18, 23-4), insisting on peaceful remembrance over violence. This song was widely and positively received, but as the situation evolved, or “matured,” in Bitzer's vocabulary (12), the time for mourning ended and was replaced by a time of reaction. The new “imperfection” or exigence for many Americans and their leaders was no longer the immediate aftermath of the attacks, of finding survivors, recovering the dead, and informing the families: now that the national shock and sorrow had worn off, the exigence for most had become the existence of an attack without retribution, and the major political task became warmongering, something millions of the leaders' civilian audience accepted and supported.

Among this militant audience were several musicians, especially in the country genre, one long associated with patriotism. As Lee Greenwood's rendition of “God Bless the USA” filled the airwaves, other artists were penning songs fitting this particular moment; a long-time country singer, Toby Keith, propelled himself to superstardom in 2002 with “Courtesy of the Red, White, & Blue (The Angry American),” exemplifying the wave of hyper-patriotism and xenophobia with its notorious line, “We'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way.”¹⁰ His reception in the genre spoke to a wide acceptance of the Afghan invasion and looming Iraq War, his tough-guy image suggesting a manly, unconquerable nation that would destroy its enemies, and those who agreed with him would be part of this invincible nation. A year later, another country singer, Darryl Worley, released a single and album entitled *Have You Forgotten?*, accusing listeners of not supporting the burgeoning war effort and rekindling the outrage that was starting to fade two years after 9/11.

While Toby Keith and Darryl Worley were responding to their perceived exigence, of an unavenged attack on American soil and threat to American security and national pride, other artists were responding to the new situation Keith and Worley were helping create and exigence as they perceived it: an attack by individuals rather than nations that the American government responded to by

invading sovereign nations, largely supported by American citizens. Perhaps the most famous example of this backlash occurred within, again, the country genre, in a case that tore apart the genre with a speech addressed to a hostile audience. In 2003, the Dixie Chicks, at the time one of the best-known and most successful country groups, made critical remarks about President Bush at a concert, sparking a battle with Toby Keith that resulted in the Chicks' estrangement from country music (as well as death threats and CD-breaking rallies).¹¹ While they perceived an exigence, a need to speak to modify the beliefs and behavior of their fans, the majority of their listeners rejected their message and effectively ended their careers as country artists. The Chicks and their songs—from their low-key war protest “Travellin' Soldier” to their nonpolitical hits—virtually disappeared from the radio, and Toby Keith effectively replaced them as a top ranking country star. When Green Day recorded *American Idiot*, this feud, though within a different genre, stood as testament to the power of political disagreement even within artistic communities. If a band as major as the Dixie Chicks could topple from a single comment, a relatively minor band could disappear with an album as incendiary as *American Idiot*.

The Dixie Chicks would later appear on the covers of *Entertainment Weekly* and *Time* over the issue;¹² their comeback, when it came, was as a mainstream band, the music video for their defiant “Not Ready to Make Nice,” which references the feud and death threats,¹³ retired from the VH1 Top 20 Countdown after fourteen consecutive weeks at number one (fifteen weeks total), breaking the record for longest stay at number one.¹⁴ That year, the Chicks won Grammys for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal;¹⁵ and while they had also earned CMA (Country Music Awards) nominations, there were, unsurprisingly considering their earlier ostracization, no wins. The American idiots remained in control, at least of the country genre.

Outside of country music and closer to Green Day's genre, in 2002, the metal band System of a Down released *Steal this Album!*, and the single “BOOM!,” released in 2003, protested the ongoing march to war, their exigence the threat to civilian life, especially that of children in invaded countries.

Outspoken liberal documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, director of *Fahrenheit 9/11* collaborated with System of a Down on the music video, which included footage from the worldwide February 15, 2003, anti-war rally, in which the band demonstrated.¹⁶ The Nightwatchman, a solo act of rocker Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave, recorded “No One Left,” a song featured in a 2004 soundtrack of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, comparing the life and death of a New Yorker killed on 9/11 with an Afghan or Iraqi citizen killed in the invasions. The Nightwatchman's exigence, hearkening back to generalized antiwar songs, is the inability on the part of militants to identify with each other as essentially the same; the war for him, then, was less a product of 9/11 or politics, and more an eternal flaw in the human character of aggression, much like Nena's “99 Luftballons.”

In the rap and hip-hop genres, artists' exigence focused more on the nation's leaders than war itself. Only two weeks before the 2004 election, popular rapper Eminem released “Mosh,” drawing correlations between Bush and Osama bin Laden, the music video depicting a mob of angry and downtrodden young people gathering in anonymous black hoodies while the rapper himself yells, “Fuck Bush!” In the pre-election version, the mob registers to vote; in the post-election version, it bursts into the Senate as a protest rally.¹⁷ The lesser-known hip-hop duo Common Market, in “Nina Sing,” criticizes the situation of “sons sent to war for the grunt work of the government” and calls out the hypocrisy and overreaction of the US government with, “Terrorists with pipe bombs, who's sittin' on the megaton?” (lines 3, 25). Even the otherwise dance-oriented popular hip-hop group Black Eyed Peas recorded “Where is the Love?” in 2003, the video featuring band members as guerrilla artists, plastering a city with question marks and remarking, “Overseas, yeah, we're trying to stop terrorism/ but we still got terrorists here livin'/ in the USA, the big CIA, the Bloods and the Crips and the KKK” (5-7); “If love and peace are so strong/ why are there pieces of love that don't belong?/ Nations dropping bombs” (27-9); and “the wars' going on, but the reasons' undercover” (40). Immortal Technique collaborated with Mos Def and Eminem in 2005 to produce “Bin Laden,” a rap song packed

with lines declaring, “if you speak about the evil that the government does/The Patriot Act’ll track you to the type of your blood” and “They funded Al-Qaeda, and now they blame the Muslim religion/Even though Bin Laden was a CIA tactician” (23-4, 31-2). The chorus proclaims, “Bush knocked down the Towers” (9), turning the blame for the attack directly on the president himself, Immortal Technique and Mos Def’s exigence, like that of the Black Eyed Peas, the misguided foreign wars while domestic injustice went unchallenged. The more restrained of these artists called for fellow-feeling with people in the occupied lands, a refocusing on domestic problems, and a marked decrease in violence, and even while Eminem made heavy use of violent imagery and language, his explicit goal was swinging the vote away from Bush, and Immortal Technique, while using militarist language, draws attention back to domestic warfare.

Even the satirical cartoon *South Park* dedicated its 100th episode to the political and musical divisions in the early 2000s. In the episode “I’m a Little Bit Country,” militant country-music-identified people and pacifist rock-and-roll-identified people split up their town, eventually resolving their conflict with a collective singing of a modified version of “I’m a Little Bit Country.”¹⁸ Considering that these are all only a few of the musical artifacts concerning the march to war, “American Idiot” wasn’t remarkable for criticizing the government or media. However, it emerged as both a defining single and album of that year, winning the Grammy for Best Rock Album of 2004.

Green Day, unlike other artists, devoted much of an album to their response to the political particularities of the early Aughts. Though the album centers on the lives of recurring characters, political messages emerge again and again in their thoughts, speech, and actions. Whereas other artists tended to speak as themselves rather than through characters, Green Day only appears to do this in the single “American Idiot,” where the first of the three archetypes—the Idiot, the Faggot, and the Last—is introduced.

I. The American Idiot

The first line of the first single from the album declares, “Don't wanna be an American idiot!” From the very beginning, this figure is one of ridicule and a target for the criticisms Green Day makes against the nation, its people, and its leader. Of the three archetypal figures, each modeling a personality and set of choices for listeners, this is the one that is painted so negatively, the audience would either disidentify with it or stop listening to the song or album.

The figure of the American idiot appears based on George W. Bush, then in his first term of office and chief among the warmongers. The label “idiot,” however, includes more than his decisions to invade Afghanistan and Iraq: for the first year of his presidency, Bush was criticized as largely absentee and garnered ridicule for his clumsy public speeches;¹⁹ his tendency to mangle phrases and mispronounce words in part led to the popularity of bumper stickers reading “Somewhere in Texas, a village is missing its idiot.”²⁰ And whereas “Bushism” had previously referred to policies by the presidents of that name, a new meaning developed to describe George W's language.²¹ Infamously, while the attacks of September 11th were occurring, the president was reading *The Pet Goat* to a class of elementary schoolchildren and continued reading after receiving news of the unfolding disaster. This incident received wide publicity and criticism and remained in mainstream consciousness for years: when Bush was running for reelection in 2004, Eminem's video for “Mosh” parodied the scene, with the president attempting to read the book upside-down. The first meaning of “idiot,” then, refers to this awkward public persona, that of a man who spent his first several months as president looking like a fool; anyone who supported him, Green Day suggests, was following an idiot, not a respectable leader.

Soon after 9/11, however, the president became more active, promoting revenge and paranoia, eventually invading a sovereign state on false reports of weapons of mass destruction and cultivating an image of a war president as his administration conducted an ill-defined “war on terror.” A new department called Homeland Security was created, and the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory

System, better known as the terror alert system, was devised to monitor the day-to-day threat of terrorist activity. A wave of hyper-patriotism and xenophobia swept across America after as domestic media explained the new terror alert system and an extremist interpretation of jihad. President Bush's approval rating shot up to 90%,²² politicians were judged on whether or not they wore flag pins, and Twin Towers trinkets and I ♥ NY shirts were ubiquitous. Muslims and people mistaken for Muslims were targeted in hate crimes, anti-Muslim attacks rising 1700% in 2001 alone,²³ and citizens were encouraged to report anything that seemed vaguely threatening. The American Idiot was no longer just the President but millions of his constituents, people who promoted and acted upon rumor, ignorance, bigotry, and fear. These idiots were ones Green Day's audience was surrounded and influenced by on a daily basis, pressuring them to conform to a militant and paranoid ideology; so when the band declares, in the first line of the first song, "Don't want to be an American idiot," the highly visible and famous group publicly identifies itself as an ally to these pressured nonconformists, assuring the isolated minority that they are not alone.

Targeting the mainstream listener as well as the mainstream media, "American Idiot" is full of jabs at blind credulity with relatively few overt references to the Bush Administration. The word *media* appears only once, in the closing verse, but it's twinned with a line from the first verse: "don't want a nation under the new mania" (line 2) becomes "don't want a nation controlled by the media" (16), *media* directly associated with madness and an agenda of control, a sentiment nailed in by the closing couplet, "information age of hysteria/is calling out to idiot America" (17-18). These attributes of the Idiot, subject to mania, hysteria, and the manipulation of the media, combine to paint a mass America wild with unthinking madness, pushing listeners away from this mindset and encouraging them to stop listening to the media and look down on the majority of their neighbors, giving them metaphorical ammunition against the militant majority.

In the album booklet, in the hero St. Jimmy's handwriting, "idiot America" is scrawled larger than the rest of the line and is followed by the trademark symbol, TM, indicating a corporate hand in this distinct brand of Americanism. This malicious force, stirring up hysteria and paranoia, has created a "new kind of tension/all across the alien**ation**"(5-6),²⁴ dividing a country against itself even as it tries to unite against a supposedly common external enemy. In reality, Green Day insists, the media is calling out, "now everybody do the propagan**da**/ and sing along to the age of paranoia," as though the crisis were a dance craze or cultural fad (13-4). Though nominally reporters of events, the media here are portrayed as instigators of action; but rather than focus on the ethics or dangers of such a role, Green Day chose to mock media followers as dancing fools, puppets rather than people.

In responding to their exigence of mass media-aided political manipulation, Green Day thoroughly mocks the archetype that they suggest represented the majority of Americans, the Idiot. Listeners who had found themselves in a dissenting minority could now take pride in that minority and resolve to continue dissenting with the moral support of their musical ally. The release of this song as the first single and its popularity modified the rhetorical situation of 2004's popular political landscape by helping spread the message of media manipulation and condemnation of viewer gullibility. Its audience was urged to disbelieve mainstream media if it didn't already and warned against joining the majority of Americans who were now openly being described as Idiots, a step in the direction of empowering the dissenting minority to demand accountability from the information industry and government.

