

## GEORGE W. BUSH TO THE IRAQ WAR THROUGH GREEN DAY'S SONG “AMERICAN IDIOT” IN SPEECH ACTS AND MARX'S ALIENATION THEORY

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### ABSTRACT

This study observes Green Day's "American Idiot" (2004) as a critical response to post-9/11 American society and the Iraq War, aiming to analyze how popular music functioned as a spot of resistance to media manipulation and political discourse during the Iraq War era, particularly in relation to what MacAskill & Burkeman (2003) document as the controversial Weapons of Mass Destruction narratives. The research utilizes dual theoretical framework combining Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969) and Marx's Theory of Alienation (1844/1975) to investigate both linguistic structures and sociological commentary within the song. The methodology involves detailed analysis of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts within the lyrics, while simultaneously examining forms of alienation manifested through media control, false consciousness, and social relations. Findings reveal that the song's effectiveness as political critique stems from the interaction between its linguistic structures and social commentary, with Speech Acts serving as a tool for challenging dominant narratives and generating political consciousness. This aligns with Herman and Chomsky's (1988) analysis of media manipulation and Jhaveri's (2004) examination of petroimperialist interest. Results demonstrate that locutionary acts function as basic statements of rejection while illocutionary acts directly confront what Kellner (2003) identifies as characteristics of post-9/11 discourse, with perlocutionary effects generating awareness of media manipulation. The study concludes that "American Idiot" operates simultaneously as a linguistic act of resistance and a critique on systemic social isolation in post-9/11 America, particularly in its challenge to media-propagated narratives that support the Iraq War. The impact of this study extends beyond historical analysis, contributing to our understanding of how popular culture, particularly music, can function as both a mirror of social alienation and an instrument of resistance through cautiously constructed speech acts, demonstrating continued relevance two decades later as Merchant (2023) papers.

**Keywords:** Green Day, American Idiot, Speech Act Theory, Theory of Alienation, false consciousness

### INTRODUCTION

Speech Acts is a theory that addresses how we want to accomplish something using words by identifying what it takes to make a statement that works or has an understood intention. In short, Speech Acts are actions expressed through speech to achieve a specific goal. According to Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1983), there are

three types of Speech Acts, they are Locutionary Acts which means the words themselves, Illocutionary Acts which means what you mean to do with those words, and Perlocutionary Acts which means what actually happens because of those words. Not only that, Speech Acts are also classified into five aspects according to Searle (1983). Speech Acts can be classified into five categories. The classifications are Representatives which means telling things, Directives which means asking for things, Commissive which means promising things, Expressive which means sharing feelings, and Declarations which means making things. Karl Marx's Theory (1844, 1975) of Alienation describes how workers become estranged or disconnected from their humanity under capitalism. Alienation is characterized as alienated labor. According to Marx (1844), there are four types of Alienation of which Marx wrote as relating to the capitalist mode of production: the alienation of the worker from the products of his labor, the alienation felt in the course of production or labor, the alienation from the nature of our species or human existence, and the alienation of man from man or society.

This research and Merchant's (2023) study both explore media manipulation and long-term effects of the Iraq War's WMD narrative. The research analyzes Green Day's "American Idiot" as cultural resistance using Speech Act Theory and Marxist Alienation concepts, while Merchant uses a traditional political-historical approach. Quail (2021) takes a broader cultural studies approach to chart various protest music across the alternative scene during the Bush era. It differences with this research concept which analyze linguistic structures in the song. This article and Schreiber's (2017) both investigate a politically charged under George W. Bush administration. Schreiber (2017) focuses on its cultural impact, while this research analyzes its linguistic and ideological critique. Buck (2024) focuses on performance and theatrical rhetoric, while this research uses a linguistic and sociological approach. This research highlights the song as a form of resistance against propaganda and false consciousness. Muttitt (2018) examines the strategic role of oil in the 2003 Iraq War, both studies share a focus on the Iraq War, arguing that economic and geopolitical interests played a significant role in the U.S. intervention. Highlights the political and cultural significance of the songs in shaping American identity.

Therefore, this research talks about a song with American Idiot (2004) title which is inside those songs talk about a lot of politics can be seen from two theories such as Speech Acts by Searle and Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation. Thus, In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, while musicians dealt with new political realities and social challenges, American popular culture changed dramatically. Green Day's "American Idiot" (2004) is a powerful critique of media manipulation and political discourse during the Iraq War, making it an iconic musical response to the time period. The song's illustrate reflection as a critique of post-9/11 in American culture through language structures and sociological criticism.

