

**The Appropriation of Allen Ginsberg's Individualism and Anti-militarism by 1970s-80s  
and Contemporary Punk Rock Artists**

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### **Introduction: Ginsberg and Punk**

“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, / starving hysterical naked,” sound the first lines of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” (1-2). “Howl” was published in 1956 in *Howl and Other Poems*, a collection of poems that also includes “America.” Allen Ginsberg was a prominent member of the Beat Generation, a group of writers that was controversial in the 1950s, because they explicitly portrayed homosexuality, drug experiences, spiritualism and life in mental institutions in their work. In his poetry, Ginsberg laments the post-war condition and the materialistic attitude of 1950s capitalist America by opposing its militarism and emphasizing the importance of individualism. Similar to Walt Whitman, whom he admired greatly, Ginsberg celebrates individuality, giving voice to individuals who remain invisible among the masses. His poetry was important for young Americans who were trying to make sense of their lives in the wake of World War II. In the preface of *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's “Howl” and the Making of the Beat Generation*, Ginsberg biographer and cultural historian Jonah Raskin writes that “Howl” spoke to their generation because the poem “bound [them] together and gave [them] a sense of identity as members of a new generation that had come of the age in the wake of World War II and the atomic bomb, a generation that lived in the shadow of nuclear apocalypse” (xi). In the 1960s, many Americans opposed America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Ginsberg expressed anti-militarism in his poetry too, and has often been connected to the hippie counterculture of the 1960s, which protested extensively against the Vietnam War. The Beat writers also influenced rock artists of the 1960s, including the Beatles and Bob Dylan, whom Ginsberg befriended (Warner 36).

Several authors have researched the connection of the Beat Generation to rock music, for instance music journalist Simon Warner in *Text and Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll* and literary critic Laurence Coupe in *Beat Sound, Beat Vision: The Beat Spirit and Popular Song*. However, few have researched what the Beat Generation, and Ginsberg in particular, had to

offer the punk subculture. Punk is an anti-establishment culture that emerged in the mid-1970s to restore rock culture's original rebellion. It advocates non-conformity and individualism and revolves around punk rock, a subgenre of rock music with often politically engaged lyrics (Hannon 2). While Warner dedicates a small part of his book to punk music, in *Beat Punks* author and biographer Victor Bockris focuses exclusively on the connection between the punk subculture of the 1970s and 1980s, and the Beat Generation's literature. Bockris brings punk and the Beats together, interviewing several key figures that have played a role in the Beat Generation's involvement with punk subculture. In the introduction of *Beat Punks*, Bockris argues, "the Punks, led by Patti Smith and Richard Hell, adored the Beats and the Beats in turn were grateful to the Punks for drawing fresh, renewed attention to their work" (9). Still, Bockris predominantly focuses on Beat writers William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, placing Ginsberg in the background.

In spite of what Warner and Bockris have written on the connection between Ginsberg and punk subculture, there has been little in-depth research into this connection. Therefore, this paper will focus on punk subculture and Ginsberg, who was still active when punk emerged in the mid-1970s. Both stood up for the many Americans who felt confused and alienated during the 1970s and 1980s because of social inequality, increasing consumerism, repressed freedom of speech and nuclear warfare. Ginsberg inspired the musical careers of singer songwriter Patti Smith and punk rock band the Clash. Moreover, Ginsberg is still an important inspiration for punk rock artists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because his ideas of individualism and anti-militarism helped artists like Green Day to attack George W. Bush and later the Wonder Years to question the status quo of American society. While both punk rock artists from the 1970s-1980s and contemporary punk rock artists share individualism and anti-militarism with Allen Ginsberg, contemporary punk rock artists become less rebellious, because America's political climate has changed.

The first section of this paper will examine Allen Ginsberg's poems "Howl" and "America," because in Ginsberg's oeuvre these poems contain individualism and anti-militarism most prominently. Individualism and anti-militarism were punk subculture's most important ideals when it emerged in the mid 1970s. The second section will show Ginsberg's connection to the musical careers of 1970s punk artists Patti Smith and the Clash. Although it was a British band, the Clash was active in the United States, collaborated with Ginsberg and helped bring the transatlantic punk movement into existence. The third section will show that Ginsberg's individualism and anti-militarism inspired the 21<sup>st</sup> century punk community to oppose the war in Afghanistan and Iraq during Bush's presidency, with Green Day's *American Idiot* as the most important punk anti-war statement. However, after Bush's second term as President of the United States ended with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, punk subculture became mostly silent, despite the fact that Obama expanded the same policies that the Bush administration initiated (Pye). Contemporary punk rock artists have become less outspoken about their anti-militarism during the Obama administration, but the Wonder Years still use Ginsberg's ideas in their music. As a prophecy of the hippie counterculture during the 1960s and punk subculture in the 1970s and 1980s, Ginsberg's poetry is partly recovered by punk rock artists of a new generation.

