IMAGES of ISSUES:

TYPIFYING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

EDITED BY

JOEL BEST

California State University, Fresno

ALDINE DE GRUYTER

NEW YORK

©1989

POPULAR MUSIC AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CLAIMS AGAINST POPULAR MUSIC

Herman Gray

8

In 1985, several prominent Washington D.C. women formed the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) to attack explicit sexuality and violence in popular music lyrics. Prince, Madonna, Twisted Sister, The Dead Kennedys, WASP, and AC/DC became targets of PMRC criticism. The campaign reached its zenith at a Senate hearing where PMRC members charged that popular music contributed to teenage suicide, pregnancy, and drug addiction. They called for tighter social controls over public access to popular music and demanded that the music and broadcast industries take greater responsibility for popular music's content.

Such debates over popular music are not new. Popular culture and, in particular, popular music are important subjects for claims and counterclaims about the moral and social order. Conflicts over popular music involve groups who disagree about appropriate habits, tastes, values, and behavior. Contending groups want to limit or extend what they define as nonconventional values and behavior. Through claims-making they seek support from business, civic, educational, moral, and cultural institutions (Gusfield, 1981).

Claims against popular music are not just about music. They are also expressions of political, cultural, and social disagreements over images, meaning, and behavior. They are contests for control over public images and expressions. To illustrate the persistence and variety of these social struggles, I trace the history of claims and counterclaims about popular music during three periods: the early 1900s, the 1950s, and the 1980s. For each period, the social context in which claims about popular music emerged is described. Identifying the social context can help to make sense of the specific meanings and uses popular music had for the groups involved in these debates. In each period, opponents of popular music tried to defend their view of the social world at a moment when they thought that world threatened. In the 1920s, blacks and immigrants were the source of the threat, in the 1950s, it was blacks and Communists (in the 1960s it was students and hippies), and in the 1980s it was oversexed, drugged musicians and an irresponsible recording industry. Finally, this analysis de-

scribes the groups who made claims, the rhetoric of those claims, the strategies used to translate claims into action, and the responses of other groups and institutions.

Early Resistance to the Spread of Jazz

In the early decades of the twentieth century, there was an organized move to stop the growing popularity of jazz (Leonard, 1962). To some white middle-class men and women, jazz represented a crisis of civilization and a threat to progress (Gusfield, 1963; Leonard, 1962; Sussman, 1984). Critics associated jazz (and other cultural practices of working-class blacks and European immigrants) with undisciplined consumption and the celebration of leisure and pleasure.

In the decades when jazz was born and started to flourish, America was undergoing sweeping social changes. Cities filled with black migrants from the South as well as immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. These new arrivals brought distinctive cultural habits and practices to the city. This was also a period when the formal, constraining culture of the upper classes came under assault. Rigid social norms that defined acceptable public decorum were replaced by tolerance for public displays of drinking, smoking, sensuality, and good times. The Protestant Ethic of thrift and saving was replaced with an ethic of consumption and immediate gratification made possible by the development of credit, advertising, and the department store. Traditional forms of home-centered leisure gave way to an emerging mass culture of film, radio, and the phonograph. The small family-centered world of the nineteenth century was displaced by the mass public society of the 1920s (Sussman, 1984; Toll, 1982). Jazz was the perfect expression of this new sensibility and public culture.

Attempts to limit jazz formed part of a broader movement to curb the social and moral excesses of the period. This broader movement included campaigns for Prohibition and anti-immigration legislation. Opponents of jazz were middle-class professionals, clergymen, educators, businessmen, women socialites, and public officials. Opposition also came from the traditional music establishment (e.g., music educators, dance teachers, classical musicians, and music critics) (Berger, 1947; Leonard, 1962). These caretakers of traditional values associated jazz with the decline of civilization and the erosion of progress: "Jazz, at its worst is an unforgivable orgy of noise, a riot of discord, usually perpetrated by players of scant musical training. . . . Second, jazz at its worst is often associated with vile surroundings, filthy words, unmentionable dances . . ." (Berger, 1947:23). People who held these views defended traditional values—family, thrift, hard work, and moderation. They equated jazz with immorality, sexual promiscuity, and poor, uneducated blacks (Berger, 1947; Leonard, 1962).

Their claims aimed at exposing what they saw as jazz's undesirable features; they wanted to stop its spread and popularity. They pressured local and state governments to limit public performances and public access to jazz, and they campaigned to delegitimate jazz or at least disassociate the music from its social and cultural origins.