II. The Faggot America

The speaker of "American Idiot" considers himself immune to political propaganda, even though his opposition earns him abuse. With war protesters, set in opposition to the tough-guy image of warmongers, branded *fags*,²⁵ the speaker declares, "Well, maybe I'm the faggot America/ I'm not a part

of a redneck agenda" (11-2), at once owning the abusive term and turning another one on war supporters. And while *redneck* may simply be reactionary name-calling, its position as modifier of *agenda* suggests a political plan rather than an amorphous group of militarists.²⁶ Indeed, *redneck* may describe the president as much as it does the stereotypical war supporter, considering his image as a Texas rancher who occasionally appeared on TV clearing brush; and in the early days after 9/11, he resorted to cowboy lingo to describe the hunt for Osama bin Laden: a *New York Times* article quotes the president saying, "There's an old poster out West that said, 'Wanted, dead or alive,' and 'we're going to smoke them out.'"²⁷ Replacing the terms hawks and doves, rednecks and faggots become the new conflict's militants and pacifists, with respective associations of aggressive stupidity and effeminate weakness.

Rather than responding to militarist aggression in kind, the speaker in "American Idiot" sets himself up as the Other, taking a subversive position and empowering a pejorative term, while Eminem's "Mosh" relied on the fury of individuals with personal grievances and accusations of governmental terror, and System of a Down's "BOOM!" accused warriors of child murder and blasphemy. This nonaggressive response suggests to listeners a different course of action than violence, and the embrace of *faggot* helps undermine its abusive potential. Green Day's audience is here given a second choice: if they do not want to be an American Idiot, they can choose to become the figures most ridiculed by the Idiots: the peace-loving "faggots."

The music video, too, is a mixture of mockery and defiance: the band performs the song under a giant green-dyed American flag while Billie Joe Armstrong makes faces at the camera and strikes a pose at the line "now everybody do the propaganda," mocking the wave of hyperpatriotic journalism and music as a faddish dance. In a time when flag-honoring was almost compulsory, a punk band defacing a national symbol and adopting the pejorative *faggot* created a safe space for pacifists to stand up against the war effort and disregard the pre-election propaganda insisting on Bush's reelection for

the success of the wars. While subject to abuse from the Idiots, the Faggots now had an ally in mainstream rock, one that kept the term and archetype alive throughout the album as the image of the beleaguered but morally righteous protester.

The term reappears in the most specifically anti-Bush song, "Holiday," which was released as the third single in 2005;²⁸ a freewheeling, mocking song, its music video depicts the band on a drinking spree with run-down can-can dancers, visually confirming the suspicion that "this is the dawning of the rest of our lives/ on holiday," describing the state of American affairs as a vacation from rationality (9-10). The nation, like the band members and dancers, are threatened with collapse if they continue behaving as though disruption of normal life has no consequences. The personality of the "faggot America" appears in the beginning of "Holiday," whose chorus begins with the peaceable, "I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies" of misinformation and hyperbole of public discourse (8). The relative powerlessness of a dissenting individual in this climate is illustrated with,

Hear the drum pounding out of time
 Another protester has crossed the line
 To find the money's on the other side (11-3)

Protesters, the "faggot Americans," find themselves alone when they step out to demonstrate, while their fellow countrymen and leaders overwhelmingly support the war effort. In response to this lack of support, the speaker adopts the persona of a "representative from California" to deliver the following outraged rant:

Zieg Heil to the President Gasman
 Bombs away is your punishment
 Pulverize the Eiffel Towers
 Who criticize your government
 Bang bang goes the broken glass and

Kill all the fags that don't agree

Trials by fire, setting fire

Is not a way that's meant for me (19-26)

Although these first words of the Representative from California are the Nazi salute, it's unclear how they're directed, if they're a sarcastic shot at the Representative's own government (if California is signifying liberalism), or if they're referring to the genocidal activities of Saddam Hussein, a figure mentioned in an earlier verse describing the famous American destruction of his statue in Baghdad. The *President Gasman* is likely Hussein, who had influence over oil reserves, but had also gassed Kurdish Iraqi citizens in a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the late 1980s. This ambiguity bleeds into the following line about *punishment*: debate about the war split along the claims that it was about removing a dictator and the counter claim that it was about removing an oil power. Perhaps the clearest connection to the Iraq War is in the *Eiffel Towers* line: France had spoken out against the US invasion, sparking a backlash of Francophobia in the US, to the extent that restaurants in the House of Representatives changed the names of French fries and French toast to "freedom fries" and "freedom toast" on their menus.²⁹ The *fags* in the following line might still be referring to the French or the larger group of anyone opposed to the war and may include the Representative from California himself: if the Representative is a mask used by the speaker, then wearing him could empower the protester in the same way a punk rocker calling himself a fag does in "American Idiot." In a live performance of "Holiday," Armstrong taps his chest at the word "fags," once again aligning himself with protesters. His assertion before performing "Holdiaj," that "this song is not anti-American; it's anti-war," further emphasizes his solidarity with political pacifists.³⁰ To defeat the protesters, Armstrong suggests, the Idiots have to contend with him as well. Considering the recent downfall of the Dixie Chicks, outspokenly aligning himself and the rest of the band with the protesters presented a real risk for the formerly nonpolitical band, one their listeners would recognize and appreciate.

III. The “Last of the American Girls” (and Boys)³¹

Although “American Idiot” and “Holiday” empower pacifism and the tragic video for “Wake Me Up When September Ends,” in which a young soldier is killed in Iraq, condemns violence, more songs favor the image of the violent revolutionary encapsulated in the image of the “last of the American girls,” a phrase that emerges to describe Gloria in *21st Century Breakdown* but applies equally to the *American Idiot* revolutionaries. As more pointed references to the Bush Administration appear as the album progresses, the characters' tendency toward violent imagery increases, and listeners are introduced to the third archetype, the doomed freedom fighter.

When St. Jimmy, in his name-song, is introduced as “the needle in the vein of the establishment” (8), he's a typical punk figure, but his later mention of “the product of war and fear that we've been victimized” draws listeners, however briefly, back to the reigning climate of the time and attributes his “taste for suicidal cigarettes and ramen and a little bag of dope” to this climate and, ultimately, his suicide (14, 11). Jimmy, the revolutionary figure of *American Idiot*, considers himself and those around him victims, again embracing the less glamorous and macho response that the Idiots would favor and allowing others to own it, too. If the hero of the album calls himself a victim and reveals his weaknesses, his listeners, themselves flawed and frustrated young people, included in Jimmy's “we,” can identify with him and his struggle. His habit of fighting and comparison to a zipgun, a homemade weapon, and his eventual collapse and suicide, however, tell listeners to find another path. While the lyrics do not condemn Jimmy—in fact, they mourn him—he stands as a nonviable option for the audience: we are encouraged to admire Jimmy but not become him.

New heroes are introduced in *21st Century Breakdown* to illustrate the Last of the American rebels; like Jimmy, their status as victims of an oppressive society is emphasized. An early draft of the title track of *21st Century Breakdown* was rewritten to bite harder at the Bush Administration and

emphasize the victimization of American citizens: whereas the leaked demo version contained the lines, "From Mexico to the Berlin Wall/Homeland Security could kill us all,"³² the final version reads "Video games of the Towers' fall/Homeland Security could kill us all"(17-9). Although the internal threat of Homeland Security remains in the album version, the international references are scrapped and updated in favor of a 9/11 reference in a complaint about its ubiquity in discourse as an excuse for unpopular policies like the Patriot Act or its commercialization in the wake of the disaster. The retained line, however, maintains the threat of an oppressive government, to the point of death.

Jimmy's response to the threat was the prediction of all-out domestic warfare. In "She's a Rebel," a song praising his girlfriend, Whatsername, Jimmy declares,

The insurgency will rise
 When the blood's been sacrificed
 Don't be blinded by the lies
 In your eyes (15-7)

Whatsername is also described as a *vigilante* in "She's a Rebel"; that, like *insurgency*, suggests a nonchaotic force, in this case a counter-army. After the invasion of Iraq, an organized resistance developed, which the news media named an insurgency, and this term in "Know Your Enemy" may refer to either the Iraqi militarized insurgency or a domestic, nonmilitary one led by Whatsername and Jimmy. The *lies* from "Holiday" reappear, and the order to not cross the line becomes a command to see beyond the propaganda which, by 2009, had largely worn off the war effort but was replaced by Barack Obama's presidential campaign of hope and change.

In fact, in an album with no direct references to Obama, its gaze focused more backwards than forwards, perhaps the strongest possible reference is in the video for "Know Your Enemy," a performance in an open prison enclosure reminiscent of the Guantanamo Bay detention center compound.³³ One of Obama's major campaign promises had been to shut down the center, which had

opened under the Bush Administration and was the subject of ongoing torture scandals, within a year. That year came and went with little progress toward closing down the center, and when this single was released in April 2009, the deadline had long since passed. In this context, the blinding lies of the closing verses refer to Obama's campaign, his failure to fulfill them, and mass credulity of those promises. Not only are the detainees victims in limbo, without prisoner of war status and often being held without charge; searchlights and security cameras set up in gas stations, Main Streets, and the Capitol Building suggest a Big Brother government created by the Patriot Act.

In this context, the *insurgency* becomes a promise of domestic uprising against a nightmarish domestic surveillance program, and the final, screamed line, "So gimme gimme revolution!" urges listeners back into protests (22), to demonstrate against both foreign affairs and homeland abuses. "While the album protests wars, "She's a Rebel" paints Whatsername as a violent liberator:

She's a rebel

She's a saint

She's the salt of the earth

And she's dangerous.

She's a rebel

Vigilante

Missing link on the brink

of destruction (1-8)

At once holy and untamed, the danger and the endangered, Whatsername is hailed a *vigilante* rather than a mercenary or terrorist, a "good outlaw" rather than a contractual or chaotic one. Her activism, though *dangerous*, helps her "[bring] this liberation" (28). She, then, is a level-headed figure, one with a cause and means to work toward it, a capable leader. However, Armstrong is sure to tell us she's "on the brink of destruction," the same as Jimmy; she later leaves the movement, allowing the nascent

revolution to collapse. At the end of *American Idiot*, then, both freedom fighters prove they were the Last of their group, their 'lastness' suggesting their method of protest was unsustainable.

Gloria replaces Whatsername and St. Jimmy in *21st Century Breakdown* as the doomed revolutionary and is the subject of two name-songs, "¡Viva la Gloria!" and "¿Viva la Gloria?: Little Girl." She is described in this first praise song and another, "Last of the American Girls," as an elemental force, "smash[ing] her knuckles into winter" ("¡Viva!" 29), a veteran who had "made [her] bed in salad days/ amongst the ruin" (26-7). Her determination to remain in this ruin, a dead monument, city, or nation, the wreckage left at the end of *American Idiot*, makes her the new protector, the one to bring the movement back to life.

Like Whatsername, however, Gloria is doomed. Even as she works to revive the old revolution, the unidentified speaker of "¡Viva!" warns her, "don't look/ back on last November/when your banners were burning down" (35-7). This "last November" might refer to the 2008 or the 2004 elections: if it's 2004, this is a plea to not think about the failed movement to vote Bush out of office, one of the main political goals of *American Idiot*, which Jimmy had been a part of and died from. If "last" refers to the immediately previous year, however, Gloria seems to be a protester who had spent the last eight years at work only to find she couldn't retire under the new administration. Green Day leaves the reference ambiguous, letting listeners choose which November to leave behind, but the applicability of the line to both 2004 and 2008, significant election years, suggests that we as Americans should disregard the events and promises of each election as equally untrustworthy. Whoever wins office, they suggest, the revolutionary's work does not end.

But while Gloria sets back out to the fight, we're given a more disturbing image of her: "¡Viva!" describes her as a "hurricane" and "a natural disaster" (28, 30), conjuring images and recent memories of Hurricane Katrina, one of the deadliest and most destructive natural disasters in American history, in part due to infamous mismanagement on the part of national relief agencies. This Katrina reference and

another moniker as "an endless war" directly jab at President Bush and his policies and make Gloria the embodiment of America's tragedies, transgressions, and reactionary violence (26).

