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On: 08 September 2011, At: 02:14

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Popular Music and Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpms20>

The politics of rock

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Available online: 24 Jul 2008

To cite this article: Larry Jaffee (1987): The politics of rock, *Popular Music and Society*, 11:4, 19-30

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007768708591294>

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The Politics of Rock

Larry Jaffee

"If you grew up in the sixties, you grew up with the war on TV every night, a war that your friends were involved in. I want to do this song tonight for all the young people out there, because I remember when me and my friends were 17 or 18, we didn't have much of a chance to think about how we felt about a lot of things. The next time they're going to be looking at you, and you are going to need a lot of information to know what you're gonna want to do. Because in 1985, blind faith in your leaders, or anything, will get you killed..."

—Bruce Springsteen introducing his live version of "War"¹

Popular music has always consisted mainly of silly love songs. Pick the top 100 singles from any week in the past three decades, and you won't find more than a half-dozen tunes that stray from: a) falling in or out of love with the opposite sex; or b) the pleasures of sex.

That is why the rare song that makes a political statement or deals with a social problem is such a refreshing revelation. And when it cracks mainstream radio's Top 10, such as Bruce Springsteen's recent remake of Edwin Starr's 1970 anti-Vietnam hit "War," in which he pretty much tells his draftable fans not to be taken in by Washington's lies, it seems almost like a miracle, compared to the innocuous crap (content-wise) that usually pervades the airwaves.

Over the past six years, the Reagan Administration has provided enough material to fill hundreds of albums, but only a handful of mainstream pop or rock songwriters have picked up on the dubious ongoing of the Oval Office. On the otherhand, there are plenty of independent artists working in various musical fringe genres—punk, hardcore, reggae, rap, funk, folk—who continually produce "non-commercial" works that "say something" to small audiences.

But lately more and more "hits" have dealt explicitly with political themes, reflecting that mainstream musicians are taking notice of the people getting killed daily in South Africa, Central America and the Middle East, as well as the "Star Wars" and nuclear arms buildup. Now that the Teflon presidency has been tarnished and become an easy target, there has been a resurgence of "agitpop" swinging to the left.

Protest rock in the early Bob Dylan—mode grew out of vogue by the early '70s, which is surprising in light of Watergate's effect on the country. With the exception of the "No Nukes" movement in 1979, politics did not make much of an impact on U.S. pop and rock music during most of the decade.

Rock's recent politicization can be partly attributed to Bob Geldof getting a bunch of British musicians together in November 1984 to do something about Ethiopian famine. Rock 'n' roll suddenly became socially conscious. Inspired by Geldof's "Band Aid" record, several dozen American singers banded together for USA for Africa, which spurred Live Aid, and later Farm Aid.

The more politically active participants (i.e., Bruce Springsteen, Jackson Browne, John Cougar Mellencamp, Sting, et al...) used the new-found philanthropic spirit for more polemic causes, such as Artists United Against Apartheid's "Sun City" and Amnesty International benefit concerts.

Such cause commitment began to resemble the end-the-war movement fostered by 1960s rock musicians. Of course, there are huge differences between 1960s and 1980s rock activism. In the same way that Vietnam protests and hippies changed popular culture then, MTV and its unabashed consumerism have largely impacted American society.

In 1967, American youth were getting drafted and killed. Vietnam was such a unifying issue that it was possible for rock anthems to turn into hits while asking to "please come to Chicago" or fight back about the "four dead in Ohio."

In 1987, most young people don't care much about American militaristic imperialism in Central America. For them, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Libya, South Africa and Lebanon are faraway places that they and their friends will never see. Partying and making money are priorities. And nuclear destruction is merely an esoteric concept that can't possibly happen. As Timbuk 3's recent hit stated, "Life's so great, I gotta wear shades..."²

Today's aspiring yuppies also can't live without their MTV, so progressive-thinking rock stars such as Springsteen and Browne realize that music videos provide an opportunity to not only sell records but also espouse political statements.

