

WELCOME
FRIENDS,
ACTIVISTS,
STUDENTS, &
SCHOLARS.

THANKS TO THE
JUSTICE STUDIES
ASSOCIATION
FOR INVITING ME
TO TALK ABOUT
A PORTION OF
MY LONG-TERM
RESEARCH ON
MUSIC AND
RESISTING
CRIMES OF THE
POWERFUL!



JUSTICE STUDIES
ASSOCIATION
PRESENTS:

PUNK SOCIAL JUSTICE

**THURSDAY,
MARCH 19**

7:00pm Eastern
on ZOOM

Join us for a
conversation with Dr.
David Kauzlarich,
exploring the power of
punk music and
culture in resistance
efforts and promoting
social justice

<https://tinyurl.com/JSAThirdThursdays>

David Kauzlarich, Ph.D. is Professor of Sociology, Criminology, & Justice Studies at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. He studies crimes of the powerful and resistance efforts to them, especially the role of music in social movements. His forthcoming book with Routledge, *Punk Criminology*, advocates using cultural elements of punk rock in the understanding of crime.

WWW.JUSTICESTUDIES.ORG

COPIE

STOPS



BACKGROUND



This presentation is a small part of my ongoing research and writing on punk rock resistance to crimes of the powerful. It is also related to my forthcoming book with Routledge, *Punk Criminology*, and my endeavor punkcriminology.com.

In general, I study how elements of the punk rock genre itself relate to resisting organized harm by states and corporations. More specifically, I study how original songwriters and performers compose and communicate resistance to crimes such as racial, gender, class, and sexual identity inequality and oppression, in addition to social problems such as war, environmental degradation, and neoliberalism. I examine lyrical content and delivery, song arrangement, verse/chorus relationships, instrument and tone choices, as well as performance decisions, especially those involving messages of resistance.

I have interviewed dozens of artists in the UK, Canada, and the US, and draw heavily on my many years as a songwriter, performer, producer, scholar, and activist in punk rock and adjacent genres. .

This short presentation will be focused on some key elements of punk rock that correspond to justice-seeking efforts and resistance to injustices more generally.

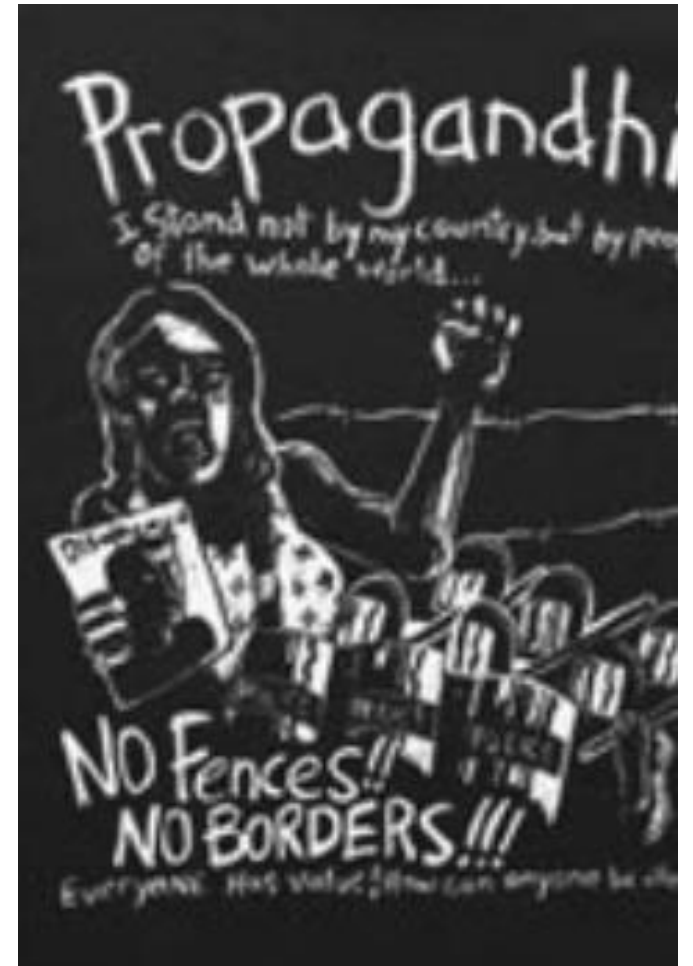
CAVEATS

Several musical genres are linked to calls for social justice and oppression resistance.

Punk is just one genre, but with some unique qualities that, to me and many other punk scholars, justify a special focus, as David Beer (2014) sees in his stimulating book *Punk Sociology* (Palgrave).

One could easily discuss the counterhegemony of rap, blues, and folk music, as they also have storied histories and continuing relevance to social critique.

So, to begin, I will acknowledge one could easily talk about – and there have been many people who have done so – rap, blues, or folk social justice.