Like her predecessor Jimmy, Gloria knows she's doomed: as one of the "last of the American girls," she's an "endangered species headed into extinction," is "paranoid," and carries "a little book of conspiracies right in her hand" ("Last" 6, 5, 4), a victim of the hysteria the speaker from "American Idiot" warned us about. While St. Jimmy escaped (or fell victim to) this hysteria through suicide, Gloria, the strongest surviving revolutionary, visibly crumbles even in her praise songs, not only illustrating the ongoing prevalence of hysterical propaganda but the absolutely devastating effect thereof.

And if the last best hope can't hold herself together, average Americans, the listening audience, never stood a chance. "Mass Hysteria," the opening section of the two-part "American Eulogy," opens with the blaring klaxons framing, "Hysteria! Mass hysteria!"³⁴ The first verse following this panicked opening reads

Red alert is the color of panic
Elevated to the point of static
Beating into the hearts of the fanatics
And the neighborhood's a loaded gun (1-4)

The color-coded Terror Alert System appears in this throwback song to the post-9/11 panic, only now the hysteria has been rebranded *panic* and *static*, a criticism prevalent in *21st Century Breakdown*, the conviction that political fearmongering eventually loses all meaning. The song "In the Static Age" complains, "I can't see a thing in the video/I can't hear a sound on the radio/ in stereo in the static age" (11-3), insisting that all forms of mass media are empty and corrupt. Credulous consumers of this media, however, are still easily manipulated and prepared for violence, as noted in "the neighborhood's a loaded gun." In a landscape where "mass confusion is all the new rage" ("Mass" 8),

True sounds of maniacal laughter
 And the deaf-mute is misleading the choir
 The punchline is a natural disaster
 And it's sung by the unemployed (11-4)

The *deaf-mute*, an individual most unequipped to be leading a choir, jabs again at the former president, particularly with the *natural disaster* as a *punchline*, almost undoubtedly Hurricane Katrina, both of which point to Gloria. The Great Recession, the major issue at the end of Bush's presidency, influences the last quoted line and a good deal of the class warfare in the album, the major cause Gloria and Christian rally against. The unemployed, though, *sing* the natural disaster, vocal support of Gloria's elemental violence, and young fans of Green Day, unable to find jobs during the Recession, find themselves identifying with this call to violence.

Warfare imagery continues into the last movement of that song, "Modern World," in which the speaker introduces himself as "a fugitive son" and "the last of the rebels" (1,5). Pervasive panic and certainty of destruction creates an air of hysteria within the song itself, and the final refrain of "I don't wanna live in the modern world" becomes an anthemic chant to replace "don't wanna be an American idiot" ("Modern" 30, "American" 1). Christian, as well as Gloria, has fallen into a violent instability, and their supporters, the audience which has been singing along to the praise songs, gets pulled into their dissolution.

None of the revolutionaries, however good their intentions, escapes the breakdown that threatens all of the Last, those who engage in violent or unsupported uprisings. *21st Century Breakdown's* "Murder City" tells us the speaker is "wide awake after the riot/this demonstration of our anguish," later finding Christian "crying in the bathroom" (1-2, 27-8). In "Christian's Inferno," Christian finds himself burning with anger and declares himself a prophet or martyr that will obliterate human history back to a time before we had minds to lobotomize:

I am the atom bomb

I am the chosen one

Toxin your reservoir

And then return man to ape (15-8)

Christian elsewhere sings the eulogy for the entire nation, recalling a life “before the lobotomy” of the 21st century, but here he hyperbolically threatens the entire human species. Like Jesus, Christian claims a chosen status but connects it to a destructive rather than preservative role. Likewise, "Horseshoes and Hand Grenades," another rage song, opens and closes with "I'm not fucking around," the last line supplemented with a repeated shout of "G-L-O-R-I-A," calling out to the now-mercenary, now-vigilante doomed hero to aid his efforts in "demolition, self-destruction/What to annihilate.../The old age" (23-8). This all-out obliteration of the "old age," presumably the one tainted with propaganda and distortion, is as impractical and unsustainable as the rage that eventually leaves Christian "crying in the bathroom" after the riot in "Murder City."

Armstrong's songs build up each hero through either praise songs or relatable situations: Jimmy is the frustrated runaway who takes to street preaching, Whatsername will sing the revolution into being, Gloria “smashes her knuckles into winter” in her fight to rebuild the ruin of her nation, and Christian rages at the plight of the downtrodden everyman. But Armstrong is equally certain to show us the downfalls of these fighters: Jimmy kills himself, Whatsername abandons her friends and is forgotten, Gloria loses her way and then her leadership, and Christian suffers a breakdown. Although the Last of the freedom fighters sound glorious, their turns to violence lead them all to destruction; though their choices are better than those of the American Idiots, this archetype is unfavorable and unsustainable. The fight for truth, these songs insist, must be peaceful and collective to stand any chance: disunity and distortion tore apart Jimmy and drove away Whatsername, and violence breaks Christian and forces Gloria to "lay down [her] arms" and "give up the fight" in "21 Guns" (10,11). The

Last of the American revolutionaries are Last for the very reason that they're bound to self-destruct, leaving the only sustainable movement the peaceful protest of the oft-scorned but increasingly-empowered "faggot America." Through these albums-long stories, Green Day lets listeners into the lives of otherwise glamorous heroes to argue that, of our three basic choices, the weakest-looking remains the most honorable and sustainable, for the task of correcting social injustice is neverending.

"SHE SINGS THE REVOLUTION": THE AXIOMATIC POWER OF MUSIC

The revolution, the necessarily peaceful protest, will be musical, these albums insist. As noted earlier, stridently political music pervaded the Bush Era, along with the conviction that music had the power to instigate real-world changes. *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown* themselves demonstrate confidence in the power of music to the extent that music is a driving force in the fictional revolutions and plays a role in major points of the characters' lives.

The speaker in "American Idiot" sarcastically declares "now everybody do the propaganda/and sing along to the age of paranoia" (13-4), a comment not only on hysterical news media but on the influx of political music, portraying "the propaganda" as a dance and the "age of paranoia" as a period as mockable and therefore not absolute: if it can be made fun of, it can be legitimately countered. And if music has the power to challenge the status quo, the first single from *21st Century Breakdown*, "Know Your Enemy," reminds listeners of their duty to speak up, asserting that "silence is the enemy" and that the "choir infantry" will rise to combat complacency (12, 7). Jesus' complacency had triggered the collapse of his revolution in *American Idiot*, and general American complacency and credulity saw President Bush reelected in 2004. Without an election to influence, "Know Your Enemy"'s music video, set in its Guantanamo-esque prison camp, pushes Americans to speak out against prisoner abuse,

signalling to listeners that the same lack of outcry that allowed the establishment of Guantanamo's detention center and the Patriot Act will continue to invite oppression if we don't protest.

Whatsurname herself had "[sung] the revolution/the dawning of our lives" into being during the first uprising in "She's a Rebel" (26-7), and her "songs of yesterday" ("Before" 15), "live[d] in the underground," as we learn in "Life Before the Lobotomy" (16). Christian revives them at the beckoning of his ancestors' singing from "another place and time" (3), helping to guide him to the new uprising. So while the revolutionaries themselves had died or dropped out, their songs remained as kindling for a new wave of protesters, and Christian's will survive after him as well, to be revived by the next generation.

Even as individual revolutions fail, they're solemnized with song: Gloria "plays her vinyl records/singing songs on the eve of destruction" in "The Last of the American Girls" (21-2), and when the nation is on the brink of collapse, Christian sings the American eulogy. Even though Gloria is leaving the movement and 20th century America has died, songs documenting their struggles remain for the next wave, much like these albums themselves, serving to both inspire and memorialize civilian protests. In a moment of two foreign wars and a nation consumed with militancy and paranoia, Green Day developed entire albums centered around a few core characters to demonstrate follies of blind obedience and of violent protest while eschewing the unfruitful calls for fellow-feeling that have been a staple of protest songs for decades in favor of indignation and challenge. These more focused protests identify the major issues of the day and their specificity insists upon the need for immediate action on the part of otherwise too-complacent listeners.

CHAPTER THREE

"MY NAME IS ST. JIMMY"/"MY NAME IS NO ONE": THE UBIQUITOUS UNSTABLE
SPEAKER

Only a few songs in *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown* identify their speakers, and several shift points of view between verses. At times, the speaker appears to be the singer himself, as in the video for "American Idiot." If so, that song would indisputably be a rhetorical speech act, but it becomes less clear when the band speaks through characters. Bitzer argues that for speech to be rhetorical, it must be in response to a real rhetorical situation, one which "is to be distinguished also from a fictive rhetorical situation" (11). But while the characters in *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown* are fictional, they respond to an America and a situation that is real when they speak politically (their personal lives and relationships, however, remain fictive). While these characters act as metaphors and symbolic persons--the everyman, the guerrilla, the troubled teen, the savior--the choices they make mirror those available to real-world listeners, and their lifestories become arguments for and against these choices, which Bitzer's definition allows is non-fictive and therefore genuinely rhetorical. The relationship between the speaker and audience becomes complicated, however, when we recognize the variation in speakers within these songs.

Pragmatically, in rock operas with set casts of characters and well-defined protagonists, it's natural to expect to know who's speaking at any given time, but the lack of clarity in these albums serves to create blank characters, invitations to listeners to insert themselves into the storylines and identify with the revolutionaries and their cause. Keeping in mind that every major revolutionary in these albums fails but that listeners don't know that until the stories resolve, audiences bond with the

revolutionaries throughout their struggles, witness their downfalls, and learn how their major strategies failed, leaving only peaceful protest as a viable option. By “living” with and sometimes as these characters, the audience can experience each set of possible choices in response to the particular exigence of wars, domestic oppression, and media-fueled hysteria that Green Day responds to, and through this experience, listeners arrive at the same conclusions as if the band directly told them that peaceful protest is the most favorable choice.

The all-important "American Idiot" single has no self-identified speaker beyond "maybe I'm the faggot America" (11), but, as noted before, this first identification is the strongest in either album, for, though peaceful protesters face external opposition, they are not as prone to self-destruction and are becoming more and more empowered.

Jesus is the first named speaker in *American Idiot*, and the views expressed in "American Idiot" are compatible with his, but they are with his alternate personality, Jimmy's, too; and though Jesus is clearly an angry young man, his otherwise passive role in the album's storyline suggests he's not the singer. All the lyrics in the album booklet are in Jimmy's handwriting, making him the creator of every song and therefore arguably its (original) voice. Jimmy, however, emerges sometime after "Jesus of Suburbia," the second track, and dies in "Homecoming," the penultimate song; plotwise, then, Jimmy cannot be the speaker in "American Idiot." If neither character is the speaker, then, the *I* may be identifiable with the Armstrong himself, particularly considering the speaker is Armstrong in the music video and his embrasure of *fag* in the above-noted performance of "Holiday." If so, the declaration of "maybe I'm the faggot America" bears more weight (11). Armstrong, the lead singer and songwriter, didn't put the words into the mouth of a character but of himself; listeners, then, can identify with this sentiment as identifying with the band itself rather than through a secondary puppet speaker. "American Idiot"'s position as first single, released a few weeks before the 2004 election, and without the

confusion of a character's mediating voice, made for the clearest political statement with the greatest chance of swaying voters against Bush.

In any case, "American Idiot" sets the mood and politics of the album, views to which both named characters, and, presumably, Green Day's listeners, subscribe. With that established, the first of two nine-minute suites and a name-song, "Jesus of Suburbia," opens with the declaration, "I'm the son of rage and love/the Jesus of Suburbia" (1-2). The *rage* and *love* tells us from the beginning that Jesus is an unstable character and foreshadows the unsustainability of his revolution and hints that, while teenage listeners are meant to admire and identify with him, they should not emulate him.

Jesus, we learn, is an angry suburban kid "on a steady diet of soda pop and Ritalin" (4), who takes on the role of martyr because "no one ever died for my sins in Hell/as far as I can tell" (5-6).