Indeed, a picture, especially a series of juxtaposed graphic images, is worth a lot more than a thousand words. As the details of Iran/Contragate unravelled, a video by the widely popular group Genesis catapulted the song "Land of Confusion"³ into the Top 10. The video portrays Reagan as a feeble-minded baffoon who wakes up from a nightmare about his job, and accidentally pushes the "nuke" instead of "nurse" button next to his bed.

The video was produced by the British political satire company Splitting Image known for grotesque but lifelike puppets of world leaders and celebrities. One wonders whether a record company would fund such a provocative (and expensive) clip if it was requested by an artist not deemed a commercial money-maker like Genesis.

Making money has always been the main consideration with the corporate rock industry, which operates no differently than any other capitalistic business. The bottom line is the most important consideration, and whether a record is "commercial" often overrides a song's aesthetic merits.

For the past decade, six giant entertainment conglomerates—CBS, Warner Communications, Polygram, Capitol/EMI, RCA and MCA—have accounted for about 85 percent of the U.S. recorded music market. With their high overhead, they claim they cannot survive without huge hits. Such pressure is often bothersome to musicians who feel that the music is more important than how many records are sold.⁴

And it's almost impossible to sell vast quantities of "product," as the marketing executives put it, without mass radio play. As a result, record companies suggest to their artists they think twice about music that doesn't have the potential of selling millions. Translation: don't make waves and don't make political records.

Of course, one reason the record companies have that attitude is that they know ratings-and-advertising-revenue-obsessed radio stations are reluctant to play anything controversial, which explains the commercial failure of Artists United Against Apartheid's "Sun City."⁵

Aside from urban markets, most radio programmers in the U.S. passed on the record in late 1985, claiming the funk-based song was "too black" for their mainly rock white formats, even with Springsteen, Bob Dylan, U2's Bono, Lou Reed, Hall & Oates, Peter Gabriel and other rock heavyweights present.

But what radio programmers were really saying was that they were not comfortable playing a song that *blares*: "Our government tells us we're doing all we can/Constructive engagement is Ronald Reagan's plan/Meanwhile people are dying and giving up hope/This quiet diplomacy ain't nothing but a joke/... Why are we always on the wrong side?"

Since rap music proved to be "commercial" in 1986 with Run DMC (who sang on "Sun City") crossing over into the Top 10, one can only conclude that the lyrical content precluded it from becoming a hit, since "it has a good beat and you can dance to it."

(Ironically, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting decided not to acquire for its affiliates the documentary, "The Making of Sun City," because it was "too commercial," "too self-serving" of the musicians and violated the network's "journalistic integrity." The decision seems

more to have to do with the non-profit's recent move away from liberal ideology to not jeopardize corporate underwriting. A few PBS stations have since broken national policy, and televised the film on their own.)

Little Steven Van Zandt, the leader of the "Sun City" project, had hoped that radio listeners would be able to decide for themselves about the political statement the song made. "Sun City" had been preceded by several other anthem-like, anti-apartheid songs, such as Gil Scott-Heron's "Johannesburg" (1975); Gabriel's "Biko" (1979); and Special AKA's "Free Nelson Mandela" (1982). But those songs were known only to a select few listeners, and rarely played on anything but college radio stations which generally stray further from the "safe" musical flock (i.e., the Whitney Houstons, the Lionel Richies, the Billy Joels) than do their commercial counterparts.

Whereas FM radio stations from the late '60s through the early '80s mostly played album-oriented rock (AOR) that tended to feature long-playing cuts and not short, catchy singles, the past 5 years have seen the rise of the contemporary hit radio (CHR) format that concentrates on a tightly rotated list of only blockbuster smashes, resembling the AM radio of yesteryear. FM radio playlists, once the renegade of the airwaves, have sadly reverted to "the hit parade" for the masses and middle America, thus not leaving much hope for political anthems.

The format change has been a difficult transition for someone like Jackson Browne, who still has a large following, experiences no problem filling hockey arenas during concert tours and used to get played on FM radio. Commercial radio's snubbing of his last album, 'Lives In The Balance', which harshly repudiated U.S. involvement in Central America, prompted him to take promotional matters into his own hands.