## I. Allen Ginsberg's Individualism and Anti-militarism

This section will examine Ginsberg's poems "Howl" and "America" because these poems contain the most important ideals of punk when it emerged in the 1970s: individualism and anti-militarism. In *Punks: A Guide to an American Subculture*, Sharon M. Hannon argues, "punk's disregard for authority and capitalism led them to reject the predominant culture as hypocritical, shallow, and false. To them, that culture rewards conformity above all else; there is no room for the creative, the individual, or the different" (2). Although "Howl" is not political in nature, it was important to punk's ideals, because the poem was Ginsberg's public statement against America's obsession with material goods and warfare, and the country's willingness to sacrifice the individuality of common citizens to serve the capitalist system. In part I of "Howl," Ginsberg writes that he saw "the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" (1), caused by America's focus on industrialization and capitalism. In addition, Ginsberg asks, "What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" (241). The answer is the malevolent entity "Moloch" (242), capitalist America that repressed its citizens and limited their self-expression. Many young people were angry and felt alienated, because they wanted to be individuals who could think for themselves instead of conforming to society (Hannon 88). Thus, Ginsberg and punks were likeminded in their call for individualism and disregard of American authority. Ginsberg's "America" also shows American citizens' conformity and lack of individuality. In the poem, Ginsberg refers to one of the most important American magazines, *Times Magazine*:

I'm addressing you.

Are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?

I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.

I read it every week (41-44).

This can be interpreted in two ways. Ginsberg is either being ironic about reading *Times Magazine*, because he laments that American citizens understand their lives and the world around them in the shadow of media representation like *Times Magazine*, or he is a conformist himself. The lines “it occurs to me that I am America. / I am talking to myself again” (49-50) support the suggestion that Ginsberg himself becomes what he hates. The image of *Time Magazine* is a good example of American mainstream culture’s corruptive influence on American citizens’ individual expression.

Ginsberg also expresses anti-militarism in “America” and wonders when America will stop fighting Russia and China out of fear for communism: “America when will we end the human war? / Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb” (4-5). American authority fights communist countries instead of improving the country’s social and political problems. Ginsberg wants American militarism to stop, because he regrets the country’s lack of free speech and expression and the fact that political and social decisions are made by leaders who are afraid of the way in which the media portray them. Ginsberg often participated in political protests and he was arrested several times, for instance at an antiwar demonstration in New York in 1967 (“Allen Ginsberg”). In 1972 he was jailed for demonstrating against then-President Richard Nixon at the Republican National Convention in Miami (“Allen Ginsberg”). Ginsberg’s anti-establishment mentality and anti-militarism in particular were important for 1970s punk rock artists Patti Smith and the Clash, but also for Green Day, which will become clear in the section on punk in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## II. The Emergence of Punk in the 1970s: Patti Smith and the Clash

In their demonstration against mainstream culture's conformity, punk rock artists like Patti Smith and the Clash connected to Allen Ginsberg. Punk emerged in America in the 1970s from boredom with mainstream culture, because American middle-class youth felt that rock and roll had lost its ability to express economic and social troubles (Simonelli 122). Bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones that used to be countercultural had turned into arena rock bands and were now part of mainstream culture (Simonelli 122). The punk movement believed that the 1960s hippie culture was too soft to achieve real social change and punk subculture wanted to create its own force of resistance against the establishment (Warner 55). In his article "We Called It America" for *the Phonograph* Josh White argues, "This was the antithesis of the Beatles' 'Love Me Do'. Here, young Americans were kicking back against cultural collectives and social norms, against the mainstream. Here, in infant form, was the spirit of punk's core values: individualism, confrontation and wit." The first American punk scenes consisted of two groups; on the one hand, art students who saw themselves as poets, writers and artists and on the other, middle-class youths from the suburbs who used punk to express their discontent towards the world (Hannon 5). Punk gave young people the opportunity to "seize a voice amidst the ruins of the capitalist culture, and declare a position" (qtd. in Warner 409). Punk rock artists regarded Ginsberg, who was a Jewish, homosexual, second-generation Russian immigrant with a Communist mother and a Socialist father, as their prophet, because he was unashamed of addressing social problems and showing his true self in his poems (Warner 84) and Barry Miles argues, "now there was a new wave of rock musicians, who saw the previous generation as boring, lifeless and irrelevant, yet they regarded Ginsberg as a source of inspiration as someone who could understand exactly what they were doing – as he did" (qtd. in Warner 56).