The major objections to jazz rested on three related but distant claims: sexual excess, aesthetic incompetence, and racial inferiority. Charges of sexual promiscuity came mainly from clergymen, parents, and educators who objected to what they regarded as jazz's obvious disregard for the sexual codes of the day. One minister complained that jazz provoked "man's lower nature": "Jazz music *causes* drunkenness . . . [by sending] a continuous whirl of impressionable stimulation to the brain, producing thoughts and imagination which overpower the will. Reason and reflection are lost and the actions of the persons are directed by stronger *animal passion*" (Leonard, 1962:33—emphasis added). Jazz was blamed for the sexual excitement and downfall of youth. Adult moral guardians saw youth as particularly susceptible to the excesses of jazz. For instance, an editorial in a leading music education journal claimed that jazz harmed the minds and bodies of those too young to resist its temptations (Leonard, 1962).

Jazz seemed to threaten every aspect of social and personal life. This perceived threat often assumed absurd proportions. For example, an orchestra leader who performed regularly at a California State Hospital blamed jazz for driving innocent, unsuspecting children into the insane asylum: "I can say from my own knowledge that about fifty percent of our young boys and girls from age sixteen to twenty-five that land in the insane asylum these days are *jazz crazy dope fiends and dance hall patrons* . . . Where you find one you will find the other" (Leonard, 1962:37; emphasis added). Jazz, it was held, even endangered the unborn. In 1926, the Salvation Army filed a brief to halt construction of a movie theater next to a home for expectant mothers. "We are loathe to believe that babies born in the maternity hospital are to be legally subject to the implanting of jazz emotions by such enforced proximity to a theater and jazz palace" (Leonard, 1962:37).

As a source of uncontrolled sexual urges, jazz posed a threat to the family. For Dr. Francis E. Clark, President of the Christian Endeavor Society, jazz represented, "an offense against womanly purity, the very fountainhead of our family and civil life" (Leonard, 1962:37). Like children, women were thought to be especially vulnerable to the negative effects of jazz.

Aesthetic opposition to jazz came from the musical establishment. Musicians, music critics, and educators opposed to jazz found the music of black Americans undisciplined, emotionally volatile, and performed by musicians without proper academic training. But these claims, too, were fueled by passions against what was seen as jazz's social and moral excesses (Berger, 1947; Leonard 1962).

The asthetic opponents of jazz came from universities, music conservatories, and professional journals of music education and criticism that emphasized formal training and traditional canons of performance, composition, and criticism. They were passionate defenders of formal rules and values that came from western European culture. To these critics, jazz, especially the popular genre of ragtime, represented nontraditional values. A prominent music critic echoed this sentiment: "It [is] merely a raucous and inarticulate shouting of hoarse-throated instruments with each player trying to outdo his fellows in a fantastic cacophony" (Leonard, 1962:46). Comparing jazz to European classical traditions and values, critics labeled jazz inferior music. Moreover, its commercial success and popularity directly challenged traditional musical values. These aesthetic charges added academic legitimacy and respectability to the moral campaign against jazz.

The claims by middle-class whites that jazz was aesthetically inferior and morally dangerous were steeped in racism. In early twentieth-century America, middle-class, white, Anglo–Saxon Protestants served as the social and cultural standard against which black Americans and their culture were judged. So explicit was this measure of social acceptance that, in 1925, the *New York Times* claimed "that the merits of jazz could be determined by comparing the intelligence of those who like it with those who it . . . offends" (Berger, 1947).

Traditionalists' rhetoric linked race with the moral dangers of jazz. Expressions of moral outrage were tightly wrapped in racist fears about sexuality, primitive instincts, lack of discipline, and loose morals among black Americans. Middle-class whites were offended by the bars, brothels, and other venues in poor and working-class black communities where jazz flourished. These associations help explain the passion with which opponents defined jazz as a moral threat. Blacks and their music threatened the middle-class Protestant ideal of discipline, restraint, and control.

How were the claims against jazz translated into action, and by whom? Many of the objections to jazz came from middle-class professionals with direct access to newspapers and journals of opinion, professional organizations, city councils, school boards, and churches. The opponents used these organizations to press their claims against jazz (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977).