Eleven months after the album was first released and declared just about commercially dead by his record company Elektra/Asylum, Browne personally funded a video for the title track, which lyrically pulled no punches: "You know you've seen it before/when a government lies to its people/and the country is drifting toward war/On the radio talk shows and on TV/you hear one thing again and again/how the USA stands for freedom/and we've come to the aid of a friend/But who are the ones we call our friends/these governments that kill their own..."

Elektra/Asylum vice president Mike Bone told Rolling Stone the label granted Browne's request to release the song as a single because "Jackson believed so strongly in this, and politically speaking, he's hit the nail right on the head."⁶ But, interestingly, the label wasn't willing to fit the bill for the video.

AOR and college radio stations were serviced with a 12-inch version of the track, along with a letter from Browne stating his hope that the song would encourage listeners to "think about what is happening in

Central America and examine closely what they are being told by our government and the major news media."

Despite being rereleased during the Iran/Contragate revelations, the single, which musically doesn't stray from Browne's trademark sound that has worked for him so well in the past, failed to make a dent in the charts. Hence, one can only conclude that radio figured that it's best to leave the political reporting to the news media. The "Lives In The Balance" video, while getting some showings on MTV, otherwise received limited television distribution, which isn't surprising since radio and video playlists usually program the same hits.

In a discussion of political music's commercial viability, Springsteen, arguably the country's biggest music star, is a special case. Like most multi-platinum artists, he's virtually assured of airplay for anything put out under his name. Even though he played a prominent role in "Sun City," it still wasn't his record and the song's funk rhythm sounded much different than any of his music.

As an unofficial spokesman for the underclass, Springsteen packs a lot of influence with the average blue-collar Joe. He genuinely takes an interest in the disenfranchised who occupy many of his songs, as evidenced by his numerous personal donations to such causes as striking miners or helping the homeless when his tour brings him to a community-in-need.

But politics have been something of a dilemma for Springsteen, whose songs are often misinterpreted by listeners. The title track of his mega-seller "Born In The USA" became a patriotic anthem coveted by Madison Avenue and even Reagan's reelection committee during the 1984 campaign. The song is about an embittered Vietnam veteran who can't find a job.

Springsteen wisely turned down Reagan, but did so without explanation. From a leftist perspective, that's a shame because as a populist media phenomenon, he reaches more people than any other entertainer.

Fortunately, his live version of "War" leaves no ambiguity to what he's talking about. But it's interesting to note that most CHR radio stations played the shorter version without his pointed spoken introduction that was sure to offend conservative, pro-administration advertisers who might pull lucrative spots.

It's also important to note that if anyone other than Springsteen released "War" as a single in 1986, the song would probably never even make the charts, let alone hit Top 10. In fact, on their debut album, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, a political/openly gay British band, recorded the same "War" but the record company did not release it as a single. On the album, Frankie's version preceded an original anti-

cold war song, "Two Tribes," which turned out to be the band's second U.S. Top 10 single.

The video for "Two Tribes," an MTV favorite, showed Reagan and Chernenko lookalikes in business suits slugging it out in a boxing ring, while representatives from other countries bet on the outcome of the world. The video's final image: a globe exploding.

A 12-inch remix version of "Two Tribes" opened with the following radio announcement by a Reagan soundalike in a casual tone: "If your grandmother or any other member of your family should die while in the shelter, put them outside but remember to tag them first for identification purposes..."

This version and the one that used Reagan's real offhand remark, "I've just signed legislation that bans Communism forever. The bombing begins in 10 minutes," were only heard in dance clubs and on the most adventurous radio stations.

Like Frankie & Co., several other British artists with gay followings, including Tom Robinson, Bronski Beat and The Smiths, have taken gay rights advocacy one political step further by recording songs with anti-oppression, anti-nuclear and anti-war themes between the tracks calling for sexual freedom.