Denying his own instability, he insists,

but there's nothing wrong with me

this is how I'm supposed to be

in the land of make believe

that don't believe in me (8-11)

Although Green Day has been a band since 1987, with original fans well into their forties, the band continues to target teens, here by identifying Jesus as one and following his struggles of self-identification. A more or less universalizable struggle, Jesus' rage against the hypocrisy of his hometown, his disconnection from a popular belief system, and his general anti-establishmentarianism appeal to disaffected teens, inviting them to identify with this anti-hero. So, when a previously-invisible speaker declares, "We are the kids of war and peace from Anaheim to the Middle East. We are the stories and disciples of the Jesus of Suburbia,"³⁵ listeners can include themselves in that *we* and metaphorically join Jesus as he runs away from his broken home to become an urban revolutionary. This shift allows the listener to still admire and even join Jesus but no longer identify with Jesus

himself, a gradual separation that suggests to the audience, even at this early stage, that they shouldn't want to be him.

The perspective changes again in the final movement, "Tale from Another Broken Home":

Jesus either speaks to someone like him, or the unnamed speaker addresses Jesus with:

I don't feel any shame, I won't apologize
 When there ain't nowhere you can go
 Running away from pain when you've been victimized
 Tales from another broken home (11-4)

If this is Jesus speaking, listeners may consider themselves the addressee and bond with Jesus on a personal level (though, again, no longer *as* Jesus); and if the speaker is anonymous, the listener might take on the role of defender and begin participating in the revolution by justifying its beginnings. Either way, listeners, especially teens, are invited into the story and even into the inner circle around Jesus, becoming witnesses to and participants in the action of the album and making the uprising's evolution and disintegration personal. When the movement collapses, then, listeners are left in the same situation they started from, that of the real-world America, with the knowledge that an uprising wouldn't succeed, a conviction made clearer by Jesus' alter-ego, St. Jimmy.

Jimmy first appears in his own name-song, "St. Jimmy's coming down across the alleyway/ Up on the boulevard like a zipgun on parade" (1-2)³⁶. After this brief description by an unknown speaker who pointedly compares Jimmy to an improvised weapon, the alter-ego introduces himself with, "My name is St. Jimmy and you better not wear it out" (5), describing himself as "the resident leader of the lost and found" and the "needle in the vein of the establishment" (8), at once a protective figure to his followers and an adversarial one to The Man. Two images emerge: the first description by the unnamed speaker describes Jimmy as an unstable, violent force, and Jimmy describes himself as an urban savior,

unable to see his own impending death, a warning to listeners to err on the side of caution in emulating heroes.

Over the course of his song, an unnamed person describes Jimmy by name once, and Jimmy names himself an additional three times, insisting listeners learn who he is. The repetition of the name and his image as the anti-establishment fighter bonds listeners to him, perhaps even identifying as him as they sing along to "my name is St. Jimmy" and "it's St. Jimmy, and that's my name" (5, 22). This bonding proves dangerous, however, when Whatsername reveals that Jimmy is a "figment" of Jesus' imagination. Listeners who had come to identify with the charismatic rebel now feel the blow rather than simply witness it, and Jimmy's later disintegration becomes personal.

In the first movement of "Homecoming," we see Jimmy in his heroic role one last time: "in the crowd of pain, St. Jimmy comes without any shame" (14), "bearing gifts and trust, a fixture in the city of lust" (10). The third person speaker here allows Jimmy his savior image; speaking from a point after the saint's death, this introduction stands as a eulogy, though the listeners don't yet realize it. Jimmy's final sermon is "we're fucked up" (17), a message many teenage fans would agree with, and when he asks his followers, "What the hell's your name?" (12), listeners are forced to question their own identity as his crumbles in the face of invalidation. Unable to define himself,

Jimmy died today
 he blew his brains out into the bay
 in the state of mind
 it's my own private suicide (20-3)

But though Jimmy, the "glow of light" and "the spark in the night" (9), can't maintain himself, hope remains for those of his followers who can identify themselves and carry on the movement without him. Although the speaker is unnamed,³⁷ s/he survives Jimmy's death; and while s/he considers his death personal, signaling a continued bond with the saint, s/he outlives him and may help revive the

movement. If listeners have bonded with Jimmy, his death serves as an opening for new leadership and a chance to carry on the movement in his memory as much as it serves to end this phase of the revolution.

The process is repeated in *21st Century Breakdown*, though in a modified form; in the same way the rhetorical situation of 2009 was a modified version of that of 2004, with less national attention on wars and more on the growing recession, the new revolutionaries have modified their attention away from war and Bush and onto domestic injustices. The new heroes take up the remnants of the *American Idiot* uprising, this time with more stable and mature personalities: whereas Jesus and Jimmy were teens, Christian presents himself as an older everyman, "born into Nixon, [he] was raised in Hell" ("21st" 1). The lyrics identify Christian as middle-aged, born under the same president as Billie Joe Armstrong; this detail and a later reference to his son's graduation year (2013) suggest a personal connection to the message, much like his identification with the "faggot America" in performing "American Idiot" and "Holiday."³⁸ This personal connection, like the embrace of *faggot* in *American Idiot*, remind the audience of their now superstar allies whose moral support helps defend protestors from abuse from American Idiots. The lines, "my generation is zero/I never made it/as a working class hero" identify Christian as still part of the lower class (7-9), a point that resurfaces throughout the album, and the reference to "Working Class Hero" puts the speaker in the tradition of a class war participant, even while his admission of failure prepares listeners for this movement's eventual collapse.

But while the music video indicates the speaker of "21st Century Breakdown" is Christian, the lyrics tell us,

My name is No One

The long-lost son

Born on the Fourth of July

Raised in the era of heroes and cons

That left me for dead or alive (24-8)

Here we're presented with an idealized vision of the would-be working class hero, born on America's birthday, an everyman whose survival was completely his own. Immediately after this verse, however, he declares, "I am a nation/ a worker of pride" (29-30), giving us a new identity as a collective. The references to the lower economic class weave throughout this song and album, so *worker* isn't new; it is, however, reinforced, much like St. Jimmy's repetition of his name in his titular song, both of these men apparently desperate to be sure their listeners know who they are. The new information, however, is the mention both of pride and the self-identification as a *nation*: despite the cons and blindness of his hometown and era, this worker emerges as a patriotic American. The caustic sarcasm of "Holiday" here has transformed into a deep and personal bitterness, but one from a loyalty betrayed rather than youthful cynicism, as the speaker lists his sacrifices, calling himself "The pillar of damage control" (39). So while Christian, with his multiple self-descriptions, hails from a different age and background than Jimmy, he emerges as a hero of *21st Century Breakdown* and draws an older, less cynical audience into the protest movement, at least until his emergent rage overwhelms him. This appeal to an older audience pulls in Green Day's earlier fans, those who had aged along with the band, in a conviction that struggling for social justice is not only a duty of the young but for everyone. The later rage that consumes Christian unites both the older audience with the younger, teenage one, as Christian reveals a side increasingly like that of Jesus of Suburbia and St. Jimmy.

But if some listeners would rather identify with (or find more accessible) a glamorous freedom fighter, they can join the crowd in the third-person verses of "¡Viva la Gloria!"³⁹ After singing her praises, the audience can imagine itself as part of a trusted inner circle as it urges her not to "let the bonfires go out" and lose faith in her cause (45). Though other verses of "¡Viva!" are in the first person, particularly ones warning Gloria of her growing age and the dangers of losing hope, the dynamic

between perspectives allows the audience to join a crowd during the more upbeat, encouraging, and revolutionary lines, allowing listeners to bond with or hero-worship Gloria, the same way they could with Jimmy.

And while listeners can imagine themselves as the reporter of Jimmy's death, they can also identify as the condemner of Gloria in "¿Viva la Gloria?: Little Girl." Since this song is entirely in the second person, listeners may consider themselves the sole speaker or one of a tribunal informing her she's a runaway "with [her] face in the gutter" (12). Having been prepared for her downfall since her first name-song, the blow, when it comes, lacks the same impact as Jimmy's sudden death: whereas *American Idiot* ended a song after Jimmy's suicide, *21st Century Breakdown* continues through another act, a third of the album, indicating the revolution no longer ends with its leaders. Though individuals, even heroes, will fail, the movement is strong enough to continue without them. Listeners who had identified as members of the inner circle, then, may see what becomes of the movement after Christian and Gloria, proof that specific leaders aren't necessary for meaningful action, a message listeners can take with them when the album ends and they're returned to a nation beset with the same problems the fictional heroes faced. And the more identified listeners are to the characters and their causes, the more likely they are to engage in their own protests against injustice, be it through political rallies or simply voting.

A single voice carries the final song of *21st Century Breakdown*, "See the Light"; a survivor of the movement, a witness to Gloria's rise and fall, of the violence and fire that accompanied Christian's thinking, emerges with a single wish, "I just want to see the light" (9). Though there's only one perspective, it's the story of the group, and with no delusions of triumph or messiahs, this survivor intends to go on once s/he has relearned "what's worth the fight" (13). If the listener identifies with this speaker, having been present for all the trials and action of the album, then the listener becomes the carrier-on of the movement, the next Gloria. That is, though the heroes were always doomed, the

listener first joins and eventually replaces them in the same way Christian and Gloria replaced Johnny and Whatsername. And since Christian and Gloria's story wasn't an exact repeat of Jesus, Jimmy's, and Whatsername's, the now-warned listener can renew the movement in the actual America with more reasonable expectations: there will be no glorious revolution and no savior, but a unified message and a peaceful approach will minimize the threat of collapse.

Jesus, Jimmy, Whatsername, Christian, and Gloria give the audience different views of the freedom fighter archetype, occasionally speaking in their own voices and inviting listeners into their lives and minds. More often, however, the speaker stands just to the side of the heroes, reporting on their actions or directly addressing them, equally as the voice of praise as caution. As much as the audience bonds with the heroes, they find they must distance themselves from the heroes' choices if they wish to survive; to carry on the work of the freedom fighters, the audience must modify their actions to resemble those of the “faggot America,” the archetype embraced most closely by the band itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

“JESUS OF SUBURBIA” TO “EAST JESUS NOWHERE”: AN UNEASY RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

In these albums marked by repeated intertwining symbols, the most frequent and inescapable pattern appears in the Christian names, references, and ideas that weave throughout and define these characters and songs. The protagonists of *American Idiot* call themselves Jesus and St. Jimmy, and the couple in *21st Century Breakdown* are Christian and Gloria, but at the same time listeners are bonding with these personalities, they're told that "the Jesus of Suburbia is a lie," St. Jimmy the rioter kills himself, and Christian and Gloria disappear into their individual hells, suggesting that each character was failing catastrophically in their missions to save their societies.

Just as Green Day had avoided politics in their first seventeen years as recording artists, they had also generally avoided religion; the reasons for the heavy religious references and imagery as well as the politics in *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown* are the same. Immediately after 9/11, Christian references in political speech became more frequent and pointed; while the president had used Christian imagery in speeches since his first campaign, those were generally appeals to the voting majority, which shared his religion. After 9/11, however, Bush began frequently referencing the Crusades, casting the contemporary wars not only as fights against terrorism but against other religions, particularly Islam. This shift in discourse became part of Green Day's Bitzerian exigence: not only were the political actions of war and the establishment of the oppressive Department of Homeland Security and Patriot Act major defects that they felt compelled to modify, the hypocrisy of religion in political

speech, particularly the use of a supposedly peaceful religion used to justify the wars, needed modification. In the same way politics and religion melded in national discourse, Green Day infused their major archetypes with Christian references: the American Idiot not only blindly followed the government but the church, ignoring conflicting messages where they arose; the Last of the freedom fighters took on elements of crusaders, believing themselves saints and saviors while they violently rebelled; only the Faggot protester, already a political outsider, stood outside religious hypocrisy. Without either blind obedience or hubris, the protester acts on his or her own moral conscience, again and again held up as the example of the genuinely righteous American without the band directly telling the audience, in accordance with their anti-authoritarian principles, precisely what to believe, do, or say.