Patti Smith is a highly influential punk rock songwriter who was involved in the early



days of the American punk rock scene, which emerged in New York in 1973 with the opening of punk club CBGBs (Hannon, *Preface*). Among the first American punk rock artists to perform at CBGBs were the Velvet Underground and the Ramones, but it was Smith together with Tom Verlaine and Richard Hell of the rock band Television who established the punk rock scene at CBGBs (Warner 56). The Patti Smith Group was the first band from the CBGBs scene to release an album, attracting mainstream attention and reaching people outside of New York (Hannon 110). Victor Bockris argues that in early 70s New York the coolest thing to be was a poet and that many people who are now successful started out as New York Poets (qtd. in Warner 348). Smith had already written poetry, but was inspired by Burroughs and Ginsberg to perform her work live in New York. Ginsberg attended Smith's debut performance at St. Mark's Church in the East Village of Manhattan and the two shared book signings and live appearances (Warner 352). Because Smith was familiar with Ginsberg and Burroughs, Bockris argues, "this punk movement isn't going to have to kill their fathers, they're going to use them. And that was the beginning of the alliance between the Beats and Punks that put such firm ground under the movement" (qtd. in Warner 356). Ginsberg himself often performed his poetry live and Steven Taylor, Ginsberg's guitarist for twenty years, compares Smith's performances to the Beat poet's live appearances arguing that, "the whole poetry scene she emerged out of in the early 70s was heavily Beat influenced. Just the fact of getting up in a club and reading your poems to music is a Beat thing" (qtd. in Warner 357). Next to the Beats' influence on her work, she was greatly inspired by artistic visions of French poet Arthur Rimbaud and singer-songwriter Bob Dylan (Warner 350-351). Smith established herself as a singer-songwriter with her 1975 debut album *Horses*. On the album, Smith fused punk rock music with spoken poetry. The first song from the album, "Gloria" is an example of individualism that lies at the heart of the Beat spirit. The first lines "Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine" (1) shows how Smith distances herself from American

society in which religion is important to many citizens. She does not conform to any rules, singing “People said ‘beware’ / but I don’t care / their words are just rules and regulations to me” (7-9). The song shows Smith’s desire for complete individual freedom to express herself in her poetry and music, which is a Beat ideal that punk rock artists willingly rehearse.

Smith’s personal connection to Ginsberg developed further when she did anti-war work with him until standing at his deathbed in 1997 (Didcock). After Ginsberg’s death, Smith paid homage to the Beat poet in her 1997 song “Spell” by quoting the complete footnote to “Howl,” in which everything is called holy, “Everything is holy! Everybody’s holy! Everywhere is holy! / Everyday is in eternity! Everyman’s an angel!” (353-354). In a 1977 interview with Bockris, Ginsberg argues that “her proposition has been the triumph of the stubborn, individualistic, Rimbaud-Whitmanic ego, but then there is going to be the point where her teeth fall out and she’s going to become the old hag of mythology that we all become” (41). The third section of this paper, “Punk in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” will show that Smith continues to show her vital individualistic spirit by criticizing the war in Iraq and Afghanistan during the Bush Administration.