Generally, British and European musicians are more vocal than their American counterparts about the danger of nuclear weapons since they're in the Soviet Union's backyard. For them, the possibility of a nuclear holocaust seems more real and is reflected in their lyrics.

In the same way that the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident in 1979 spurred Musicians United for Safe Energy's "No Nukes" movement in the U.S., Russia's Chernobyl disaster in April 1986 prompted several songs about the dangers of the atom, although the problem had evidently been on their minds for longer than that.

Six weeks after Chernobyl, Peter Gabriel during a globally televised Amnesty International concert told of an eerie truth about radiation: "Red rain is pouring down all over me... Well I've seen them in a sheltered place in this town/they tell you this rain can sting, and look down/there is no blood around see no sign of pain..."⁷

Billy Bragg, Britain's current favorite troubadour/socialist, on his latest album pointed out in "Help Save the Youth of America" that the entire world is susceptible to radiation: "And the incident at Tschernobyl proves/The world we live in is very small/And the cities of Europe have burned before/And they may yet burn again/And if they do I hope you understand/That Washington will burn with them..."⁸

About a year before Chernobyl, Sting, prophetically warned of nuclear energy's dangers in "We Work The Black Seam": "The build machines they can't control/And bury the waste in a great big hole/

Power was to become cheap and clean/Grimy faces were never seen/
But deadly for twelve thousand years is Carbon Fourteen.”⁹

In “Russians,” which became a Top 20 U.S. hit, Sting asks, “How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer’s toy.” Despite all of his good intentions advocating a non-nuclear future, he’s alarmingly antagonistic and blames cold war tensions on the Russians. If, as he writes, “there is no monopoly of common sense on either side of the political fence,” then why does Sting conclude, “What may save us, me and you/is that the Russians love their children too...” What about the Americans, Sting?

Falco, the zany Austrian who last year hit paydirt with his tongue-in-cheek “Rock Me Amadeus,” in late 1986 made fun of the Americans and Russians in “Cowboyz and Indianz”: “Red Square White House...Hard times for the Soviets/’cause Uncle Sam is playing space cadet/My Ronnie lies over the ocean/My Gorbachev lies under the sea/Let the force be with you/When the empire strikes.”

West Germany’s Nina Hagen, whose weird makeup seems like it could have resulted from nuclear fallout, in 1985 remained optimistic with “Russian Reggae”: “In the Soviet Union we celebrate reunion/ Because there will be no more fighting/And we will make the United Nations be part of our celebration/The Atomic War will never happen...”

But Nena, also West German, looking into the future in January 1984 found war inevitable in “99 Luftballons,” which reached number 2 on the U.S. charts: “It’s all over and I’m standing pretty in this dust that was a city/I can find a souvenir just to prove the war was here.”¹⁰

While nuclear destruction and U.S./U.S.S.R. relations are the most prevalent themes in British and Western European political rock songs, several other issues also have been recently addressed such as: the U.S. co-option of the U.K. (New Model Army’s “51 State” and The The’s “Heartland”); the U.S. invasion of Grenada (Elvis Costello’s “Peace In Our Time”: “Just another tiny island invaded when he’s got the whole world in his hands/And the heavyweight Champion fights in the International Propaganda Star Wars/There’s already one spaceman in the White House/What do you want another one for?”¹¹); the British/Argentine war over the Falkland Islands (Elvis Costello’s “Shipbuilding”); and Vietnam as a history lesson (Paul Hardcastle’s “19,” referring to the average age of the U.S. soldier in the war, whereas WWII was 26). Part of the reason why there are more political records in Britain is that the independent record scene there is as influential on sales and radio airplay as the major labels.

In the U.S., hundreds of independent, do-it-yourself labels also release what the major labels feel is not commercial, but they rarely make an impact on the mainstream. Subsequently, indies are the only outlets for

political musicians working in the fringe genres, such as punk, rap, folk, reggae, jazz and blues. Who else would release an album by inflammatory, hardcore punk groups called The Dead Kennedys (whose lead singer, Jello Biafra, beat an obscenity charge in California¹²) or Naked Raygun?"