Following of post-9/11, Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969) and Marx's Theory of Alienation (1844, 1975) are dual theoretical approach which utilizes for this research, to analyses the song's linguistic mechanism and critique of media manipulation, false consciousness, public relations, and systems of resistance in post-9/11 America. Green Day's "American Idiot" challenged popular narratives such as American media discourse and political consciousness experienced significant changes, particularly around the Iraq War and the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) narrative (MacAskill & Burkeman, 2003). The research aims how to considerate music, it can assist as a spot of resistance to political and media manipulation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This research on Green Day's "American Idiot" as a response to post-9/11 America and the Iraq War builds upon several established bodies of literature, including studies of political music, analytical frameworks for critical discourse, and examinations of media's role in shaping public opinion during wartime. This literature review synthesizes key works that inform the theoretical and methodological approaches of this study.

### 1. Political Music as Social Commentary

Research establishes how popular music by Green Day (2004) functions as political resistance, particularly during social disorder and specifically in post-9/11 America. Long (2010) analyzes Green Day's "American Idiot" as a



politically charged protest against the George W. Bush administration. The album's narrative and lyrics use rock opera elements to critique post-9/11 American politics during national tension.

## **2. Speech Act Theory Applications**

Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969), which was originally intended for language analysis, has been adapted to musical compositions. It shows how song lyrics can be studied as complicated speech acts, exposing how musical texts influence social reality. Reynolds (2004) investigates post-9/11 music rhetorical methods, whereas Bustam (2016) provides frameworks for evaluating structural ambiguity in politically sensitive texts.

## **3. Marxist Analysis of Media**

Research by Ollman (1976), and Herman and Chomsky (1988) provide frameworks for understanding how media systems contribute to social estrangement and shape public opinion through propaganda models. Øversveen (2023) reconsiders Marx's alienation theory, claiming the basic forms of alienation remain in today's capitalism despite major changes. This framework helps explain how 21st-century media creates estrangement like that in Green Day's critique of post-9/11 America.

## **4. Iraq War Media Manipulation**

Studies by MacAskill and Burkeman (2003), Jhaveri (2004), and Merchant (2023) document how the WMD narrative was constructed and amplified by mainstream media, creating lasting impacts on public trust.

# **METHODOLOGY**

This study observes Green Day's "American Idiot" (2004) as a linguistic structure and a sociopolitical commentary using a qualitative descriptive method, with textual analysis serving as the main methodology. The study employs a dual theoretical framework that integrates Searle's Speech Act Theory and Marx's Theory of Alienation to offer complementing analytical methods that address both the micro-level linguistic structures and macro-level sociological implications of the song. This methodological approach is particularly relevant to analyzing protest music from the post-9/11 era because it allows for a systematic examination of how language functions as political resistance (through speech act analysis) while simultaneously investigating how this resistance addresses forms of social estrangement (through alienation theory).

The additional contextual materials such as band member interviews (Armstrong, 2004; Dirnt, 2004), existing media coverage of the Iraq War (MacAskill & Burkeman, 2003), and historical records of political discourse under the Weapons of Mass Destruction narrative (Bush, 2003), the lyrics were considered as the main source of data. A dual integrated method was used, the research analysis can go beyond and inspect how popular music's language structure, become a function as tools for social critique and political consciousness in certain historical contexts (Kellner, 2003; Reynolds, 2004).

## **Primary Theoretical Frameworks**

### **1. Searle's Speech Act Theory**

The analysis utilizes Searle's (1969) and Austin (1962) foundational speech act categories, which as MacAskill & Burkeman (2003) demonstrate, are particularly relevant for analyzing political discourse in the Iraq War period, Armstrong (2004) himself unconsciously validates in his articulation of the song's political intent in Rolling Stone interviews:

Locutionary Acts: Analysis of the basic meaning and propositional content, as applied by Reynolds (2004), reflected in Armstrong's (2005) explanations of the lyrics' direct messaging in examining war-time rhetoric.

Illocutionary Acts: Examination of: Directive Acts (commands, requests) that connects to power structures. Declarative Acts (statements that change social reality) as contextualized by Jhaveri (2004) in relation to media control. Expressive Acts (conveying attitudes and emotions) that Merchant (2023) and Armstrong (2004) link to public response to intelligence failures. Assertive/Representative Acts (truth claims) Green Day's explicit political statements (Armstrong et al., 2005).

Perlocutionary Acts: Study of the effects on the audience and consequent actions: Analysis of how the lyrics create awareness of collective fear and anxiety in post-9/11 America (Kellner, 2003). Investigation of the song's role in fostering critical consciousness about war propaganda, which Dirnt (2004) discusses in relation to fan reactions. Examination of how the song generates recognition of media manipulation.

