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Assignment 2

Roles of Civic Engagement in a Republic

Green Day's song and music video "American Idiot" serves as a powerful and thought-provoking commentary on the importance of civic engagement in a republic by illustrating the dangers of apathy and disengagement, the importance of resistance against manipulation and propaganda, and the duty of citizens to actively participate in the political process and work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

I chose "American Idiot" by Green Day mainly because it is a good song I have listened to previously, and it is a song that I had never looked at the lyrics before or really analyzed what the song was about, so I am interested to see how this song was picked to be on the list. "American Idiot" is a song by Green Day, written by lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong and was released in 2004 on their seventh album titled the same, "American Idiot." The song is a scathing critique of American society and politics in the early 2000s, explicitly targeting the administration of George W. Bush and the war in Iraq. The music video, directed by Samuel Bayer, features footage of the band playing in a desolate, post-apocalyptic world intercut with images of the American flag and political slogans. Green Day's song demonstrates the importance of civic engagement by highlighting the dangers of apathy and disengagement in a democracy. Last week's reading of "Civic Virtue" by Sara Bosin mentions the disconnect between Americans and their communities, saying, "The baby boomers and the Generation Xers display a disconnection from the community and a tendency toward individualism." (Bosin, *Civic virtue*) and I believe that "American Idiot" references this ideal by talking about the alienation and lack of purpose or direction that new generations feel towards politics. The lyrics of "American Idiot" are a

direct attack on the political climate of the time, with Armstrong taking aim at the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq and the overall state of American society. The song's title, "American Idiot," is a play on words, referring to both the idiocy of American politics and the idea of the "American Idiot" as a symbol of the country's misguided actions. The lyrics specifically mention the "redneck agenda" and the "white trash" that Armstrong believes is running the country, as well as the manipulation of the American public through the media. "American Idiot" 's theme of manipulation can be correlated to Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech, where King talks about many topics, including African Americans' right to vote and participate in the democratic process. King calls to action, saying, "We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote, and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote." (King, 1963).

This week we read "Six Great Ideas" by Mortimer J. Adler, specifically Chapter 8: "The Pursuit of Truth" the title itself really matches up with the message of "American Idiot," both in its title and chorus, "Don't wanna be an American Idiot." Adler says, "the whole truth and nothing but the truth--will never be achieved in any stretch of time" (Adler & Moyers, 1982). I feel that this connects to the song by saying that while the truth will never be fully achieved anytime soon, it's essential to educate yourself on current political topics so that you are not seen as an "American Idiot" who mindlessly follows others. The song also correlates to another of our readings this week, "The Coddling of the American Mind" from Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, where they talk about a movement that is becoming a trend in American colleges, that being a sort of censorship to uncomfortable topics. In the article Haidt and Lukianoff talk about things like Microaggressions and Trigger warnings: "For example, some students have called for warnings that Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' describes racial violence and that F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' portrays misogyny and physical abuse" (Greg Lukianoff, 2017). I feel that this correlates with "American Idiot" well, and how in the early 2000s, it was the media trying to

brainwash us, but now there are certain groups doing the same, trying to say what is wrong and what is right.

In conclusion, "American Idiot" by Green Day is a powerful and politically charged song that critiques American society and politics in the early 2000s. The lyrics and music video effectively convey the themes of disillusionment, apathy, and the need for civic engagement. "American Idiot" calls on its listeners to reject the idea of being a passive participant in the political system and instead become active and engaged citizens. The song and video are important messages even in today's political climate.

Bosin, S. (n.d.). *Civic virtue*. Civic Virtue | Learning to Give. Retrieved January 20, 2023, from <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/civic-virtue>

Adler, M. J., & Moyers, B. D. (1982). Chapter 8: The Pursuit of Truth. In *Six great ideas* (pp. 1–6). essay, Thirteen.

King, M. L. (1963, August 23). *Martin Luther King I have a dream speech - american rhetoric*. American Rhetoric. Retrieved January 21, 2023, from <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>

Greg Lukianoff, J. H. (2017, July 31). *How trigger warnings are hurting mental health on campus*. The Atlantic. Retrieved January 21, 2023, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>