It was indie Arhoolie Records that released the first Iran/Contragate record, "Gipper Gate Blues," by a Dixie jazz group called Barbara Dane and Her Goodtime Bonanza Band.¹³

Dane takes the role of the President ("While I was in the kitchen patting turkeys on the head/Colonel North was in the cellar shredding as fast as he could shred") handling the situation ("I'm trying to get the facts on this but I'm at a loss/After all this time in Washington, I thought I was the boss"). The chorus goes, "I haven't done anything wrong/And I'll never do it again."

While "Gipper Gate Blues" is clearly a novelty record, most of the recent indie hardcore punk records are serious, not satirical. For example, indie bands like Los Angeles' the Minutemen and Boston's The Proletariat recently released albums containing practically nothing but biting anti-Reagan, anti-war, and anti-Vietnam songs.

Of course, recording for a major label doesn't necessarily mean you've sold yourself to the devil. The big six in recent years have made efforts to cash in on the "cutting edge of rock," signing artists who they realize may never sell large quantities. With the right nurturing and packaging (refining the rough edges), the majors rationalize that commercial success will come eventually if the talent is there. For example, Warner Communications struck a distribution deal with Los Angeles indie Slash Records, which has since found national audiences for previous cult bands like Los Lobos, Del Fuegos, and the Bodeans.

Indie bands don't expect to sell a lot of records—which can be made for as little as several thousand dollars—only enough to break even and keep their cult fans and the odd college radio station satisfied. And some of them even scrape up enough money to produce low-budget videos, but are resigned to the fact that there aren't many outlets for such clips other than open-minded local UHF TV stations. However, national exposure is possible from cable television's USA Network, which regularly shows indie and major-label political videos on its late night, weekend "Night Flight" show.

Veteran musicians Bruce Cockburn and Gil Scott-Heron have proven that it's possible to work for major labels and still make leftist, anti-Reagan statements in non-commercial musical styles. Cockburn combines folk, rock and jazz over imagery-conjuring lyrics, while Scott-Heron plays a jazz-based funk with rap-like commentary.

Both have accepted the fact that they will always play to limited audiences because of their resistance to make commercial records. Yet both have released about 15 albums each, and tour regularly throughout the world.

Although Cockburn, a Canadian, has been making albums since 1969 for big record companies, including CBS, RCA, Island, A&M and MCA, his music only began to take a political slant after he visited Central America for the first time in 1979. Before then, he admits his albums were "fairly entertaining, but innocuous in the sense that they didn't have any political message."¹⁴

Since that first visit, Cockburn has been back twice to Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua and has "ended up being a quasi-spokesman for the Central American cause. I don't mind that and feel a certain responsibility to stick with it."

His Central American experiences have produced a number of graphic songs on his last three albums ('The Trouble With Normal', 'Stealing Fire', and 'World of Wonder') that depict brutal militarism against village peasants by U.S.-supported dictatorships.

"Big commercial success in the U.S. would be nice, but it doesn't prey on my mind. I already make a living. I don't need big-time success in the U.S. or anywhere else to survive. But, of course, it would be nice for the songs to reach more people," Cockburn lamented.

Similarly, Scott-Heron, an American based in Washington, D.C., is not hung up over mass success. "I hear it all of the time," he said. His response: "I'm giving you what I give you. Do whatever you can."¹⁵

Surprisingly, a capitalist like Clive Davis chose Scott-Heron in 1974 to be his first artist on his new label Arista, for which he immediately delivered topical commentaries like "H2O Watergate Blues" and "We Beg Your Pardon," while more recently covering the Reagan years with "B-Movie" and "Re-Ron."

"I've enjoyed my association with Clive," said Scott-Heron in August 1986. "He's one of the only major record executives who would have given us the opportunity he did back in '74 and stayed with us for the past 12 years. I think Arista has changed because of the influence of RCA (which bought it in 1985), and I'm not sure I'll be able to work there much longer. But I've never had anything against Clive because he gave me the opportunity that got my music all over the world."