Around the same time as Patti Smith, London-based punk rock band the Clash was part of the original wave of British punk music in the 1970s alongside the Sex Pistols, but became part of the American punk rock scene after touring the United States extensively. Compared to other 1970s punk rock bands like the Sex Pistols, the Damned and the Ramones, David Simonelli argues, “the Clash were the most politically committed of the punk bands, featuring songs angrily denouncing the United States, dole queue politics, racism and the apathy of people in opposition to these problems” (129). The song “I’m So Bored with the U.S.A.” from their 1977 debut album *The Clash* shows that the band was against American government’s influence on other countries. Lead singer Joe Strummer says in the 2000 documentary *The Clash: Westway to the World* that “Authority is supposedly grounded in

wisdom. But I could see from a very early age that authority was only a system of control and that it didn't have any inherent wisdom." He further states, "We were trying to grope in a socialist way towards a future in which the world was a less miserable place" (*The Clash: Westway to the World*). The Clash disapproves of American authority, because it did not improve the country's miserable situation, which Ginsberg also disputes in "America" and "Howl." A few months before his death in 2002, Strummer expresses the importance of punk's individualistic spirit, "I will always believe in punk rock, because it's about creating something for yourself. Lift your head up and see what is really going on in the political, social, and religious situations, try and see through all the smoke screens" (qtd. in Pedelty and Weglarz 20).

Although the Clash was from London, they were closely connected to the New York punk scene, where they encountered Allen Ginsberg. In 1981, they invited Ginsberg on stage to perform his poem "Capitol Air" with the band during one of the 17-night gigs at Bond's International Casino at Times Square New York ("Allen Ginsberg Punk Rocker (part two)"). The poem starts with the statement: "I don't like the government where I live / I don't like dictatorship of the rich" ("Allen Ginsberg Capitol Air Live"). This shows Ginsberg's disregard of American authority, which he shares with the Clash and many other punk rock artists. Ginsberg argues the song is, "punk in ethos and rhythmic style for abrupt pogo-dancing, jumping up and down, but elegant in the sense of having specific political details" ("Allen Ginsberg Punk Rocker (part two)"). From the live collaboration followed the 1982 track "Ghetto Defendant" featuring Ginsberg, because the Clash was charmed by his deep voice and interesting character and wanted "the voice of God" on their song (Warner 405). The song fuses Ginsberg's spoken poetry with Joe Strummer's singing and simple three chord progressions. Strummer wanted Ginsberg's help to draw attention to the local effects of global economic and political forces (Peacock 2). In the song, Ginsberg and the Clash criticize

America's foreign policy, in particular Reagan's continuation of Nixon's War on Drugs that affected many American common citizens (Peacock 11). In the final lines of "Ghetto Defendant," Strummer laments capitalism singing: "All churn in the wake / on the great ship of progress" (54-55).

The title song "London Calling" from the 1979 album *London Calling* is an anti-war song similar to Ginsberg's reaction to the Cold War conflict in "America." The title sets the apocalyptic tone of the song and comes from the BBC's identification during World War II, "this is London calling" ("Songfacts – List of Songs by the Clash"). Strummer sings about nuclear warfare:

The ice age is coming, the sun's zooming in.

Meltdown expected, the wheat is growing thin.

Engines stop running, but I have no fear

'cause London is drowning and I live by the river (9-12).

Similarly, in "America" Ginsberg criticizes America's nuclear warfare: "Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb" (5). In addition to political views, the Clash expresses aversion to the conformity of 1960s rock bands. The Clash did not want to be glorified like the Beatles, because hippie culture was in the past and punk had risen. In "London Calling" Strummer sings: "don't look to us / phony Beatlemania has bitten the dust!" (5-6). Ironically, in 1977 the Clash signed to CBS, a major record label that was home to countercultural heroes like Bob Dylan, whom the Clash despised (Pedelty and Weglarz 3). Although the Clash was anti-capitalist, the band's goal was not to be captured by a narrow subculture, but world conquest (Pedelty and Weglarz 3). In *Political Rock*, Pedelty and Weglarz argue, "simply put, capitalism would provide the avenue for reaching the masses that then, in principle, could be mobilized to overturn that same system and build something better" (3). The Clash's incorporation into the mainstream shows capitalism is inherent to modern society and this can

be tied to Ginsberg's realization in "America": "it occurs to me that I am America. / I am talking to myself again" (49-50). It was through these record sales that the Clash brought their revolution rock to the attention of large groups of youths who began questioning and challenging the social mind-control that American government imposed on its citizens.

