Tiya Chokhani

Professor Carlos

TA: Jesus Flores

Musicology 5: History of Rock & Roll

December 5, 2022

Final Paper:

“American Idiot” by Green Day is the title track in their seventh studio album released on September 21, 2004. The song was written by Billie Joe Armstrong, recorded by Green Day, and released by Reprise Records. The album was nominated for six Grammy Awards in 2005, including Album of the Year, and won one for Best Rock Album. The song “American Idiot was even ranked #47 by The Rolling Stones among the 100 best songs of the 2000s. The single peaked at #61 on the Billboard Hot 100 and ranked the #13 Single of the Decade by Rolling Stone magazine in 2009.

Fear and xenophobia are key elements in "American Idiot." The band talks about how misinformation is being used by the media to incite paranoia in a post - 9/11 society. It’s a deeply political track that has cemented itself on every significant protest music playlist. The song "American Idiot" was published during the 2004 presidential election, in which George W. Bush was elected as the President of the United States of America for a second term. This song serves as both a summary of the album's key concepts and a sort of warning to Americans as a whole: resist the urge to become Idiot America by retaining your individuality. Geen Day wasn't afraid to explore their old - school punk rock roots even when it wasn't trendy in 2004 and it paid off.

True to its pop - punk style “American Idiot” is fast - paced (about 180 - 190 tempo) and the only instruments used are electric guitar, bass, drums, and vocals. It starts off strong with a 4 bar typical rock & roll electric guitar intro. It follows an ABAB verse - chorus form. A simple yet captivating chord structure opens the song; naturally, bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tré Cool provide a wonderful rhythmic accompaniment as well. The song's musical style doesn't veer too far from this base, but some great syncopation and a sick guitar solo sure make it pop. The song's words and voice are what give it such a strong and moving feel. The drums create a thunderous vibe that lets you know this song is an anthem for the album. With a deep and hefty bass, severely distorted guitars, and thundering drums, Armstrong, Dirnt, and Cool all managed to pull off a simple yet great tune. The chorus is fantastic since the lyrics make references to the characters' backgrounds and personalities. Billie Joe Armstrong, a singer/guitarist, enters the song with his signature tone and delivery, delivering his orders with vigor and a lovely demeanor. Armstrong addresses the problems of President George W. Bush's administration as well as the general complacency and judgemental attitude of Americans while Cool's lone percussion leads the assault. From the confrontational opening to the latter blows like "Well maybe I'm the faggot America," every sentence perfectly captures how bigoted, impressionable, and just plain terrified American folks were in the wake of the events of September 11th, 2001.

When compared to earlier rock songs like “Surfin’ USA” by the Back Boys we can see how much rock & roll has evolved and how the sound differs. “Surfin’ USA” has a simpler message and isn’t so political whereas “American Idiot” directly comments on the political state of the economy. Rock and Roll songs with political messages become increasingly common after 1975. While “Surfin’ USA” is closer to Doo-wop and folk style of music as it was released in 1963, when the teeny boppers were big while “American Idiot” is more punk rock and alternative as it was relased in 2004.