For example, prominent women associated with the Episcopal Church Women in New York anticipated, by 50 years, the strategy used by the Parents' Music Resource Center. Women like Mrs. J. P. Morgan, Mrs. Borden Harriman, Mrs. Henry Phipps, Mrs. James Roosevelt, and Mrs. E. H. Harriman used their visibility to publicly oppose jazz (Leonard, 1962:44). Less prominent women were also at the center of organized activity against jazz. Women from local clubs and organizations chaperoned dances and attended public clubs to ensure that jazz was not performed. The music section of the Federation of Women's Clubs even passed a resolution to

"annihilate" the new music. Most of this activity sought to monitor and stop the spread of jazz, advocating instead "traditional American music." Around 1925, Henry Ford staged a series of traditional folk dances to "counteract the evils of jazz dancing" (Leonard, 1962:44).

Opposition to jazz went beyond public monitoring and declarations. In 1922, the New York Legislature passed a bill regulating jazz music and dancing. By the end of the 1920s, such laws existed in at least 60 communities across the country, including such major cities as Detroit, Kansas City, and Philadelphia (Leonard, 1962:45).

In newspapers and journals of opinion, opponents tried to discredit jazz or at least define it as aesthetically inferior to European classical music and traditional American music. The *New York Times* simply ignored jazz, while celebrating classical and traditional music. Other writers described jazz as a dying fad or attempted to belittle the music and its followers.

Most of these strategies were short lived, and in the long run, they proved ineffective. The white social and music establishment eventually accepted jazz because of changes in the genre and the organization of the music business. The white middle-class musical establishment embraced swing, big band, and other forms of jazz-related concert music performed by and for whites. Acceptance among whites was also hastened by technological and marketing developments in radio, recordings, and film (Berger, 1947; Leonard, 1962). These developments made jazz more available and accessible to white audiences and to a limited extent reduced the fear and mystery about jazz.

What is significant about these early misguided and racist claims against jazz are the attempts by middle-class traditionalists to portray jazz as a threat to the social fabric, and especially to women and children who were seen as helpless against such a potent force. Opponents associated jazz with questionable personal morals, suspicious situations, and cultural inferiority. Furthermore, jazz was found wanting as art. Central to these criticisms was the fear that white, Protestant, middle-class life was under assault by ethnic immigrants, black migrants from the South, and the rapidly changing social scene. The tone and assumptions about popular music's harmful effects on society and its members continued in later campaigns against rock.

Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll: 1950s and 1960s

Attacks against popular music reappeared in the 1950s with the emergence of rock (I use the term as a generic category that includes rhythm and blues, rock, and other derived popular forms) (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977; Denisoff, 1975; Frith, 1981.) The social environment in which rock developed was volatile and quick-changing. The expanding postwar econ-

omy meant greater access, for more people, to the promise of the American dream (e.g. home ownership, education, and job training). This decade featured the beginning of Cold War rhetoric between the United States and the Soviet Union. The international Cold War was accompanied by domestic anti-Communist hysteria that culminated in the McCarthy hearings. The hearings created a climate of distrust, suspicion, and attacks on writers, entertainers, musicians, intellectuals, and anyone publicly critical of the United States.

In the 1950s, race relations returned to the forefront of America's social psyche with the birth of the modern civil rights movement. Based in the South, this movement challenged the social and legal norms that supported segregation and racial inequality. Through court battles, sit-ins, economic boycotts, and marches, the civil rights movement presented organized resistance to racial oppression.

The combined presence of television, the transistor radio, and the automobile represented a shift in the ways people experienced leisure and entertainment and produced a new conception of the cultural marketplace. Radio stations and recording companies increasingly distinguished popular audiences according to age, race, and income, rather than simply seeing them as an undifferentiated mass. Consequently, young people became an attractive economic market with distinctive habits, tastes, and practices. Simultaneously, young people began to exercise greater independence and control over their leisure, entertainment, social life, and tastes.

The conjuncture of black political agitation, youthful independence, and the Cold War hysteria, for some, signaled the unraveling of America's social and moral fabric. With its forceful new expressiveness, rock became the visible target of those most threatened. Antirock crusaders focused on the music's origins in black America, its alleged negative effects on the values and character of young people, rock's link to drugs, its antireligious qualities, and its use by Communists bent on destroying the political and social fabric of America.

Rock's opponents came from both inside and outside the popular music industry. Within the music business, the objections to rock were both aesthetic and economic. Dominant musicians, songwriters, and producers such as Frank Sinatra, Alec Wilder, and Mitch Miller challenged rock's musical integrity. Sinatra complained that rock, "was the most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear," and that "by means of its almost imbecilic reiterations and sly—lewd—in plain fact dirty lyrics . . . [rock] manages to be the martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth" (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977:46).