In the same way Green Day largely ignored the phenomenon of Obamania before and during the 2008 election, in which the new president was portrayed as a savior figure, the band seems to understand Christianity on the same terms, as grand words and ideas with little actual benefit. Christianity, like political propaganda, is a major discourse in America, but as it outlasts individual politicians, it became part of Green Day's exigence and demanded address as they responded to the post-9/11 climate: while Obamania faded within a year of the election, Christianity, the religion of 76% of Americans, has been and will remain a dominant ideology for the foreseeable future.⁴⁰ Green Day was able, then, to ignore Obama-as-savior but not the persistent idea of a savior itself and the post-9/11 talk of crusades against foreign “evildoers,” as President Bush often called his enemies. At a time when the American Idiots were heavily using the purportedly peaceful religion to justify wars, Green Day responded to this particularity by tying religious imagery to the cast of freedom fighters, arguing that, like the image of the streetfighting rebel, the religion offered glamorous ideas, but adhering to either ideology would end in dissolution. Again and again, we are presented with savior figures, in the self-named Jesus of Suburbia, Saint Jimmy, Christian, and Gloria, their very names reminding us, as the

characters march to their deaths and breakdowns, that we should not try to be saviors or believe they exist: again and again, Green Day suggests the only sustainable route of action is mass peaceable protest, not violent insurrection or individual exceptionalism.

The self-appointed Jesus of Suburbia declares himself the most exceptional, a new messiah, one born of "rage and love" and following "the Bible of none of the above" (1,3). A reimagined Jesus of Nazareth, he protests the shortcomings of the established traditions and scriptures and attempts to modify them on his own, leading to a split in his own mind and his eventual inability to continue fighting. The Jesus of Suburbia is no one's savior: the absolute love and dedication necessary to save others cannot overpower his rage, and he cannot survive on his own. Finding himself alone, he declares that he's living "in a land of make believe/ that don't believe in me" (10-1), a mindset that drives him into exile, searching out wisdom at a local 7/11, studying the "graffiti in the bathroom stalls like the holy scriptures of the shopping mall" ("City of the Damned" 14). He conducts a funeral service for himself in the fourth movement of the "Jesus of Suburbia" suite, "Dearly Beloved," and the final section, "Tales of Another Broken Home," tells us that Jesus "lost [his] faith to this, this town that don't exist" (5). His inability to help himself or anyone else, along with his graphic self-destruction in the music video, warn young listeners away from attempting to change a society or ideology in isolation, while Jesus' critiques of the religion and its followers suggest change remains necessary. The only option, then, is a mass movement devoid of violence.

In his anti-heroic way, Jesus appears in the music video as a rebellious teen, leaving home after a fight with his mother, embarking on a binge of property damage. The graffiti that Jesus reads in the song are written by him in the video in a convenience store bathroom. After he covers the walls in the song's lyrics, he cuts his palm and leaves a bloody handprint to sign his work. The hand wound, a visual tie to the Biblical Jesus that is never mentioned in the lyrics, realigns the teen with a more holy pursuit, evening out the damage of his rampage, which is also not in the lyrics, suggesting a multi-

dimensional teen searching for meaning and beginning to create it out of his own pain. The evidence of both activities, however, are short-lived; the store owner quickly repaints the entire bathroom a stark white, Jesus' nascent wisdom and his blood obliterated with a paint roller, signifying the mortality of himself, his message, and his movement.

The transmitter himself is wearing the mask of the most famous martyr of the religion, but in the Broadway adaptation, Jesus goes by the name Johnny, perhaps a reference to John the Baptist, who baptized the Biblical Jesus, suggesting Johnny's status as a bridge between the old and new traditions, between the dead and empty suburbia and the revolutionary city. Interestingly, however, Jesus is not the sacrifice or the rabbi: Jimmy is. Himself an imaginary construct, St. Jimmy appears to be named after James, the apocryphal brother of Jesus. Jimmy calls himself the "patron saint of the denial with an angel face/ and a taste for suicidal cigarettes"(9-10); bent on self-destruction, he is nevertheless "the light" and a preacher in "Homecoming" (9), and becomes the martyr of the movement. Martyrs, of course, die, and Jimmy does so violently, alone, and in despair, another signal to listeners that solitary rebellion cannot succeed and they should discard any thoughts of either witnessing or becoming a savior.

Whatsename, though functionally nameless, is also painted as both revolutionary and holy figure, particularly with "she's a rebel/ she's a saint/ she's the salt of the Earth/ and she's dangerous" ("She's a Rebel" 1-4). Gloria, too, is called "the saint of all the sinners" in "¡Viva la Gloria!" (31); their saintly status is a rank, much like their status as leaders of the political revolution. Given three saints and a savior, one of whom dies, one of whom is forgotten, one of whom loses his memory, and one of whom falls from grace, listeners are left doubting the power and stability of holy figures as much as that of secular leaders, particularly those who use religion to justify their actions. If these heroes, who have the best interests of their audience in mind, cannot prevail, how can corrupt politicians hope to save the nation?

While "Jesus of Suburbia" and "Saint Jimmy" were adopted names, Christian and Gloria from 2009's *21st Century Breakdown* appear to operate under their own names and not project themselves as martyrs as Johnny had. Their construction, then, is more subtle, both names fairly common in themselves; this corresponds to a decrease in crusader discourse after the close of President Bush's second term. With the justification period for the wars over and the commander-in-chief out of office, the rhetorical situation evolved away from pointed religious discourse, and musical references to that discourse could afford greater subtlety. Christian is not named after a particular Biblical figure but after the group of believers itself, further emphasizing his Everyman image, an anonymous member of a majority group. When he declares, in "Christian's Inferno," "I am the atom bomb/I am the chosen one" (15-6), he assumes a religious warrior identity, both a Crusader and an apocalyptic weapon, a throwback to post-9/11 war talks. But even with this posturing, Christian finds himself in his own "inferno," bringing to mind the most famous Inferno, in which the hero/author found himself a pilgrim in hell; with this in mind, Christian remains the untitled everyman, even while his hyperbolic speech echoes American exceptionalism and history of devastating warfare. As a figure of the average American, much like Johnny of *American Idiot*, Christian demonstrates the significant damage that exceptional thinking can cause to an isolated mind, and his breakdown in "Murder City" emphasizes the need for listeners to band together peacefully in order to avoid such disaster.

Gloria, likewise, is a fairly common name, but so are Faith and Grace. While Christian serves as our Everyman, Gloria, like St. Jimmy, is our revolutionary, and *Faith* and *Grace* can't capture her essence like *Gloria* can. The song "¡Viva la Gloria!" in some respects echoes the Greater Doxology, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*: the refrains of "¡viva la Gloria!" and appeals for her to come down among the people and bring them hope recall the lines of praise and supplication of the religious *Gloria*. Despite her name and status as lead revolutionary, however, the speaker in "¡Viva la Gloria!" warns her, "don't lose your faith/ to your lost naivete" and says, "say your prayers and light a fire/ we're gonna start a

war"(36-7, 8-9). Though phrased in religious terminology, the *faith* refers to her conviction in her cause: the speaker is warning her not to turn out like Jesus, whom Whatsername left for saying "this city's burning. 'It's not my burden'" ("Letterbomb" 16). Jesus had lost his faith in his own cause, unimpressed by the violent destruction of his home or its people, and Gloria's ever-increasing militancy, which leads her to rioting in "Murder City," threatens the same.

In "¿Viva la Gloria?: Little Girl," the same terminology describes her downfall as involving "the charlatans and saints/ of your abandon" (18-9), mixing the two categories together as though they were indistinguishable, a reference to the similar-appearing heroes and cons elsewhere in the album. The "saint of all the sinners" is now an "unholy/sister of grace" and "a junkie/ preaching to the choir" (30-1), leaving her "a stray for the Salvation Army" (13, 36). No longer a revolutionary leader, she disappears from the album, with no word on her reclamation or salvation. If the Christian terminology in these albums were actually religious, we could expect some narrative of redemption, which never comes; it's more likely, then, that the religious language is another lens through which to consider the political and psychological breakdowns of these characters, an exploration of the revelatory line, "the Jesus of Suburbia is a lie" ("We Are the Waiting" 14).

The notion of the lie is expressed loudly and sharply in "Holiday," which opens with the apocalyptic image of "an Armageddon flame"(2), a reference to "a hymn called faith and misery and war" (6). And as the speaker moves on to imagery of falling cities and misguided patriotism, he shouts, "Can I get another amen?" and others respond, "AMEN!" (14), tying this religious affirmation to the political image of "there's a flag wrapped around a score of men" (15). This connection of war and religion is furthered in the album booklet, in which a cross is drawn next to the "zeig heil," at the start of the Representative from California's caustic speech (19). The Nazis had used a version of Christianity as part of their propaganda, and while that reference is the most hyperbolic in a hyperbolic song, this unspoken accusation of using religion to build an empire rivals the paranoid mass American

assumption that the majority of Muslims were radical jihadists during the early years of the War on Terror.

The speaker of "In the Static Age" takes the hysteria further, describing it as

Music to my nervous system

Advertising love and religion

Murder on the airwaves

Slogans on the brink of corruption

Visions of blasphemy, war and peace

Screaming at you (5-10)

In the same way it becomes difficult to distinguish between the heroes and cons, corruption becomes normalized and blasphemy passes for scripture, war and peace become muddled, and religious fanaticism is used to justify violence, asking

What's the latest way

That a man can die

Screaming hallelujah?

Singing out "The dawn's early light"

Silence of the rotten

forgotten (35-40)

The insertion of the "dawn's early light" line from "The Star-Spangled Banner" reconnects American idealism to Christianity (*hallelujah*) and war (both the American Revolution and 21st century wars). Painting warfare as fashionable with "what's the latest way," the speaker grows caustic, reminding listeners of the dead, their voicelessness, and the militants' betrayal by forgetting them. War and religion, the song insists, are essentially the same, violent systems that combine to cause a range of atrocities, and people owe it to themselves to avoid getting caught up in both.

Before this reminder however, come the two angriest songs of the album. The violence-glorifying "Peacemaker" declares, "as God as my witness/ the infidels are gonna pay" (8-9), conjuring both images of jihadists and Crusaders posturing for war against each others' *infidels*. President Bush described post-9/11 military action as "a crusade" and the ill-defined other side as "evil".⁴¹ Where national discourse stirred up panic of a Muslim Holy War in which most Americans were cast as "infidels," the president was speaking as though that were indeed the situation, "crusade" suggesting the war wasn't about terrorism but about clashing religions. The speaker in "Peacemaker" challenges, "For what will divide us/ the righteous and the meek?" (13-4); as he adopts the language of the crusader, the speaker details a killing spree, declaring, "This is the neo/St.Valentine's Massacre," (45-6). This glorification of gangsterism jabs at United States invasive and nation-destroying foreign policy, but the peak of religious-themed rage doesn't appear until the hyperbolically militant "East Jesus Nowhere," in which listeners are instructed to

Raise your hands now to testify
 Your confession will be crucified
 You're a sacrificial suicide
 Like a dog that's been sodomized. (1-4)

This verse takes the earnest words of a believer and, rather than calling them false in themselves, says they and the believer will be destroyed, though it's unclear what the sacrifice is for. Considering the intensity of anger in this song, there may be no benefit from the sacrifice other than the violence of the act. The speaker goes on to condemn the entire religion as lies:

Put your faith in a miracle
 And it's non-denominational
 Join the choir we'll be singing
 In the church of wishful thinking (8-11)

This choir may be the one that the "deaf-mute is misleading" in "Mass Hysteria" or the one that Gloria's preaching to in "Little Girl"; either way, the choir as an image of collective religious voice tends to be a gullible group in *21st Century Breakdown*, akin to the Idiots in the earlier album, and Gloria's defecting to it suggests an assimilation into popular but untenable ideas. Her losing faith, then, is a loss of conviction to her own unpopular cause, a new warning to listeners: like St. Jimmy, we may die if we try to fight prevailing ideas and policies on our own, but we could also become like Gloria and turn into one of the American Idiots.

In fact, the largest religious group, the credulous choir, come off as a mass of "American idiots" in this song, not realizing that

A fire burns today
Of blasphemy and genocide
The sirens of decay
Will infiltrate the faith fanatics. (12-5)

Images of heresy and crimes against humanity appear side by side, burning through the nation; but the last lines of the chorus suggest an awakening: if the "sirens of decay" can "infiltrate" the minds of the "faith fanatics," the fanatics may begin to rebel against their respective traditions, though the "cops of the new religion" counter this awakening (32), whispering

Don't test me
Second guess me
Protest me
You will disappear (25-8)

The threat of disappearance, associated with tyrannical military governments, indicates increasing domestic oppression of both ideological and physical varieties. Echoing the hysteria of mass media, this song portrays a frightening world of state-sponsored terrorism, turning the paranoia many

Americans had of foreign terrorists into a home-grown reality born from their own fears. The danger of protest that had been mentioned in “Holiday” reappears here: Green Day doesn't allow us to think that protest is safe or easy, but they do insist that it is necessary.