CAVEATS, CONT'D

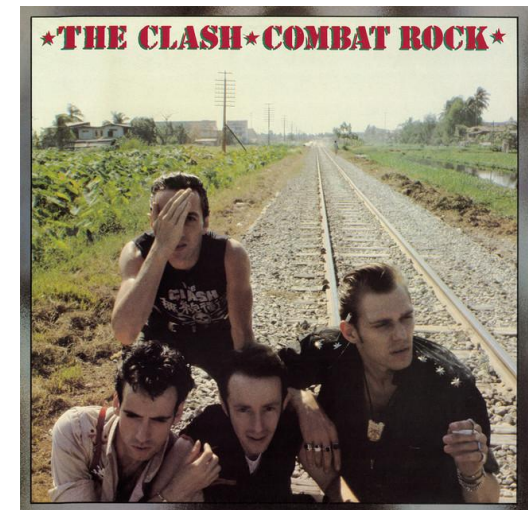
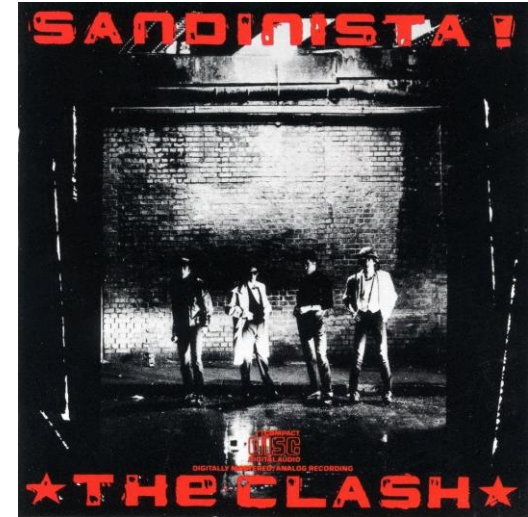
Punk has highly commercialized and coopted as well as more authentic manifestations.

I focus more on original, independent, local, and regional bands in my original research.

Punk has many subgenres and these can differ dramatically in instrumentation and message. Cross-fertilization and hybridization has blurred the lines between a lot of punk, rock, metal, and folk. For example, the music of X and The Ramones sounds much different than the hardcore punk of Converge and the blues punk rock of Social Distortion.

The very definition of punk is hotly contested in popular culture, especially in consumer, listener, and musician communities. I tend to agree with Ambrosch (2018: 1) here:

It is crucial to understand that punk is not simply a genre of music, although music does play an integral role within it. A cultivation of social dissent and cultural transgression, punk is a part of, as well as a counter project to, popular culture. Defining itself in opposition to the dominant culture and ideology of mainstream capitalist society, it is widely recognized as a counterhegemonic identity, albeit an inherently diverse and internally inconsistent one (Ambrosch, 2018). The Poetry of Punk. Routledge).





TWO QUESTIONS

1. What are unique qualities or elements of punk?
2. How do some of these elements make the genre worthy of special consideration for justice-seeking and justice-making?

SOME DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF PUNK

- Song length (shorter than most rock songs)
- Song subject matter, vibe, energy, speed and language use (profanity, angst, alienation, loud, often fast, less love songs and more political commentary)
- Less concern with melodic, in-tune, and harmonious vocal performances (if you can talk, you can sing punk)
- Less concern with technical playing skills (if you can play a chord or note, you can play punk rock guitar or bass)
- Shunning of the “rock star” imagery (gang vocals and chants, few guitar solos, focus on “wall of sound” rather than instrument virtuosity)
- DIY (do it yourself)
- Fashion and symbolism



CONNECTIONS TO JUSTICE-SEEKING

BAKED-IN SUSPICIONS OF AUTHORITY & HIERARCHY

Punk ethos

- Questioning, if not rejecting, blind conformity to mainstream rules about music, dress, language, rules, manners, and attitudes.
- Inherent aversion to going along with Establishment ideas of how to write, perform, and distribute music, e.g., managers, agents, producers, record companies. Alternative events and house shows, all-ages venues, cheap tickets, and plain or and often dilapidated venues replace fancy and expensive venues. This is the DIY ethic as well (more on that in a minute).
- Punk music is about people making something larger than themselves for themselves and their community, not to impress, not to rise above, and not to show off.

Social Justice

- Whether distributive, restorative, or social, alternative forms of peacemaking and fairness-seeking do not necessarily rely on the rules of the state and legal experts. Law is targeted and biased and the machinery in place to engage it is corrupt and hegemonic, i.e. the criminal justice system.
- The language and rules of the court evade almost all of us, especially those most left out of society. The dress code, titles, and certifications are inherently and purposefully demarking. The context oozes with the power of the state, and social status.
- The classist, racist, and sexist nature of actors and institutions do not allow for important voices, contexts, and concerns to be considered and addressed. From the quality of counsel to the bureaucratic processes that miss too much of the sociology of situations in favor of individual reductionism.
- In sum, traditional institutional justice does not serve and allow equal participation and outcomes.

VIRTUOSITY, SKILL, AND TRAINING DON'T MATTER IF THEY DESTROY COLLABORATIVE ENERGY OR INTERFERE WITH THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SPEAKER/PERFORMER AND LISTENER/AUDIENCE. SIMPLE IS BETTER. DIY IS BETTER. TOGETHER IS BETTER.

Punk ethos

- “three chords and the truth,” not showing off, not weaponizing talent and training to gain status, superiority, or an edge
- Downplaying the separation between performer and audience
- Every human can play punk
- Overall energy and communication are priorities

Social Justice

Finding truth together as regular engaged people

Mutual respect, involvement, and aid

Availability to and for all

Equal status

Just being human is enough to deserve, contribute to, and pursue justice

Principles of Punk Rock Praxis

Connecting punk rock ethos to justice work, teaching, writing & service

Work outside of formal institutions and systems as much as possible

Seek alternative venues for your work

Volunteer to help the less experienced

Question authority, status, and putative virtuosity and prestige

Avoid showboating and snobbery

Strip down your appearance or represent your tribe

Try it, even though you might not be that good at it

Make your work only as long it needs to be

Collaborate in all facets

Dissent & resist inequality

Use emotion and energy, not just intellect

Reject admirers/fans/followers and reframe the relationship as a partnership

Put earnings directly back into similar projects

Equally share all costs and labor

Do not exploit and take advantage of others

Be responsible for yourself and your tribe

Community-promotion rather than self-promotion

Q & A