Large recording companies, committed to the largely white, middle-class-directed popular music of the period, wanted to maintain the stylistic and economic hegemony they enjoyed. Because they neither liked rock very much nor were prepared for its popularity, many record executives initially

tried to ignore the new music (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977). As rock grew more popular and independent recording companies producing rock became commercially successful, major companies softened their objections and began to fill their rosters with rock artists.

The most visible and organized public objections to rock came from radical right-wing political and religious groups, such as the White Citizens Council, the Ku Klux Klan, the Christian Crusade, the John Birch Society, Citizens for Conservative Action, and the Young Republicans (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977; Denisoff, 1975). Their objections were often passionate, moral in tone, and deeply rooted in religious, political, and racist rhetoric. For instance, some opponents warned that rock, because of its origins in black blues and rhythm and blues, challenged the society's existing racial norms (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977; Denisoff, 1975). The idea of black musicians and entertainers as appealing heroes for white youth was simply unacceptable to these groups. A handbill distributed by the White Citizens Council of Greater New Orleans illustrates the convergence of racist, political, and moral rhetoric: "The screaming, idiotic words, and savage music of these records are undermining the morals of our white youth *in America*. Call the advertisers of the radio stations that play this type of music and complain to them! Don't Let Your Children Buy, or Listen To, These Records" (Denisoff, 1975:381—emphasis in original). Groups like the White Citizens Council also linked rock and roll to the developing Southern civil rights movement.

Concerns with race and politics also led early opponents to charge that rock was the result of Communist efforts to disrupt the American social and political system. As late as 1965, writer David Noebel claimed that the Beatles could potentially tear apart the social fabric: "Cybernetic warfare is the ultimate weapon and we can't afford one nerve-jammed child. Throw your Beatle rock and roll records in the city dump. We have been unashamed of being labeled a Christian nation, let's make sure four mop-headed anti-Christ beatniks don't destroy our children's emotional and mental stability and ultimately our nation" (Denisoff, 1975:385).

An equally volatile basis of opposition linked rock and sex. Songs like "Work With Me Annie," and "Roll All Night Long" were imputed to cause moral corruption in innocent, vulnerable white youth. Concern about rock's sexuality extended beyond song titles and lyrics to the dances and physical expressions of performers. In a much publicized case, the nationally televised "Ed Sullivan Show" refused to show Elvis Presley below the waist because Presley's movements were thought to be sexually suggestive.

Where opposition to the racial and sexual associations of rock came primarily from right-wing crusaders, rock's link with drugs generated even wider opposition. This concern peaked in the mid-to-late 1960s, when the Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, and the Jefferson Airplane—among others—drew criticism. Songs like "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds,"

"White Rabbit," "One Toke Over The Line," "Purple Haze," and "Strawberry Fields Forever" stimulated the wrath of religious and civic organizations (Denisoff, 1975).

Prominent public figures spoke out against rock. Congressman James Utt, California Superintendent of Schools Max Rafferty, and entertainer Art Linkletter condemned rock's association with drugs (Denisoff, 1975). In a famous speech attacking popular culture in general, and rock's association with drugs in particular, Vice President Spiro Agnew said: "But in too many of the lyrics, the message of the drug culture is purveyed. We should listen more carefully to popular music, because at its best it is worthy of more serious appreciation, and at its worst it is blatant drug-culture propaganda" (Denisoff and Peterson, 1972:308). Later in the same speech, Agnew was more direct: "There are scores of such songs: the titles themselves often whisper or shout the message. Listen to these: "The Acid Queen," "Eight Miles High," "Couldn't Get High," "Don't Step on the Grass, Sam," and "Stoned Woman." These songs present the use of drugs in such an attractive light that for the impressionable, "turning on" becomes the natural and even approved thing to do." (Denisoff and Peterson, 1972:309).

Claims against rock, whether they were sexual, racial, political, or drug-related, insisted that the music had harmful effects on young people's morals and character. In their extreme form, these claims assumed that rock had hypnotic powers that young minds could not resist. According to Bob Larson, author of a religious antirock book: "The same coarse bodily motions which lead African dancers into a state of frenzy are present in modern dances. It is only logical, then, that there must also be a correlation in the potentiality of demons gaining possessive control of a person through the medium of the beat" (quoted in Denisoff, 1975:391).