The betrayal of believers' and citizens' trust is perhaps best encapsulated in "21st Century Breakdown," whose chorus rewrites the popular "Amazing Grace" with, "I once was lost but never was found" (11), just as "I can't even sleep/from light's early dawn" rewrites the national anthem (52-3), suggesting that both of these iconic songs' mythos no longer hold. In the litany of wrongs suffered, Christian mentions "scars on [his] hands" and a "waiting for Judgment Day" (32, 46) connecting himself both to Christ and the end-times division of the damned from the saved. Having "swallowed [his] pride and choked on [his] faith" (35-6), Christian has only been betrayed by his patriotism or this faith, a would-be hero in a world of cons. Having lost everything, the speaker tells us he's "been to the edge/ and [he's] thrown the bouquet/of flowers left over the grave" (41-3), inverting marriage and funeral rituals, an instance of funerary imagery that pervades these albums, first appearing in the "Dearly Beloved" section of "Jesus of Suburbia" and reemerging with the American Eulogy, the scope expanding from the loss of an individual to an entire nation, warnings that American mainstream mythos is as endangered as its heroes.

Ultimately, Green Day's conclusions about Christianity echo those of political leaders and reactionary violence: while all of them present glamorous or glorious ideas and images, among them promises of freedom and salvation, these ideas and images do not translate into actual life. In the worlds of *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown*, there are no saviors, and freedom must be won collectively and nonviolently: the American Idiots, insisting on crusades and hysteria, are not free, and the Last freedom fighters each come to nasty ends. In the end, only the threatened but allied “faggot” protestors survive, those who stand outside the dominant discourses of war, religion, and vengeance.

Although the rhetorical situation had evolved between 2004 and 2009, the complex of particularities shifting in importance (wars, patriotism, and religious fervor generally decreasing while domestic economic concerns increased), these particularities prompted similar responses from the band: calls for nonviolent protest and solidarity in the face of violence and oppression.

CHAPTER FIVE

"MY OWN PRIVATE SUICIDE": THE STAKES AND SHAKY GROUND OF THE REVOLUTION

In addition to the factors of audience and exigence, Bitzer argues that constraints to each rhetorical situation define the appropriate response and the consequences of making that response. Some of Green Day's constraints have already been discussed, like their inability to issue direct orders to their audiences due to their genre's philosophy of anti-authoritarianism and the major musical feud of the early 2000s that caused the ostracization of the popular and successful Dixie Chicks, establishing new rules of musical engagement. The Chicks' ousting from country music demonstrated that speech can easily produce monumental action, and protest musicians wishing to maintain their careers now had to be wary of every word they said. As mentioned before, Green Day was not known as a protest band and had a stable career in punk rock, but the wars, lies, and media-promoted paranoia of the early 2000s created an exigence that the band could not ignore. In writing and producing *American Idiot*, Green Day was faced with a choice similar to that of their fictional heroes and listening average Americans: they could either create an act of protest and try to survive the backlash or remain silent, seeming to conform to the mass majority's expectations. Their resulting protest album could well have been their last, a possibility they acknowledge in the character of St. Jimmy and the collapse of the his revolution.

The American Eulogy that Christian is compelled to sing, along with St. Jimmy's suicide, suggest both a private and collective self-destruction in the cultural complex of wars, paranoia, and domestic oppression. Fictional heroes and living Americans alike, Green Day suggests, face this danger, and if we continue to live as Idiots or reactionary fighters, we are moving into both a cultural

and personal collapse. The Jesus of Suburbia and the unnamed speaker of "American Idiot" insist that life as a dissenter in this climate is both unavoidable and unbearable. Jesus and Gloria are both runaways, and prior to and prompting Jesus' return in "Homecoming,"

Jimmy died today
 he blew his brains out into the bay
 in a state of mind
 it's my own private suicide (20-3)

The unknown speaker, someone close enough to know Jimmy, feels the death as though it were his/her own. In the same way Jesus had lived through this projection of Jimmy, this anonymous reporter dies through Jimmy, the dream martyr that could not survive the "brutality of reality" that Christian laments in "Before the Lobotomy" (41). Part of this brutality is apathy, when even the dreamer fails to mourn his alter ego:

Jesus filling out paperwork now
 at the facility on East 12th Street
 he's not listening to a word now
 he's in his own world and he's daydreaming
 he'd rather be doing something else now (5-9)

His alter ego having just shot himself through the head, Jesus remains oblivious or apathetic, idly wishing himself out of his boring job, having fallen from a revolutionary to a bureaucrat, and what had begun as anthemic resistance devolved into despair. This same apathy, which prompted Jesus to tell Whatsername that he didn't care that the city was burning and triggered the end of their association, suggests a group collapse in addition to an individual one, translating into a real-world threat of resistance fighters becoming inured to violence and therefore dangerous to those around them. And

violence, Green Day insists through the individual downfalls of each hero, cannot solve America's problems, either overseas or at home.

In a real-world sense, following the catastrophic and permanent-looking ostracization of the Dixie Chicks in 2003, just a year before, *American Idiot* could have been Green Day's career suicide, not only through their sudden political speech but also through their change in format and sound: while many of their early fans regarded them as sell-outs when they signed onto a major label with *Dookie* in 1994, *American Idiot's* pop-influenced sound pushed them further from punk than ever before. Fortunately for Green Day, both *Dookie* and *American Idiot* survived the risks and pushed the band further into public acclaim.

The band faced new risks with *21st Century Breakdown*; a second rock opera, especially one with a similar focus, could seem like an attempted remake of the first one. Rather than political suicide or accusations of selling out, having modified the rhetorical situation with the recording and success of *American Idiot*, they now faced the risk of being washed up, a danger that plays out for the heroes of *21st Century Breakdown*. While the end of their stories aren't explicit, Gloria loses her way and is forced out of the group, and Christian succumbs to a breakdown. Though we don't see Christian's death, "Life Before the Lobotomy" references one of the most famous suicide songs of the last century, one around which an urban legend has sprung up, with hundreds of deaths attributed to it: "Gloomy Sunday." A repeated line, "Dreaming/I am only dreaming" (1-2), and "Dreaming/ I was only dreaming" (42-3), echoes the English translation of the Rezso Seress ballad, most famously performed by Billie Holiday. So while we're not told that these characters die, and while the speaker in "Gloomy Sunday" doesn't definitely kill him/herself, both songs consider the option. Here, then, the despair of Jesus' failed movement returns to haunt Christian along with the singing voices of his ancestors. The "lobotomy" now refers to both the mindlessness of American Idiots and Jimmy's death, a "sign [of] my

love and lost memory/from the end of the century" recalling Jesus' final act of forgetting Whatsername after their separation (19-20). Choosing the path of either the Idiot or the would-be savior, the albums insist, entail losing one's mind, something the "faggot" protestor doesn't risk, again suggesting the audience should align themselves with peaceful protest rather than cultural and political submission or outright violence.

The impulse to suicide in revolutionaries, in Jimmy's case due to his fictionality and isolation, in Christian the rage of a lifetime of betrayal, has its roots in American culture and politics, according to the video for "21st Century Breakdown." Both Christian and Gloria and Green Day appear in stencil animation, the revolutionaries' story as a couple playing out during the performance. Political and industrial figures squabble and make up as the stock market crashes, and when Armstrong sings "Homeland Security/ could kill us all" (18-9), he points toward his temple, blood spraying from the other side of his head, a splash of violence in an otherwise lighthearted take on the nation's early 21st century problems. Like Armstrong's earlier self-identification with the "faggot America," this inclusion of himself with the threatened populace insists that he is allied with average American dissidents, again offering moral support to the far less famous and powerful protesters among his audience.

If listeners identify with either Christian's everyman image or his rage, with Jimmy's isolation and frustration, their path to suicide becomes personal, to the extent that they adopt the persona who reports Jimmy's death in "Homecoming." The adversities these two faced are common enough (if we understand Jimmy's fictional status as a representation of disconnection from one's surroundings), and the image of Armstrong, an actual person, miming a suicide and blaming Homeland Security, a product of American hysteria, prompt listeners to consider themselves endangered and push them to change their nation.

"SEE THE LIGHT": THE CYCLICAL RENEWAL OF REVOLUTIONARY FIGURES

Even though the *American Idiot* album survived and even thrived in American mainstream music, indicating its message's appeal to an audience that had been in the social and political minority, and even though its success modified the rhetorical situation of the national debate, the album failed in its major goal of swaying the 2004 election away from Bush, and the major factors of Green Day's exigence—the ongoing wars, governmental oppression, and media hysteria—remained as powerful as before. And just as Green Day denied the existence of saviors within their albums, they recognized that their speech acts and resultant audience response wouldn't end the nation's problems. Instead of encouraging listeners with images of immediate salvation, then, Green Day develops a model of modest and incremental positive social modification, indicating that the struggle for freedom, peace, and accountability is ongoing.

Suicide and despair close *American Idiot* and mark portions of *21st Century Breakdown*, but a revolution disintegrates without hope, as evidenced by Jesus' dis-identification with his cause and his group's subsequent collapse. The first segment of "Homecoming," "The Death of St. Jimmy," tells us explicitly, "There's no sign of hope" (7), even while St. Jimmy provides the only light, "the spark in the night" (10). Jimmy goes unmourned, the beginning of the next segment, "East 12th Street" declaring,

And nobody cares

And nobody cares

Does anyone care if nobody cares?

And nobody cares and nobody cares

Does anyone care if nobody cares? (1-5)

Apathy, as noted before, proved to be a major part of the movement's undoing, something the remainder of "Homecoming" understands, noting "the fear of breaking down" ("We're Coming Home Again" 11), precisely the main concern of *21st Century Breakdown*. Released a little more than four years after *American Idiot*, the second album confirms that Jimmy's revolution had failed and that Christian and Gloria's is also doomed. Though the problems the second generation faced are modified versions of Johnny's troubles, the basic source of the exigences—dishonest politicians and media, cycles of warfare and domestic injustice, are staples of our culture, "situations," as Bitzer notes, that "persist" (13), facilitating the development of the protest genre and ensuring the rise and fall of rebellions and protests *ab aeterno*.

Though the phenomenon of Obamania swept the nation in 2008, sweeping up millions of voters in a campaign of youth, hope, and change,⁴² *21st Century Breakdown*'s heroes remain on the fringe of American culture, "desperate but not hopeless" or "helpless" ("Murder City" 1, 5). The unnamed speaker in "Murder City," a rioter and witness to Christian's breakdown, views the group's failures as matters of fact, serious but not necessarily world-ending. In the same way Christian and Gloria replaced Jesus, St. Jimmy, and Whatsername, this speaker may be the next to rise to the occasion and lead the next wave of domestic insurgents, learning from their mistakes and working under a more peaceful ideology.

And while *American Idiot* ended with no sign of hope or replacements, *21st Century Breakdown* points to the new wave in "American Eulogy" with the "forgotten hope and the class of '13"(4); their graduation roughly coincides to their eighteenth birthdays: voting age. Billie Joe Armstrong, Green Day's songwriter and lead singer, has revealed that 2013 is the year of his oldest son's high school graduation,⁴³ lyrically inviting his own child into the revolution in the same way he wrote his own birth year into "21st Century Breakdown" (which itself mentions the class of '13). Green Day's participation in Rock the Vote, a nonprofit project to encourage young people to vote through

musician endorsement, explicitly attempts to make democratic participation cool and bring this notoriously uninvolved demographic into active political life.

This class of new voters is urged to inform itself, not only through Rock the Vote but through the final track on *21st Century Breakdown*, "See the Light," in which an anonymous revolutionary recounts the last movement and says, "I just want to see the light/I need to know/ what's worth the fight"(11-3). Having been warned away from media and mass hysteria, hypocritical political and religious ideologies, and shown the perils of violence and isolation, listeners are encouraged to seek out political and cultural truths and peacefully protest injustice where they find it in their attempts to counter the Idiot America.