### III. Punk in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Green Day and the Wonder Years

Moving away from the 1970s and 80s when Allen Ginsberg inspired Patti Smith and the Clash, this section will show that 21<sup>st</sup> century punk rock artists revive Ginsberg's ideas. In 2001, Bush became president of the United States of America. After the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, he initiated the War on Terror, a military campaign that included the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. America was once again at war, but because Ginsberg passed away in 1997, America needed a new voice to express individualism and anti-militarism. During the Bush administration, punk's anti-authoritative statements are expressed by the following three voices: Patti Smith, PunkVoter and most importantly, Green Day's *American Idiot*.

After doing anti-war work with Ginsberg, Patti Smith continues to protest against America's militarism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the turn of the millennium, Smith stumped for Ralph Nader's Green Party for the 2000 presidential election, leading the crowd singing her 1988 song "People Have the Power" at the campaign rallies (Hoard, "Patti Smith"). The song celebrates the power of individuals and Smith believes common citizens are still capable of changing the world and starting a revolution as she sings:

I awakened to the cry  
that the people have the power  
to redeem the work of fools  
upon the meek the graces shower  
it's decreed the people rule (8-12).

Smith supported John Kerry in the 2004 presidential elections and several artists covered "People Have the Power" on the Vote for Change tour that encouraged Americans to vote for Kerry and against Bush (Hoard, "Patti Smith"). Smith also was a speaker and singer at the first protests against the Iraq war in 2002. In an interview with Simon Schama for *Financial*

*Times*, Smith remembers with contempt how this protest, a hundred thousand strong, received barely any media coverage (Schama). Her 2004 song “Radio Baghdad” describes that Baghdad used to be “the center of the world” (24) but that the Americans ruined it and that “they’re robbing the cradle of civilization” (45-46). Smith regrets that American government blames the country’s problems on other countries like Iraq, while it should concentrate on America’s inherent social and political problems.

Patti Smith is not the only one who protested against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, because a younger generation of punk rock bands rebelled against American authority and expressed their anti-militarism too. Lead singer Mike Burkett of punk rock band NOFX teamed up with fifty punk rock bands and a dozen punk record labels to form PunkVoter, a group that encouraged young Americans to vote in the 2004 presidential elections, preferably against Bush (Johnson). The fifty punk rock bands including NOFX, Rise Against and Green Day collaborated on a compilation album titled *Rock Against Bush* (Johnson). In an article for *The Huffington Post*, Burkett said, “About a year ago I decided to use my influence to get bands together to speak out about the president. I think it's our responsibility as citizens and musicians to do so. He's wrecking the country and the world. Kids are the biggest group of people that don't vote. We want to change that.” PunkVoter was successful, contributing to the largest increase in young voter turnout since 1972 and over 20 million young people voted in the 2004 elections, which was a ten percent increase over the previous election (Knapp). The turnout showed young Americans used their vote to express their discontent towards American government, although Bush was re-elected nonetheless.

Most importantly, Ginsberg’s individualism and anti-militarism were revived in the most outspoken anti-war statement of any punk rock band during the Bush administration, Green Day’s 2004 rock opera *American Idiot*. Green Day gained success in 1994 with their debut album *Dookie*, but became politically engaged after the release of *Warning* in 2000.

Green Day established itself as the most politically outspoken punk rock band with the release of *American Idiot* two months before the presidential elections of 2004. The opening song “American Idiot” comes right to the point and expresses the band’s anger towards America:

Don't want to be an American idiot.

Don't want a nation under the new media

and can you hear the sound of hysteria?

The subliminal mind-fuck America (1-4).

Pop journalist Shana Naomi Krochmal describes the song “American Idiot” as:

The opening shot of Green Day's own “Howl.” Much like the poem by queer beatnik Allen Ginsberg, the taut, tense explosion of punk rock politics decries the loss of a generation to drugs, war, hopelessness, and the sub-liminal mind-fuck of a nation ruled by infomercials and imbeciles (“Billie Joe Armstrong: Idiot Savant”).