Scott-Heron and Arista have since severed their relationship, and the musician is looking for a new contract. One wonders whether if it had anything to do with his last effort for the label: "It's a Re-Ron/Corruption, peace with Raymond Donovan and Edwin Meese/It's the Latin plan, here's our star, Macho Man/While 30 years after segregation was tried and banished from the nation/Here it comes again, discrimination/And the world's watching our reaction to the third world

because the stakes are the third world war/It's the Neutron bomb from Lebanon/It's the Gladiator Invader of Grenada/It's millions for El Salvador/And he's up to his keisters with the Sandinistas..."

Part of the problem with most political music is that artists like Cockburn and Scott-Heron are preaching to already committed audiences who are agreement with such sentiments. The key for political music to have an effect is to reach the unconverted. And the only way for that to happen is for radio programmers to loosen the reins on the playlists and turn into hits songs like "Re-Ron," "Sun City" and "Lives In The Balance."

The British punk band the Clash called their 1980 CBS album "Sandinista" long before anyone knew what it meant. One wonders whether the record company, today, would allow such a strong endorsement for the left, since the President says the contras are the good guys, the same kind of "freedom fighters" who founded America.

In contrast, Peter Gabriel favorably compared the American colonists fight for freedom against the British in 1776 to the Sandinistas overthrowing the military junta, during his 1986 tour, in which he didn't mince words to express his displeasure with the Reagan Administration meddling in Central America. But then again, Gabriel became such a big star last year that his record company wouldn't dare tell him to keep his political opinions to himself.

An interesting case study of how an American major label overreacts when faced with a record that doesn't pull any punches is the Ramones' "Bonzo Goes To Bitburg," referring to Reagan's May 1985 trip to the SS cemetery.¹⁶ Causing a stir on both sides of the Atlantic in the summer of 1985, the band's long-time record company Sire (whose parent is Warner Communications) would not release the British import single domestically for "financial" (they couldn't sell enough records) and "political" (they didn't want to make waves) reasons.

Even the New York-based band's English record company, indie Beggars Banquet, apparently succumbed to pressure, even though all of the attention boosted the song to number 5 on the independent British charts. The original record jacket photograph, showing Reagan addressing the crowd at the German cemetery, was covered by a white strip four weeks after its release.

Why all of the uproar? "Bonzo's" lyrics slammed Reagan in no uncertain terms: "When you go, turn yourself in/...don't become one of Hitler's children/...I see through you like cellophane..." Although the song was eventually released in the U.S. under a different title about a year later on the band's last album, Sire's initial timidity is still disheartening.

A reason why some of the record industry's more vocal members, such as Frank Zappa, were up in arms over the Parents Music Resource Center's proposal in 1985 to rate records for sex and violence is that they fear next on such a right-wing reactionary group's agenda will be leftist, anti-establishment lyrics.

"Parents should be alerted that there are some entertainers who manipulate the minds of young people with videos that seem to say 'better red than dead.' " said Cliff Kincaid, media-analyst of Accuracy In The Media.¹⁷ In AIM's weekly syndicated column in January, 1987, Kincaid chastised MTV for "serving as a propaganda vehicle" by showing the videos of Browne's "Lives In The Balance," Springsteen's "War" Genesis' "Land of Confusion," KBC Band's "America," and Dweezil (Frank's Son) Zappa's "Let's Talk About It." AIM objects to some of the videos' use of Vietnam battle scenes, which Kincaid called "heavy-handed—a crude and crass form of political propaganda." However, the organization is not calling for an MTV boycott or advocating for the censorship of the videos, he adds. (MTV senior vice president Lee Masters, responded, "all of the sudden there's a resurgence of issue-oriented music. Our role in that, if any, is to play great music that young people are interested in whether it has a message or not.")¹⁸

The mainstream record industry's uneasiness with political music became evident at 1987's Grammy Awards, in which the British band Simply Red performed before a black-tie and formal audience a song about poverty, "Money\$ Too Tight (to Mention)" instead of its big hit "Holding Back The Years," a ballad in the Whitney Houston vein. Lead singer Mick Hucknall pleaded during the chorus, "We're talking about Reaganomics." It was the only didactic statement made in an evening of mostly silly love songs, if you don't count Best New Artist Bruce Hornsby's obliquely, anti-racist hit "The Way It Is."¹⁹

At the 1985 and 1986 ceremonies, the record industry patted itself on the back for the fine job it did with USA for Africa and Live Aid. In 1987, after hearing Simply Red, they had to feel guilty for not doing more about social welfare in this country since the government has turned its back on the needy. It also probably inspired a few songwriters in the audience to write something with a bit more meaning in their next compositions.