Tactics used to translate these claims into action varied. In the late 1950s, Congressional hearings focused on payola (recording companies bribed radio stations to play certain records). Both the timing of the hearings and their support by antirock forces meant that the hearings became a part of the attack against rock (Chapple and Garofalo 1977). Other actions against rock included arresting performers for obscenity, organizing antirock rallies, passing local ordinances against rock, and warnings by governmental agencies (e.g., Federal Communications Commission [FCC]). In more extreme cases, segregationist, church, and civic organizations staged boycotts, burned records and rock groups in effigy, circulated petitions and handbills, and monitored juke boxes and radio stations (Denisoff, 1975).

Right-wing organizations used opinion magazines and books to publicize their antirock position, giving the issue a temporary veneer of academic legitimacy and respectability. The titles of antirock books reveal conservative religious and political concerns. For instance, Bob Larson, a religious crusader, wrote at least four books, including *Rock and Roll: The Devil's Diversion* and *Hippies, Hindus, and Rock and Roll,* and David

Noebel wrote: *Rhythm, Riots and Revolution* and *Communism, Hypnotism, and the Beatles: Analysis of Communist Uses of Music* (Denisoff, 1975).

These claims and activities reached their peak in the middle 1960s. Periodic public opposition to rock occurred in the 1970s, but mainly in the form of burning disco records. Not until the middle 1980s did another major offensive against rock surface. Gone was the overt racism that characterized the 1920s and 1950s campaigns. The moral outrage against the sexual and illicit drug themes in rock remained. And a new emphasis on violence in rock music appeared. Perhaps most curious was the social and political quarters from which this new opposition to rock music came—middle-class parents.

Rate the Record: The 1980s

In the 1980s, claims against popular music stressed rock's reliance on violence and sex, its role in the spread of harmful values, and the dangers it posed to helpless (and potentially corruptible) women and children. This time, the major organized opposition to popular music was the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC). The PMRC's claims against popular music emerged in a conservative political and social climate which also produced law and order campaigns, as well as movements attacking pornography, child molestation and missing children, violence against women, abortion, and teenage pregnancy. Antidrug campaigns appeared in the media, as did pronouncements by politicians and public leaders about the erosion of moral and educational standards of American youth. By the middle of the decade, the AIDS crisis accelerated the concerns with drugs and sex. This constellation of factors led many to believe that American society was spinning dangerously out of control. It was time, they argued, to exert social and moral control in all areas, including popular music.

PMRC Claims

PMRC was organized in April, 1985, when the wives of several prominent politicians and government officials met to complain about the music to which their children were exposed. Tipper Gore, wife of Senator Albert Gore, was offended by lyrics from "Darling Nikki" by Prince. Susan Baker, wife of Treasury Secretary James Baker, was alarmed that her young son had easy access to Madonna's "Like a Virgin." PMRC president Pam Howar heard what she considered questionable material during an aerobics class (U.S. Congress: Senate, 1985; Zucchino, 1985).

The PMRC initially enlisted the support of the National Parent Teachers Association (NPTA). [The NPTA had tried unsuccessfully to mount a similar campaign a year earlier. In June 1984, the NPTA, representing some 5.6

million members, adopted a resolution expressing concern about sexually explicit lyrics and violence in popular music and called for recording companies to label their products and indicate the nature of questionable content. In November 1984, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) acknowledged the NPTA's concern but little more.]

PMRC made its initial demands to the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), recording companies, and the RIAA. Their demands were straightforward: The recording industry should make song lyrics available to the public, and the industry should establish uniform guidelines for rating records (with codes such as "X" for explicit lyrics, "V" for violence, and "O" for occult) (Cocks, 1985). PMRC also proposed that record retailers place offensive album covers behind counters, that a system be established for rating videos and concerts, and that radio stations be given sheets detailing song lyrics (Isler, 1985). Finally, the PMRC urged recording companies to reevaluate the contracts of acts that violated public morality.

Industry Response

In response to PMRC demands, Edward O. Fritts, President of NAB, wrote to over 800 radio and television station group owners warning them about the growing public controversy over music lyrics. Fritts also sent a more direct letter to record company executives requesting that record companies provide lyric sheets to help broadcasters evaluate content.