CONCLUSIONS

Apart from Chuang and Hart's article on "Jesus of Suburbia," this present work appears to be the only rhetorical study of Green Day's recent music. My method, a combination of the rhetorical situation as defined by Lloyd Bitzer, Richard Vatz, and Scott Consigny, is unique among treatments of the theory. Like Bitzer, I argue that a complex set of persons, events, traditions, and genre constraints form an exigence, a flaw that prompts rhetorical response; however, like Vatz, I believe exigence isn't a limitable or predictable phenomenon. Rather, exigence is subjective, as are the interpretations of the particular events and persons that trigger them; earlier, I mentioned the event of the World Trade Center collapse itself was interpreted differently: Alan Jackson saw the buildings fall and felt compelled to write a song of mourning, while Toby Keith saw the same and was prompted to write a song urging for violent retaliation.

My modifications to the Bitzer/Vatz debate mirror those of Scott Consigny, who accepts subjective exigence defined by a complex of particularities, but unlike Consigny, who also argues for a rhetor skilled in commonplaces and able to respond to any type of event with limited knowledge thereof, I argue that only specific knowledge of an event can aid the creation of a fitting and meaningful speech act. In the context of political music, this is the protest song particular to a situation, one whose details vividly capture the strife of the moment and thereby spurs listeners to action: most notably in the case of Green Day, this was the "American Idiot" single promoting pacifism and increased youth voting. Neglect of this criterion of specificity leads to disingenuous, uninformed, or overly general-sounding protest music, which damages the artist's chances of effecting real-world change. I believe my modified version of the rhetorical situation—of an evolving complex of persons, events, and ideas that prompt subjective responses, which themselves become part of the newly-

modified complex, in which speakers must demonstrate familiarity with specific elements of the situation—should be applied in the study of protest music, given the wide range of exigences I have pointed to in my opening consideration of the post-9/11 musical landscape and the range of responses from the musical community, some of whose effects, such as the Toby Keith/Dixie Chicks feud, changed the face of a major genre. The time period I have worked within, the first decade of the new millennium, is especially fertile for this type of inquiry.

While many other musical protests remain tied to the specific cultural moment of the early 2000s, *American Idiot* and *21st Century Breakdown* have survived, ranking both on protest and popular rock charts. Perhaps the difference in staying power may be contributed to Green Day's breaking into the mainstream and dedicating the majority of two albums to political protest. System of a Down, though known to metal and rock audiences and somewhat recognizable to the mainstream, are best known as a metal band, and while Toby Keith became notorious for "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue," he and the Dixie Chicks were largely identified with country. Likewise, Eminem, though well known to the mainstream, is a rapper, and each of these genres tends to have more specialized audiences than mainstream rock. And while the Black Eyed Peas were perhaps the most mainstream of the above artists, "Where is the Love?" remained one of their few political songs, and the band returned to performing dance music.⁴⁴

Green Day's breaking into the mainstream in 2004 came during a wave of popular and genre-specific protest music, but *American Idiot*, with its outrage at hypocrisy and distortion, struck a chord with audiences, earning the band a Grammy, a long-running Broadway adaptation, and a spot in *The Simpsons Movie* as testaments to the album's lasting impact. Millions of listeners received their stories of indignation and protest, metaphysically participated in the demonstrations of rebellion, and received moral support for their opposition to widespread American complacency with governmental aggression and acceptance of media-fueled hysteria. The repeated failures of the fictive freedom fighters and the

persistence of the threatened but band-supported peaceful protesters argue for a a collective movement of nonviolence in response to a violent regime and system of draconian domestic policies.

And although *American Idiot* ultimately failed in its immediate goal to swing the 2004 election away from George W. Bush, it survived its cultural moment to become an iconic voice of popular protest. The band's later involvement in Rock the Vote and the continuing popularity of *American Idiot* and the following *21st Century Breakdown* kept the band in the mainstream, and the renewed outcry against hyperbolic national reactions and fear-based media continue to push for young adult involvement in politics, the later album adapting to the changing particularities of the rhetorical and political situation with its focus on workers' rights and class warfare.

By inviting listeners to identify with a cast of revolutionaries and participate in the songs through shifting and uncertain speakers, Green Day pulls their audience into the world and events of their rock operas and encourages it to take part in democratic action in their own society. Though anger and despair characterize most of these albums' tracks, the individual fates of the revolutionary figures (suicide, rejection, demotion, breakdown) warn listeners away from taking violent action against injustice or losing hope in their causes, reminding audiences that their lives as Americans depend on their collective action or inaction.

And while Green Day urges dissenting Americans to protest foreign violence and domestic oppression, the band demands as much accountability from listeners as the news media: each individual is responsible for his or her own mind, and as such, are as much to blame for falling prey to the Idiot America as we are victimized by it. Although St. Jimmy is ultimately unable to answer his own question, "What the hell's your name?," his demand for identification remains with the audience, a persistent need to evaluate who they are and what they stand for as much as how they are pursuing their goals: an acceptance of violence will lead to apathy and destruction, while the peaceful protester,

constantly challenged by the opposing majority, must always know who s/he is in order to maintain his or her position, and it is this kind of dissenter that Green Day indicates will prevail.

Green Day's increased fame, itself the product of the response to *American Idiot*, itself a response to a particular exigence Armstrong found necessary to speak upon, which happened to coincide with that of their audience, judging by the band's meteoric rise to superstardom, along with the lasting artifacts of the albums, the Broadway show, and the *Simpsons Movie*, established a lasting presence in the early 2000s. Along with their increased popular cultural significance came recognition of the band as protest artists, and their work in *Rock the Vote* continues to draw notoriously uninvolved young people into democratic participation, influencing, in one way or another, future elections and the political tide of the rising generation. Their empowerment of pacifism in the face of majority opposition, their insistence on the impossibility of saviors (social, political, religious, or otherwise), and the emphasis on a cyclical renewal of domestic movements help create a cautiously optimistic vision of our future, one in which injustices aren't magically solved but gradually modified, in which leaders don't become honest but citizens can avoid unthinking credulity, and in which solidarity and generational renewal provide for lasting stability.

- 1 Punk, broadly defined, developed in the 1960s in the United Kingdom, defined by an anti-establishment attitude and heavy focus on fast guitar melodies. Over the next several decades, it evolved and diversified into multiple sub-genres. Green Day is usually classified as pop punk, a genre arising in the 1990s and considered more mainstream in sound. Green Day has become more mainstream throughout their career, a trend that may be seen in their Grammy nominations categories.
- 2 Formed in 1987, their 1994 album, *Dookie*, saw three hit singles and won a Grammy the following year for Best Alternative Rock album.
 “Past Winners Search: 1994.” Grammy Archives online. Retrieved 10 April 2011.
 <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=1994&genre=1>>.
- 3 “Good Riddance” won MTV's Best Alternative Video in 1998.
 “Winners.” MTV Video Music Awards 1998. MTV Networks. Retrieved 3 April 2011.
 <<http://www.mtv.com/ontv/vma/1998/>>.
- 4 Green Day. "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)." Liner notes. *Nimrod*. CD. Reprise Records, 1997.
- 5 Green Day. “The Grouch.” *Nimrod*.
- 6 In fact, a repeated verse from “The Grouch” reads, “Glory days don't mean shit to me/ I drank a six pack of apathy” and regrets a “Wasted youth and a fistful of ideals/ I had a young and optimistic point of view,” suggesting, if anything, an anti-engagement in public national life.
- 7 Green Day joined Rock the Vote for the 2010 midterm election cycle.
 Carberry, Maegan. “Rock the Vote announces largest-ever midterm voter registration campaign.” Rock the Vote. 3 Aug. 2010. Retrieved 4 April 2011. <<http://www.rockthevote.com/about/press-room/press-releases/rock-the-vote-announces.html>>.
- 8 Bassist Mike Dirnt wrote the segment "Nobody Likes You," and drummer Tre Cool wrote "Rock and Roll Girlfriend"; both of these are movements of "Homecoming." All other lyrics are Armstrong's. *American Idiot*. Liner Notes.
- 9 *American Idiot* was released in September 21, 2004.
 "Music." Green Day Official Site. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.greenday.com/site/music.php>>.
- 10 Toby Keith. *Unleashed*. CD. Dreamworks, 2002.
- 11 Pareles, Jon. “The Dixie Chicks: America Catches Up with Them.” The New York Times. 21 May 2006.
 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/21/arts/music/21pare.html>>.

12 Their *Entertainment Weekly* cover is the more iconic of the two: the Chicks pose naked, words like “Traitors,” “Patriot,” “Free Speech,” and “Boycott” painted on their skin.

Willman, Chris. “Stars and Strife.” *Entertainment Weekly*. 24 April 2003. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,446278,00.html>>.

The *Time* cover, heralding their comeback in 2006, depicts Robison and Maguire with their arms protectively around Maines, the lead singer and the one who made the anti-Bush remarks three years previous.

“Radical Chicks” *Time Magazine* Cover. *Time.com*. 29 May 2006. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20060529,00.html>>.

13 "And how in the world can the words that I said

Send somebody so over the edge

That they'd write me a letter

Sayin' that I better

Shut up and sing or my life will be over?"

Maquire, Martie, Natalie Maines, Emily Robison, Dan Wilson. "Not Ready to Make Nice." *Taking the Long Way*. CD. Columbia Records, 2006.

14 Top 20 Records. *VH1.com*. Retrieved 13 June 2011. <<http://community.vh1.com/Discussion-Thread/Top-20-Records/087F6FFFF01C2E961000900E356B9>>.

15 “Past Winners Search.” *Grammy.com* Retrieved 19 March 2011. <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=2006&genre=All>>.

16 System of a Down. "BOOM!" Michael Moore, dir. YouTube. Retrieved 22 March 2011.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE2r7r7VVic>>.

17 Eminem. “Mosh.” Ian Inaba, dir. 26 Oct. 2004. <<http://www.metatube.com/en/videos/9795/EMINEM-MOSH-Original-Version/>>.

post-election version:

Eminem. “Mosh.” Ian Inaba, dir. Nov. 2004. Retrieved 4 April 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M9MTle-8AM>>.

18 "I'm a Little Bit Country." Trey Parker, dir. South Park Studios. Aired 9 April 2003. Retrieved 22 March 2011.

<<http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s07e01-im-a-little-bit-country>>.

19 Mark Knoller, a White House correspondent for CBS News, notes 151 vacation days in the first year of Bush's presidency. Knoller, Mark. "Can a President Really Take a Vacation?" CBS News. 24 Dec 2009.

20 A testament to the endurance of this sentiment, popular merchandising websites Cafepress and Zazzle were still selling these anti-Bush stickers in 2011, two years after he left office.

21 The second entry for "Bushism n2" in the Oxford English Dictionary online records this version of the term: "An idiom or mode of expression considered characteristic of George H. W. Bush or George W. Bush; (in later use chiefly) *spec.* a verbal peculiarity or lapse associated with George W. Bush."

"Bushism, n2" Oxford English Dictionary online. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.oed.com.proxygsu-ugal.galileo.usg.edu/view/Entry/274142?rskey=8riYuo&result=2#eid148349770>>

22 Over the course of his presidency, Bush would see the highest approval and disapproval ratings to date, according to Gallup polls. In September 2001, his approval ratings were estimated at 90%, and his disapproval rating hit 71% in October 2008.

"Presidential Approval Ratings—George W. Bush." Gallup. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-George-Bush.aspx>>.

23 FBI hate crimes statistics list 28 hate crimes against Muslims in 2000 and 481 in 2001, a 1700% increase. "Hate Crime Statistics 2000." FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Retrieved 4 April 2011. <<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2000>>.

And "Hate Crime Statistics 2001." <<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2001>>.

24 Though the word appears this way in the lyric booklet, it can be heard as either "alienation" or "alien nation," both comments on our national self-estrangement. The bolded "nation" in the liner notes facilitates this dual reading.