Notes

¹Bruce Springsteen & The East Street Band, "War," Columbia single 38-06432 1986.

²Timbuk 3, "The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades," I.R.S. single 52940 1986.

³Genesis, "Land of Confusion," from Atlantic album 7 81641-4-E 1986.

⁴For more on the corporate aspects of the record industry, see Steve Chappel and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock 'N' Roll Is Here To Pay* (Nelson-Hall, Chicago, 1978), pp. 217-230.

⁵Artists United Against Apartheid, "Sun City," Manhattan 1985. Also, Little Steven's 1987 solo album, *Freedom-No Compromise*, is composed of entirely anti-oppression, politically left songs.

⁶Anthony DeCurtis, "Video Verite: Jackson Browne Makes His Point About U.S. Policy in Central America," January 15, 1987, *Rolling Stone*, p. 11.

⁷Peter Gabriel, "Red Rain," from Geffen album *So*, 9 24088-2 1986.

⁸Billy Bragg, *Talking With The Taxman About Poetry*, Elektra album 9 60502-1 1986.

⁹Sting, *The Dream of the Blue Turtles*, A&M album SP-3750 1985.

¹⁰Nena, "99 Luftballons," Epic single 34-04108 1983.

¹¹Elvis Costello, "Peace In Our Time," from Columbia album *Goodbye Cruel World* 39429 1984.

¹²Jello Biafra, lead singer of the Dead Kennedys, his independent record company Alternative Tentacles, the disc's presser and distributor, were charged with "Distribution of Harmful Material to Minors" by the Los Angeles District Attorney for disseminating a supposedly pornographic poster in the band's 1985 *Frankechrist* album. The poster was a reproduction of "Penis Landscape" by the Swiss artist H.R. Giger. The painting has hung in art galleries throughout the world. Civil libertarians see the outcome of Biafra's case having wide implications on the future of censorship in rock music.

¹³David Browne, "Bedtime For Melody," *Daily News*, January 9, 1987, p. 45.

¹⁴Interview with Bruce Cockburn, September 1986.

¹⁵Interview with Gil Scott-Heron, August 1986.

¹⁶The Ramones, "Bonzo Goes To Bitburg," Beggars Banquet import single 140T 1985. Also see, Larry Jaffee, "Disc Spells Hit Time For Bonzo," *Mother Jones*, Nov./Dec. 1985, p. 10.

¹⁷Interview with Cliff Kincaid, April 1987.

¹⁸Interview with Lee Masters, April 1987.

¹⁹Paul Simon won a Grammy Award in March 1987 for best album, *Graceland*, which was recorded with black South Africans in South Africa. Before winning the award, Simon was briefly placed on a United Nations boycott list for violating the cultural boycott of South Africa. He initially was criticized by anti-apartheid activists for the album not being "political enough," meaning the musician did not come out explicitly against apartheid. Simon's response was that making the record with the musicians (who approved of the project) was a political act in itself, and that he was interested in the cultural aspects of music, not politics. The controversy subsided after a triumphant international tour in the spring of 1987.

Larry Jaffee is a Washington, DC-based writer specializing in music and entertainment topics and has contributed articles to *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Mother Jones* and *High Fidelity*. He has taught journalism and popular culture courses at Hofstra University and Pennsylvania State University, where he earned a master's degree in August 1986. Jaffee serves full-time as a senior editor of *Multichannel News*, a weekly, national newspaper covering the television industry.