RIAA President Stanley Gortikov responded to the PMRC proposals in a 10-page reply to PMRC President Pam Howar. Gortikov indicated that a general warning label about album content ("Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics") was as far as the RIAA would go with respect to PMRC proposals. Confident that such a label was enough, Gortikov noted, "several of your requests involve complexities that would make compliance impossible. However, I think you would find that the basic essence of what you are seeking will now be satisfied by definitive moves by our industry companies" (U.S. Congress: Senate, 1985:98). Gortikov's tone was conciliatory and cooperative. By acknowledging "the legitimate concerns of parents" he gave the impression that the RIAA and the PMRC were not far apart.

The RIAA firmly rejected PMRC demands for a comprehensive rating system, reevaluations of artists' contracts, and lyric sheets for retailers and broadcasters. From the RIAA's perspective, the complex structure of the recording industry and the decentralization of control over publishing, recording, retail, broadcasting, and distribution simply made the PMRC demands unreasonable (U.S. Congress: Senate, 1985:100). The RIAA also rejected most of the PMRC demands because its members felt that a very small proportion of recorded music contained sexually explicit and objectionable lyrics. Most members, therefore, felt the PMRC agenda amounted to overkill.

The PMRC rejected the counterproposals by RIAA. Its major objection was that a uniform label did no go far enough. The PMRC insisted on a stricter, more explicit ratings system, and they remained committed to establishing an independent panel to set uniform industry standards. Not surprisingly, Gortikov was troubled when the PMRC hastily rejected the RIAA proposals. He believed they did not appreciate the structural complexity of the recording industry and the problems this structure posed for implementing the PMRC agenda.

The PMRC and RIAA proposals and counterproposals demonstrate that control over the language and framework of claims can be significant. These early negotiations established the framework for claims and counterclaims about the problem.

The Senate Hearings

The PMRC used letters, slide shows, and mailings to publicize their claims and enlist support. However, their most effective tactic was to get the United States Senate to hold public hearings on popular music. On September 19, 1985, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee held hearings that brought together most of the major interests involved: the PMRC, the RIAA, musicians, broadcasters, the press, educators, the public, and the U.S. Senators. (Notably absent were the young people allegedly influenced by the music.) It was the first time that the charges and countercharges were aired before an official agency and the general public. In short, the hearings and the subsequent press coverage exposed the issue of popular music as a public problem and gave it official legitimacy.

PMRC founder, Susan Baker, began PMRC testimony by associating teenage pregnancy, suicide, and rape with offensive lyrics and song titles:

> The material we are concerned about cannot be compared with "Louie Louie," Cole Porter, Billie Holiday, et cetera. Cole Porter's "The birds do it, the bees do it" can hardly be compared with WASP, "I F-u-c-k like a beast." There is a new element of vulgarity and violence toward women that is unprecedented. . . . Some rock artists actually seem to encourage teen suicide. Ozzie Osbourne sings "Suicide Solution." Blue Oyster Cult sings "Don't Fear the Reaper." AC/DC sings "Shoot to Thrill" (U.S. Congress: Senate, 1985:11–12).

PMRC witnesses, including Tipper Gore, voiced their outrage and stressed the legitimacy of their demands. Their graphic language and passionate rhetoric personalized the issues and made them accessible to the Committee members. Moreover, PMRC definitions of the problem incorporated a broad range of issues: violence against women, pornography, teenage suicide and pregnancy, child rights, consumer protection, and industry self-regulation.

By the hearings, the RIAA had yielded to PMRC requests as much as it could without jeopardizing its own economic interests. The RIAA wanted to ensure passage of "The Home Audio Recording Act," a tax bill that was before Congress. This RIAA-sponsored bill called for a 10–25% tax on the public sale of blank audio tape and tape recorders—the proceeds to go to RIAA members. Some PMRC leaders were married to powerful men who could affect the fate of this bill. This situation put RIAA lobbyists in a delicate position; they did not want to appear insensitive to the issues raised by the PMRC (Marsh, 1985). In his testimony, RIAA President Gortikov had to walk a fine line, indicating a level of industry support for PMRC's proposals, while containing his impatience with the whole affair.

Gortikov's testimony portrayed the recording industry as sympathetic and willing to respond to issues raised by the PMRC. He emphasized the fact that record manufacturers had agreed to use parental warning labels. But this was where Gortikov drew the line. Gortikov made the PMRC part of the issue. He defined the PMRC's understanding of the popular music industry as inaccurate, limited, and potentially damaging. Hence, Gortikov tried to shift the terms of the debate.