The entire song is an attack on America’s idiocy during the Bush administration, in particular the war in Iraq and its representation in the media. In an interview with Fuse, lead singer Billie Joe Armstrong regrets how the media represented the Iraq war and says, “It was reality television and major news coming together. It was war and commercial splash in between. ... It was a twisted way in which television and pop culture is being presented nowadays.” In addition, in “The Making of American Idiot” Armstrong states the song “American Idiot” is about “feeling confused by the news or by reality television ... It’s about confusion and trying to find your individuality.” Although Armstrong never explicitly cited Ginsberg as an inspiration for *American Idiot*’s lyrics, the sentiments of individualism and anti-militarism trace back to the roots of Ginsberg and punk’s early days. Green Day’s anger towards the war in Iraq is similar to the opposition to America’s warfare against Russia during the Cold War in “America.” Ginsberg accuses America of its warfare and writes: “America this is quite serious / America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set. / America is



this correct?" (87-89). Both Ginsberg and Green Day wonder how overseas warfare will solve America's social and political problems. As argued in the first section of this paper, Ginsberg refers in "America" to Americans who understand the outside world through media representations in *Times Magazine*. Similarly, Green Day regrets that news channels like CNN present a distorted view of the Iraq war mixed with commercials, which people blindly accept as the truth. American citizens' ability to think for themselves is limited by the media and their individuality is lost. Furthermore, in the 9-minute song "Jesus of Suburbia," America comes under fire once again as Armstrong sings:

From the cradle to the grave  
we are the kids of war and peace  
from Anaheim to the middle east.  
We are the stories and disciples  
of the Jesus of Suburbia (63-67).

The character Jesus of Suburbia is the personification of the common American citizen who feels alienated in American society and who "gets pretty disenfranchised with where he comes from. ... He ends up going through the city trying to follow some beliefs or ethics. ... He starts dealing with what true rebellion means" ("Making of American Idiot"). The sentiment of alienation is intrinsically connected to punk's call for individuality, because many young people feel they do not belong in American society, in particular because the government did not keep its promises of ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Common citizens are discontent and want to retrieve their individuality, which was what middle-class youth in the 1970s longed for when they initiated the punk movement.

In the tradition of 1970s-1980s punk rock artists and Allen Ginsberg, Green Day calls for individuality in an era of warfare and media-control and rebels against American authority with *American Idiot*. However, with Obama's election in 2008, Green Day hoped the new

President would end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and could fix the chaos that his predecessor had left. This turned out differently and in an interview with MTV Armstrong says, “If you compare where we're at now to, like, five years ago, I think we're actually in a worse situation. We're fighting two wars. ... It kind of goes from one crisis to the next. ... There are a lot of desperate people in the world right now, and it can make you feel paranoid and desperate and out of control.” Not surprisingly, Green Day named their 2009 follow-up *21<sup>st</sup> Century Breakdown*, which deals with the fact that America’s political and social climate has not improved.

Patti Smith, PunkVoter and Green Day’s *American Idiot* were three important punk rock voices against the Bush administration. However, in his article “Punk Rock Is Still Politically Dead” *United Liberty* editor Jason Pye argues, “the punk rock community has been curiously silent during Obama’s presidency, despite the fact that he has continued and, in fact, expanded many of the exact same policies that began under the Bush Administration.” These policies included the reauthorization of the patriot act, authorization of the indefinite detention of American citizens and continued intervention in countries that posed no threat to America (Pye). Furthermore, the revelations that the National Security Agency surveyed the phone records and internet activity of Americans should anger punk subculture, but its rebellion is nowhere to be found (Pye). Pye argues, “Barack Obama is George W. Bush, who was, justifiably, the target of so much anger and animosity during his administration.” Pye wonders when punk will stand up against Obama’s policies and goes further by giving examples of “intellectual bankruptcy,” including Mike Burkett’s decision to retire PunkVoter. He calls Burkett hypocritical, because Burkett criticized Bush’s policies, but is content with Obama as president (Pye). The punk community is unwilling to admit that it mistrusts Obama and is settling for the lesser of two evils, because while Obama does not keep his promises, he was punk’s first choice above over John McCain and Mitt Romney.

To draw once again on Patti Smith, who protested against the Iraq war in 2002, she first rejoiced at the election of President Obama in 2008, but explains in the 2014 interview with Simon Schama that to her Obama is just a “good republican” and she does not forgive him for keeping Guantánamo Bay open and continuing the war in Afghanistan. Not only Pye and Smith are wondering when punk will finally rise against Obama. Vocalist of San Francisco hardcore punk band Dead Kennedys in the 1980s, Jello Biafra, wrote president Obama an open letter, because he felt deceived by the new president (Charlebois). He regrets that now Bush is gone, punk went to sleep and does not stand up against President Obama.