## **2. Marx's Theory of Alienation**

Marx's theory of alienation (Marx, 1844/1975) identifies four key forms of estrangement in capitalist society that provide crucial analytical tools for this study: Media manipulation and consciousness, False consciousness in political context (Kellner, 2003), Social and class relations examined through Jhaveri's (2004) petroimperialist framework, Forms of resistance and awareness that Merchant (2023) traces through two decades.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Process**

#### **1. Text Analysis**

Close reading of "American Idiot" lyrics using Searle's (1969) linguistic framework, Identification of key themes and recurring motifs as they relate to Marx's (1844/1975) alienation concept, Mapping of social and political references against Bush's (2003) war ultimatum context.

#### **2. Historical Context Analysis**

Examination of post-9/11 political discourse, Analysis of Iraq War media coverage, Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), Public response and resistance.

### **Analytical Process**

#### **1. Speech Act Analysis**

Identification of speech act types in lyrics, Classification of illocutionary forces within war-time context (Reynolds, 2004), Analysis of perlocutionary effects as described, Contextualization within historical events documented.

#### **2. Alienation Analysis**

Identification of alienation forms in lyrics, Analysis of media manipulation themes, Examination of political consciousness through Jhaveri's (2004) lens, Documentation of resistance elements as contextualized by Kellner (2003)

### **Integration of Frameworks**

The methodology combines these approaches by: Connecting speech acts to forms of alienation, linking linguistic patterns to social critique, relating perlocutionary effects to political consciousness, examining how language choices reflect and challenge alienation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis of Green Day's "American Idiot" using Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969), which was proposed by Austin (1962) and Marx's Theory of Alienation (1844/1975) provides insights into the intersection of linguistic resistance and social critique in post-9/11 America. The study reveals that speech acts function as vehicles for social criticism, with locutionary acts in lyrics acting as both basic statements of rejection and manifestations of resistance to alienation. This dual function suggests that the power of political music lies not just in what it says but in how linguistic structures themselves can symbolize forms of resistance to social control. Schreiber (2017) emphasizes how "American Idiot" was more than artistic expression, it became a cultural movement that shaped political discourse, particularly among younger audiences. By integrating Schreiber's insight, this research reinforces the idea that "American Idiot" effectively combines lyrical resistance with broader sociopolitical critique.



## **A. Speech Act Analysis in Historical Context**

### **1. Locutionary Acts and Post-9/11 Discourse**

The analysis examines how Green Day's lyrics function as different types of Speech Acts in relation to post-9/11 America and the Iraq War. Similar to Buck (2024), this research emphasizes how music works for political resistance. The lyrics function as speech acts, with locutionary acts rejecting war propaganda and illocutionary acts urging listeners to resist media narratives.

The analysis examines how Green Day's lyrics function as different types of Speech Acts in relation to post-9/11 America and the Iraq War. The song's Locutionary Acts (the literal statements) directly challenge Bush-era propaganda, particularly concerning the justification for war in Iraq. As noted by Armstrong et al. (2018), lyrics like "Don't wanna be an American Idiot " and "Don't want a nation under the new media" function as obvious rejections of what Searle (1969) would classify as government propaganda surrounding the WMD narrative.

The literal meaning of "subliminal mindfuck America" from Green Day (2004) is directly criticizes the manipulation of public consciousness through media narratives that supported the Iraq War, which was also such as Bush's speech (2003). Herman and Chomsky (2002) identify this as "manufacturing consent" where media normalized military intervention.

### **2. Illocutionary Force in Political Context**

#### **a) Directive Acts:**

"Don't wanna be an American idiot" provides both a refusal and an instruction to listeners to reject irrational approval of war propaganda., mostly relevant in light of what MacAskill & Burkeman (2003) document as Bush's ultimatum to Iraq and the administration's insistence on WMD threats despite international skepticism. It also reflecting what Rosenberg (2019) identifies as a broader cultural shift toward questioning authority after the WMD intelligence failures.

"We're not the ones who're meant to follow" functions as a directive to resist government narratives, particularly significant in light of what Merchant (2023) reveals as the lasting impact of intelligence failures regarding WMDs in Iraq, which continue to shadow U.S. intelligence credibility two decades later. According to Quail (2021), it represents a significant response to the political climate during George W. Bush's presidency, demonstrating how protest songs functioned not only as expressions of dissent but also as substances for political consciousness among youth audiences. This aligns with the broader pattern of musical activism that emerged as a counter narrative to mainstream media portrayals of post-9/11 America and the Iraq War.