The PMRC framed its claims in the rhetoric of morality, sacred values, social responsibility, and good taste. The RIAA's responses focused on legal, technical, and economic issues and implied that the RIAA shared the PMRC's concerns about morality and social responsibility.

A third group in the controversy—musicians—disagreed with both the RIAA and the PMRC. The musicians who testified defined the PMRC as illegitimate. Frank Zappa, John Denver, and Dee Snider concentrated on the question of censorship. They cautioned both the Committee and the PMRC against action that would limit creative freedom and restrict free speech. By making the PMRC members' misguided intentions and naiveté the issue, Zappa and Snider antagonized various Committee members. Remarks were exchanged that revealed the Committee members' sympathy with the PMRC and their claims.

The musicians recommended strategies to make more information available to consumers without jeopardizing personal freedom. They suggested that record companies provide lyric sheets to potential consumers and urged parents to monitor their children's music.

Beyond the Hearings

Following the hearings, the RIAA refused to accede to further; an RIAA statement declared: "The RIAA and PMRC [have] nothing left to talk about. . . ." There would be "no more concessions [and] the PG label is as far as the industry is willing to go" (Zucchino, 1985:66). By November 1985, the PMRC accepted the RIAA's original offer to voluntarily use the label "Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics."

After the hearings, musicians and artists organized opposition to the PMRC (Marsh, 1985). Troubled by what they regarded as RIAA acquiescence to pressures from the PMRC, musicians formed the Musical Majority. The Musical Majority did not view the PMRC as a consumer movement, but as a dangerous move toward censorship (Schipper and DiMauro 1985). Support for the Musical Majority came from artists, managers, music publishers, publicists, members of the film industry, and public officials (Isler, 1985; Marsh, 1985). Additional opposition to the PMRC came from the National Association of Record Manufacturers (NARM), which called for self-regulation (Schipper and DiMauro, 1985). Record retailers joined manufacturers in calling for an in-house monitoring system where record companies would alert retailers to controversial products (Schipper and DiMauro, 1985).

Other posthearing developments demonstrate splintering activity and the emergence of new claims (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). For example, there were local ordinances and proposals for state legislatures to establish systems to monitor, label, and prosecute violators (*Variety*, 1986). No longer concerned about getting their issues to the public, the PMRC focused on extending their memberships, solidifying the organization, and monitoring the music industry (DiMauro, 1986).

The PMRC continued to assert claims in other ways. For instance, a PMRC letter of complaint to the FCC on behalf of an offended radio listener led to an FCC warning for KCSB-FM, a University of California radio station (Pareles, 1987). PMRC influence was also prominent in a California case charging the Dead Kennedys' lead singer with distributing harmful materials (a sexually explicit poster) to a minor (Biafra, 1987; Pareles, 1987). Ironically, the album contained a warning sticker. The PMRC issued a public statement in support of prosecution by the state of California. (Biafra was eventually acquitted.) With their new emphasis on monitoring violators and pushing for consumer information, PMRC seems to have entered a stage of stabilization, even institutionalization (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977).

Popular Music and Social Problems

These three cases illustrate the persistence of a moral framework within which the popular music problem has been constructed. Issues, definitions, arguments, and tactics found in the 1920s and the 1950s reappeared in the contemporary opposition to popular music. For example, claims-makers in all three periods used the image of innocent, helpless victims (mainly women and children) besieged by harmful, influential, popular music that threatened society's moral fabric. Like the middle-class traditionalists of the 1920s, or right-wing extremists of the 1950s, the PMRC defined offensive popular music as a threat to moral values and character. Where syncopated rhythms and expressive dance were the focus of attacks in the 1920s,

the PMRC attacked lyrics, album covers, and video images. Rather than blame blacks, immigrants, or Communists, as opponents did in earlier campaigns, the PMRC criticized irresponsible artists and insensitive recording companies. In this sense the campaign by the PMRC was more sophisticated. Their claims involved a more complicated set of issues, and they were presented in terms that members of all political persuasions found difficult to address. Although the easy label of "conservative" was applied to PMRC members, they found support among liberals and occasionally those on the left (Landsberg, 1987; Stern, 1986).

This shift reflects the evolution of contemporary popular music. As the lyrical and visual representations in popular music have become more explicit, attacks against them have become more focused. As society in general and the popular music industry in particular have become more complex, so, too, have the focus and claims of opponents of rock. By the 1980s, musicians, the public, the recording industry, politicians, parents, and the clergy were all concerned with the impact of popular music. They disagreed over the causes and approaches to address the problem.