25 While *faggot* and *fag* in American slang have been used to slur homosexuals, in the early 2000s, it gained a wider usage as a general slur. South Park dedicated an episode, "The F Word," to this phenomenon in 2009. The older townspeople believed the children were gay bashing, but the children were using *fag* as a generalized slur: the boys explained that if they wanted to slur gays, they'd call them *gay fags* to distinguish them from other groups. A connotation of weakness remains in this new definition of *fag*.

26 The war protesters in South Park called the war supporters "rednecks": the protesters were called "commies," "flagburners," "pussies," and "hippies" in return (Parker, "I'm a Little Bit Country")

- 27 Knowlton, Brian. "Terror in America/'We're Going to Smoke Them Out'--President Airs His Anger." 19 September 2001. NYTimes.com. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/news/19iht-t4_30.html>.
- 28 Green Day. "Holiday." Samuel Bayer, dir. 7 May 2005. Retrieved 4 April 2011. MTV. Video.
<http://www.mtv.com/videos/green-day/42813/holiday.jhtml>
- 29 "US Congress opts for 'freedom fries.'" BBC News. 12 March 2003. Retrieved 22 March 2011.
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2842493.stm>>.
- 30 Green Day. "Green Day Holiday Live." YouTube. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFIqWyYtyug>>.
- 31 "The Last of the American Girls" is a track on *21st Century Breakdown* and here describes both Gloria and Whatsername as well as Christian, St. Jimmy, and, to some extent, Jesus.
- 32 Since this version is a leaked demo and not an official demo, there are no line numbers, and the line breaks are the product of educated guessing on my part. Green Day. "21st Century Breakdown Demo Version." YouTube. 13 Aug. 2009. Accessed 22 March 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlZlyVD7LA>>.
- 33 Green Day. "Know Your Enemy." Matthew Cullen, dir. Music Video. YouTube. 12 Oct 2010. Accessed 22 March 2011.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hi5OVizo968>>.
- 34 Although these words open the song, they are not included in the liner notes and are not designated by line numbers here.
- 35 In the liner notes, this section is written without line breaks, so assigning numbers would at best be a guess.
- 36 A zip gun is an improvised weapon. There's also a punk rock band by the name Zip Gun.
- 37 We're told that Jesus is "filling out paperwork at the facility on East 12th Street" and can therefore not be the reporter (5-6), and Whatsername has already left. Whatsername's tirade against Jesus' growing apathy in "Letterbomb" would push listeners to identify more with Jimmy, who remained revolutionary until his death, whereas Jesus finds himself in a bureaucratic job, away from the action.
- 38 Billie Joe Armstrong was born during the Nixon Administration, and his oldest son is part of the class of '13.
Fricke, David. "Green Day Fights On." Rolling Stone. 28 May 2009. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/green-day-fights-on-20090528>>.
- 39 All of the Gloria and Whatsername songs are in the second and third persons; where listeners can identify with the speaking Jesus, Jimmy, and Christian, they can only identify "next to" Gloria and Whatsername rather than as them.

40 According to the United States Census Bureau, roughly 76% of adult Americans identified as Christian in 2008. "Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990, 2001, and 2008." The 2011 Statistical Abstract. Population: Religion. Accessed 26 March 2011.

<<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/religion.html>>.

41 "This is a new kind of-- a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while."

Bush, George W. "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival." Office of the Press Secretary. The White House. 16 Sept 2001.

<<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>>.

42As the Bush Administration came to an end, small waves of political music reached the mainstream with the election of Barack Obama. Cletus T. Judd, country's version of Weird Al Yankovic, who had collaborated several times with the militant Toby Keith in the years after the Keith/Dixie Chicks feud, released a song and video called "Waitin' on Obama," an uncharacteristically serious and sincere parody. Will.I.Am of the Black Eyed Peas released "It's a New Day," an infectiously hopeful and happy song the day after the election, pulling on the atmosphere/promise of hope and change that Obama ran on. Travie McCoy's popular hip-hop/dance song, "Billionaire," praises him in 2010: "I'll be playin' basketball with the president/dunkin' on his delegates/ then I'll compliment him on his political etiquette (good job!)" (30-2). However, in 2011, after the political honeymoon ended, rapper Lupe Fiasco's "Words I Never Said" hit the radio with the lines, "Gaza Strip was getting bombed, Obama didn't say shit/ That's why I ain't vote for him, next one either./ I'm part of the problem, my problem is I'm peaceful" (21-3). Nonetheless, the reaction to him, both in support and criticism, is miniscule compared to that of Bush, at least as of June 2011.

43 Fricke, David. "Green Day Fights On"

44 Will.I.Am, of BEP, recorded "It's a New Day," an infectiously happy track rejoicing Barack Obama's election, but this was as a solo project, not as a Black Eyed Pea.

WORKS CITED

- Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1.1 (1968): 1-14.
- Bush, George W. "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival." Office of the Press Secretary. The White House. 16 Sept 2001. <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>>.
- "Bushism, n2" Oxford English Dictionary Online. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.oed.com.proxygsu-uga1.galileo.usg.edu/view/Entry/274142?rskey=8riYuo&result=2#eid148349770>>.
- Carberry, Maegan. "Rock the Vote announces largest-ever midterm voter registration campaign." *Rock the Vote*. 3 Aug. 2010. Retrieved 4 April 2011. <<http://www.rockthevote.com/about/press-room/press-releases/rock-the-vote-announces.html>>.
- Chuang, Lisa M. and John P. Hart. "Suburban American Punks and the Musical Rhetoric of Green Day's "Jesus of Suburbia." *Communication Studies* 59.3 (2008): 183-201
- Colapinto, John. "Working Class Heroes." *Rolling Stone*. 11 Nov. 2005.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/8719082/cover_story_working_class_heroes/print>.
- Eminem. "Mosh." Ian Inaba, dir. YouTube. Video. 26 Oct. 2004. Retrieved 4 April 2011.
<<http://www.metatube.com/en/videos/9795/EMINEM-MOSH-Original-Version/>>.
- Eminem. "Mosh." Ian Inaba, dir. YouTube. Video. Nov. 2004. Retrieved 4 April 2011.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M9MTle-8AM>>.
- Fish, George. "Blues Against Bush." *Socialism & Democracy* 20.2 (2006): 149-63.
- Fricke, David. "Green Day Fights On." *Rolling Stone*. 28 May 2009. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/green-day-fights-on-20090528>>.
- Green Day. *21 Guns*. Single. Reprise, 2009. CD
- Green Day. *21st Century Breakdown*. Reprise, 2009. CD

Green Day. "21st Century Breakdown" Marc Webb, dir. YouTube. Video. 2009.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4ZKIT1EvCA>>.

Green Day. *21st Century Breakdown*. Single. Reprise, 2009. CD.

Green Day. *American Idiot*. Reprise, 2004. CD.

Green Day. *American Idiot*. Single. Reprise, 2004. CD.

Green Day. *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*. Single. Reprise, 2004. CD.

Green Day. *Bullet in a Bible*. Warner Bros. Records, 2005. CD.

Green Day. *East Jesus Nowhere*. Single. Reprise, 2009. CD.

Green Day. *Holiday*. Single. Reprise, 2005. CD.

Green Day. *Jesus of Suburbia*. Single. Reprise, 2005. CD

Green Day. *Know Your Enemy*. Single. Reprise, 2009. CD

Green Day. *Nimrod*. Reprise, 1997. CD.

Green Day. "Holiday." Samuel Bayer, dir. 7 May 2005. Retrieved 4 April 2011. MTV. Video.

<<http://www.mtv.com/videos/green-day/42813/holiday.jhtml>>.

Green Day. "Green Day Holiday Live." YouTube. Video. Retrieved 22 March 2011.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF1qWyYtyug>>.

Green Day. "21st Century Breakdown Demo Version." YouTube. Video. 13 Aug. 2009. Accessed 22

March 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlZlyVD7LA>>.

Green Day. "Know Your Enemy." Matthew Cullen, dir. YouTube. Video. 12 Oct 2010. Accessed

22 March 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hi5OVizo968>>.

"Hate Crime Statistics 2000." FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2000>>.

"Hate Crime Statistics 2001." FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2001>>.

"I'm a Little Bit Country." Trey Parker, dir. South Park Studios. Video. Aired 9 April 2003. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s07e01-im-a-little-bit-country>>.

Keith, Toby. "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)." *Unleashed*. Dreamworks, 2002. CD.

Knoller, Mark. "Can a President Really Take a Vacation?" CBS News. 24 Dec 2009.

Knowlton, Brian. "Terror in America/'We're Going to Smoke Them Out'--President Airs His Anger." 19 September 2001. NYTimes.com. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/news/19iht-t4_30.html>.

Maquire, Martie, Natalie Maines, Emily Robison, Dan Wilson. "Not Ready to Make Nice." *Taking the Long Way*. Perf. Dixie Chicks. Columbia Records, 2006. CD.

"Music." Green Day Official Site. Retrieved 22 March 2011. <<http://www.greenday.com/site/music.php>>.

"Nominees and Winners." Grammy.com Retrieved 4 April 2011.<<http://www.grammy.com/nominees>>.

Pareles, Jon. "The Dixie Chicks: America Catches Up with Them." The New York Times. 21 May 2006. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/21/arts/music/21pare.html>>.

"Past Winners Search: 1994." Grammy Archives online. Retrieved 10 April 2011. <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=1994&genre=1>>.

"Past Winners Search: 2004." Grammy Archives Online. Retrieved 10 April 2011. <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=2004&genre=31>>.

"Past Winners Search: 2006" Grammy.com Retrieved 19 March 2011. <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=2006&genre=All>>.

"Past Winners Search: 2010" Grammy Archives online. Retrieved 19 March 2011. <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?page=2>>.

“Presidential Approval Ratings—George W. Bush.” Gallup. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-George-Bush.aspx>>.

“Radical Chicks” Time Magazine Cover. Time.com. 29 May 2006. Retrieved 4 April 2011.\

<<http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20060529,00.html>>.

"Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990, 2001, and 2008." The 2011

Statistical Abstract. Population: Religion. Accessed 26 March 2011. <<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/religion.html>>.

System of a Down. "BOOM!" Michael Moore, dir. YouTube. Video. Retrieved 22 March 2011.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE2r7r7VVic>>.

"The F Word." Trey Parker, dir. South Park Studios. Video. Aired 4 Nov. 2009. Retrieved 18 April

2011. <<http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s13e12-the-f-word>>.

Willman, Chris. “Stars and Strife.” *Entertainment Weekly*. 24 April 2003. Retrieved 4 April 2011.

<<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,446278,00.html>>.

“Winners.” MTV Video Music Awards 1998. MTV Networks. Retrieved 3 April 2011.

<<http://www.mtv.com/ontv/vma/1998/>>.

"US Congress opts for 'freedom fries.'" BBC News. 12 March 2003. Retrieved 22 March 2011.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2842493.stm>>.

APPENDIX

Track Listing

American Idiot

1. American Idiot
2. Jesus of Suburbia
 - I. Jesus of Suburbia
 - II. City of the Damned
 - III. I Don't Care
 - IV. Dearly Beloved
 - V. Tales of Another Broken Home
3. Holiday
4. Boulevard of Broken Dreams
5. Are We the Waiting
6. St. Jimmy
7. Give Me Novacaine
8. She's a Rebel
9. Extraordinary Girl
10. Letterbomb
11. Wake Me Up When September Ends
12. Homecoming
 - I. The Death of St. Jimmy
 - II. East 12th St.
 - III. Nobody Likes You
 - IV. Rock and Roll Girlfriend
 - V. We're Coming Home Again
13. Whatsername

21st Century Breakdown

1. Song of the Century

Act I--Heroes and Cons

2. 21st Century Breakdown
3. Know Your Enemy
4. ¡Viva la Gloria!
5. Before the Lobotomy
6. Christian's Inferno
7. Last Night on Earth

Act II--Charlatans and Saints

8. East Jesus Nowhere
9. Peacemaker
10. Last of the American Girls
11. Murder City
12. ¿Viva la Gloria? (Little Girl)
13. Restless Heart Syndrome

Act III--Horseshoes and Handgrenades

14. Horseshoes and Handgrenades
15. The Static Age
16. 21 Guns
17. American Eulogy
 - A. Mass Hysteria
 - B. Modern World
18. See the Light