After Green Day criticized the Bush administration with *American Idiot*, punk rock artists of a new generation have lost their rebellion and do not actively oppose President Obama. However, Pennsylvanian pop punk band the Wonder Years revives Ginsberg’s individualism by giving voice to young people who feel misunderstood and alienated. The band is less politically engaged than Green Day and does not actively rebel against American authority, but instead questions American society’s status quo. With their heartfelt lyrics and heart-on-sleeve mentality the Wonder Years empower young people to break free from their miserable situation in American society. The Wonder Years cite Ginsberg’s “America” on the 2011 album *Suburbia: I’ve Given You All and Now I’m Nothing*. The album title comes from the first line of Ginsberg’s poem: “America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing” (1). After rereading “America,” vocalist and lyricist Dan Campbell discovered that Ginsberg’s reaction to the country in the poem was in dialogue with the lyrics he was writing for the album and decided to use parts of the poem in his songs. Several song titles on *Suburbia: I’ve Given You All and Now I’m Nothing* come directly from “America,” including “I Won’t Say the Lord’s Prayer,” “I’ve Given You All,” “You Made Me Want to Be a Saint” and “And Now I’m Nothing.” In an interview with Mary Bonney for *LA Music Blog* Campbell says, “there were a lot of similar themes. Not all of them are similar or mean the same thing, but

this general push and pull between discontent with social norms and cultural ideologies versus this detached love you still have for it.” He takes Ginsberg’s reference to *Time Magazine* as an example of a love-hate relationship, because Ginsberg does not want *Time Magazine* to run his emotional life but is still obsessed by it and reads it in the public library (“America,” 41-44). Despite Ginsberg’s critique on America, he is part of American culture and still enjoys some of its aspects. While “America” is a globalized poem, Campbell explains that *Suburbia: I’ve Given You All and Now I’m Nothing* is a localized record because “it speaks to anyone who’s growing up in a similar place. A lot of the fans of [pop punk] are suburban kids who grow up in the suburbs and realize the push and pull, the disillusionment you find when you come back home and the nostalgic aching you have for the things you loved growing up there.” The Wonder Years share the sentiment of alienation and the call for individuality with Green Day. Both bands show that the search for individuality is a troublesome experience to many young Americans, because they are unable to break free from American culture that they are stuck in, which Ginsberg explains in “America.” The album’s closing song “And Now I’m Nothing” shows that Campbell, together with other youths from American suburbs that try to fit in American society, struggles with depression and feelings of alienation:

I’ll put my life back together in silence while  
writing songs on Molly’s guitar  
and Suburbia, stop pushing  
I know what I’m doing (15-18).

He feels the weight of the outside world on his shoulders and quotes from Ginsberg’s “America” as he demands Suburbia, a personification of the suburbs of Campbell’s hometown, to “stop pushing I know what I’m doing” (24). He wants the freedom to be himself instead of conforming to the town he grew up in. However, Campbell realizes he is incapable of change in the same way as Ginsberg was as he sings:

I had dreams of myself  
 As the Allen Ginsberg of this generation  
 But without the talent, madness or vision  
 I guess it's looking hopeless (36-39).

Despite the fact that Campbell is insecure about his talents, he sounds hopeful about achieving individuality as he sings “I know we've got miles to go / But I'm putting my shoulder to the wheel” (42-43). This hopefulness is similar to the last lines of “America”: “It’s true I don’t want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision / parts factories, I’m nearsighted and psychotic anyway. / America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel” (97-99). Ginsberg admits that he is not planning on serving in the army or working in a factory, because he is incapable of it anyway. He mentions his bad eyesight, madness and homosexuality to show that he is an underdog, but this does not stop him from expressing his ideals of individualism and anti-militarism. Similarly, Campbell admits that he has a long way to go, but he will work hard to achieve individuality.

While *Suburbia: I’ve Given You All and Now I’m Nothing* was directly in dialogue with Ginsberg’s poem “America,” the Wonder Years take a slightly different thematic direction with their 2013 album *The Greatest Generation*. The album’s lyrics still focus on American suburban life and Campbell’s struggles of growing up, but also refer back to great people of past generations like Ginsberg and American soldiers who fought in World War II and the Vietnam War. The band was unsure about the album title, pondering on naming it after the closing track “I Just Want to Sell Out My Funeral” or naming it “My Great War” (Campbell). However, they decided that *The Greatest Generation*, a term coined by journalist Tom Brokaw, encapsulated the album’s message (Campbell). In the album trailer for *The Greatest Generation*, which the band posted on YouTube, Campbell explains, “the last two records were battles mostly with depression, with anxiety, with the world around me [and]

where I fit into it. This [album] is the realization that all that war did was get us here and what matters now is how we grow from it, how we learn from it and what we do next.” In an interview with Jonah Bayer for *PureVolume*, Campbell says many people think that the generation of 21<sup>st</sup> century youth is mediocre and that “when you think about ‘the Greatest Generation’ you think about a generation that grew up during the Great Depression, fought in World War II... who was selfless ... who rebuilt a dying country and who was brave.”