The opposition to popular music derives from existing social and political debates in the general society. The persistence of controversies over popular music forms part of a broader political and cultural debate over the moral order (Duster, 1970). In the 1920s, critics denounced jazz as part of the erosion of traditional values caused by the influx of immigrants, the celebration of consumption, and the impact of industrialization and urbanization. In the 1950s, right-wing political and religious extremists located their opposition to rock within the broader anti-Communist and anti-integrationist discourse. Similarly the PMRC adopted issues and symbols from the feminist, child-rights, and antipornography movements, as well as profamily ideology (Stengel, 1986). The selective use and representation of symbols from these issues gave the PMRC's claims broader appeal and led to a mixture of support (Marshall, 1985; Stern, 1986). By posing the issue in terms of individualism, social responsibility, and child welfare, the PMRC laid claim to a broad range of compelling images and symbols.

The struggle over popular music historically has involved attempts by parents, adults, the middle-class, and music manufacturers to control, if not music's meanings, then its production and consumption. But the content, meaning, and experience of popular music are no longer easily controlled. People, especially the young, exert greater control over their musical tastes and experiences (Frith, 1981, 1986). When seen in a broader historical context, the periodic appearance of the popular music problem is an attempt to assert moral control over a world thought to be out of control.

References

Biafra, Jello
1987 "The Far Right and the Censorship of Music." *Harvard Law Review* 84:10.

Berger, Morroe
1947 "Jazz: Resistence to the Diffusion of a Culture Pattern." *Journal of Negro History* 32:461–494.

Chapple, Steve, and Reebee Garofalo
1977 *Rock N' Roll is Here to Pay*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Cocks, Jay
1985 "Rock Is a Four Letter Word." *Time* (September 30):70–71.

Denisoff, R. Serge
1975 *Solid Gold: The Popular Record Industry*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books.

Denisoff, R. Serge, and Richard A. Peterson (eds.)
1972 *The Sounds Of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company.

DiMauro, Phil
1986 "PMRC Still Watching Industry; Indie Label Draw Ire." *Variety* (April 23):241.

Duster, Troy
1970 *The Legislation of Morality*. New York: The Free Press.

Frith, Simon
1986 "Art versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music." *Media, Culture and Society*. 8:263–279.
1981 *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock N' Roll*. New York: Pantheon.

Gusfield, Joseph
1981 *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1963 *Symbolic Crusades: Status, Politics, and the American Temperance Movement*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Isler, Scott
1985 "Parent Terror." *Musician* 86 (December):57.

Landsberg, Michelle
1987 "Free-Market Follies." *The Nation* (July 18–25):10.

Leonard, Neil
1962 *Jazz and the White American: The Acceptance of a New Art Form*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marsh, Dave
1985 "Sympathy for the Devil." *Village Voice* (October 8):13.

Marshall, Susan

1985 "Ladies against Women: Mobilization Dilemmas of Antifeminist Movements." *Social Problems* 32:348.

Pareles, Jon
1987 "A Case against Censoring Rock Lyrics." *New York Times* (May 3):Arts Section.

Schipper, Henry, and Phil DiMauro
1985 "Agents, Managers, and Artists Form Group vs. Lyric Ratings." *Variety* (September 18):73.

Spector, Malcolm, and John I. Kitsuse
1977 *Constructing Social Problems*. Menlo Park, CA: Cummings.

Stengel, Richard
1986 "Sex Busters." *Time* 128 (July 21):12.

Stern, Susan
1986 "Women Disagree on the Role Porn Plays." *Oakland Tribune* (July 16):1.

Sussman, Warren I.
1984 *Culture as History*. New York: Pantheon.

Toll, Robert C.
1982 *The Entertainment Machine: American Show Business in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.

U.S. Congress: Senate
1985 "Record Labeling." Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. 99th Congress, 1st Session. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Variety
1986 "Maryland Porn Rock Bill Dies in Senate" (April 9):113.

Zucchino, David
1985 "Big Brother Meets Twisted Sister." *Rolling Stone Magazine* (November 7):9.

Social Problems and Social Issues

An Aldine de Gruyter Series of Texts and Monographs

SERIES EDITORS:

John I. Kitsuse
University of California, Santa Cruz

Joseph W. Schneider
Drake University

Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems
Joel Best (editor)

Constructing Social Problems
Malcolm Spector and *John I. Kitsuse*

Social Problems of Vietnam Veterans
Wilbur J. Scott