Campbell admits he is not as brave as war veterans in the ballad “The Devil in My Bloodstream” as he sings, “I bet I’d be a fucking coward. / I bet I’d never had the guts for war” (25-26), but 21<sup>st</sup> century American youths are trying to retrieve their individuality by fighting their own personal wars: “I know how it feels to be / at war with the world that never loved me” (38-40). He wants youths of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to push forward instead of being content with the current situation, which brings nothing but alienation and repressed individual expression. Campbell’s demand for progress is similar to Ginsberg’s discontent with America in the 1950s. In “America,” the lines “I’d better get right down to the job” (96), and “America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel” (99) show rebellion is crucial to achieve individuality in American society. In the album trailer for *The Greatest Generation*, Campbell further lauds his generation and says, “People say the greatest generation has come and gone, but they’re wrong. They haven’t seen what we’re capable of.” The album’s closing song “I Just Want to Sell out My Funeral,” encapsulates the call for individuality as Campbell sings:

I just want to sell out my funeral.

I just want to be enough for everyone.

I just want to sell out my funeral.

Know that I fought until the lights were gone.

And oh, we all want to know where'd the American dream go?

Did you give up and go home? Am I here alone?

And oh, as the credits roll, I'll watch as the screen glows.

Campbell wants everyone to remember him for working hard, and for his legacy. This alludes to the lines in "And Now I'm Nothing," in which Campbell had dreams of himself as his generation's Ginsberg (36-37) and that he puts his shoulder to the wheel (43). He wonders where the American dream went and if everyone has given up on improving the country's current situation, which shows that punk's rebellion against American authority is reduced to merely questioning American society.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, both punk rock artists from the 1970s-1980s and contemporary punk rock artists share individualism and anti-militarism with Allen Ginsberg, but contemporary punk rock artists become less rebellious after Obama's election. This paper showed individualism and anti-militarism in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" and "America" were important for punk subculture's values, because America's willingness to sacrifice the individuality of common citizens to serve the capitalist system bothered Ginsberg in the same way it bothered middle-class American youths that initiated punk in the 1970s. "Howl" criticizes the lack of individual expression in American society and in "America" Ginsberg refers to *Time Magazine* to show Americans conform to mainstream culture, which deprives them of their individuality. Ginsberg expresses his anti-militarism in "America," because American authority is focused on overseas warfare instead of solving the country's political and social problems. Ginsberg's presence in New York, where he encountered Patti Smith and the Clash, was important in the early days of punk, because Smith developed her Beat qualities from her personal connection to Ginsberg. She performed her poetry live and shared Ginsberg's ideas of individualism and anti-militarism, which "Gloria," "People Have the Power," and "Radio Baghdad" show. Ginsberg performed together with the Clash in New York, which resulted in the song "Ghetto Defendant." In "London Calling," the Clash shows that it was politically engaged and was bored with American mainstream culture. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Patti Smith, Mike Burkett's PunkVoter and Green Day's album *American Idiot* were important voices of individualism and anti-militarism. Green Day most prominently criticized the Bush administration and its ongoing warfare in Iraq. The band regrets that mainstream culture and its distorted view on militarism deprives American citizens from their individuality. Although Ginsberg's values of individualism and anti-militarism resonated punk's values, when Obama became president, punk rock artists became silent, although America's social situation had not



improved. Pop punk band the Wonder Years revives Ginsberg's individualism by questioning America's status quo and vocalist Campbell desires 21<sup>st</sup> century youths to seek greatness instead of conforming to America's current situation. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Green Day and the Wonder Years were loyal to Ginsberg, but new punk rock bands will have to use his individualism and anti-militarism to actively rebel against American authority if they want America's political and social climate to improve.

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