#### **b) Declarative Acts:**

Declarative Acts such as "Don't want a nation under the new media" challenge institutional relationships between media and state power, essentially declaring independence from mainstream narratives that, as Herman and Chomsky (2002) argue, functioned to manufacture consent for military intervention.

"Where everything isn't meant to be okay" functions as a declaration that, through Searle's (1969) framework, creates a new reality by formally rejecting the normalized state of perpetual war and investigation, which Jhaveri (2004) connects to U.S. petroimperialist ambitions in Iraq.

#### **c) Expressive Acts:**

"In television dreams of tomorrow" functions as an expressive act criticizing media's role in shaping public perception of future threats, demonstrating what Reynolds (2004) identifies as the media's strategic use of fear-based propaganda during the Iraq War.

#### **d) Assertive/Representative Acts:**

"For that's enough to argue" operates as an assertive statement that, in Searle's (1969) framework, represents a truth claim about the plenty of evidence to challenge dominant political narratives, particularly regarding the WMD justification for war.

### 3. Perlocutionary Effects in Social Context

The analysis reveals specific perlocutionary effects related to the historical moment:

#### a) Psychological Impact:

"And can you hear the sound of hysteria?" generates awareness of collective fear and anxiety in post-9/11 America, producing what Marx (1844/1975) would identify as a recognition of false consciousness in the war propaganda environment. Investigation in fostering critical consciousness about war propaganda, which Dirnt (2004) discusses in relation to fan reactions.

"Welcome to a new kind of tension" produces a perlocutionary effect that, as Jhaveri (2004) suggests, reveals the psychological impact of petroimperialist security measures on domestic populations.

"All across the alien nation" creates a perlocutionary effect that aligns with Marx's (1844/1975) concept of universal alienation, encouraging listeners to recognize what Ollman (1976) describes as the systemic nature of social estrangement under conditions of political manipulation.

### B. Alienation Analysis in Historical Context

#### 1. Media Manipulation and Estrangement

The analysis applies Marx's concept of alienation to Green Day's critique of mass media manipulation in post-9/11 America. The lyrics "Don't want a nation under the new media" reflect what Marx (1975) labeled alienation from species-being, suggesting Americans became disconnected from their authentic social nature through media-controlled narratives. This interpretation aligns with Herman & Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model, which explains how mainstream media manufactures consent for government policies through systematic information filtering and framing techniques.

The phrase "subliminal mindfuck America" is interpreted as representing Marx's (1975) concept of alienation from human nature, where individuals become estranged from their authentic consciousness through external manipulation. Kellner (2003) provides relevant context by documenting how post-9/11 media narratives created systemic alienation through carefully controlled information flows that limited critical perspectives on the Iraq War and promoted nationalist narratives that discouraged dissent.

#### 2. False Consciousness and Media Control

The analysis connects Marx's (1975) concept of false consciousness to the lyrics "And can you hear the sound of hysteria?" suggesting identifies to collective delusion which fostered by media manipulation. Herman & Chomsky's (1988) work on media propaganda provides theoretical support for this interpretation, particularly their analysis of how dominant media institutions shape public perception to align with political and economic interests. Jhaveri (2004) applies this framework specifically to Iraq War coverage, documenting how media narratives promoted uncritical acceptance of government claims about WMDs.

Kellner (2003) considers specifically over the Iraq War of how media narratives controlled public dissertation after 9/11 tragedy, "In Television Dreams of Tomorrow" proves Marx's (1975) concept of alienation to the situation then. Muttitt (2018) focuses attention to oil's strategic role in the war, strengthening how economic impulse shaped media narratives, a critique inserts in the song's rejection of blind nationalism.

#### 3. Social Impact

The song highlights the struggle between individuals and society that arose following 9/11 as a consequence of media tales that worsened social tensions and separations. Within these lyrics "All across the alien nation" and "Welcome to a new kind of tension" support Marx's theory of alienation (1975), stressing how civilization separates from the condition. When media handling caused gaps in evolution, American felt the sense of alienation during the Iraq War. The situation encouraged terror and suspicion, decline society bonds, MacAskill and Burkeman (2003).



#### 4. Resistance to Alienation

MacAskill and Burkeman (2003) describe media manipulation of WMD narratives and Marx (1975) alienation consciousness mentioned to the line "We're not the ones who're meant to follow." Marx (1975) gets the foundation of resistance to alienation through "For that's enough to argue" aligns with long-term general skepticism around broadcasting stories follow-on the Iraq War, Merchant (2023).

As Bustam (2023) emphasizes, linguistic choices in political discourse function as powerful tools that can either reinforce or challenge dominant narratives, with critical discourse frameworks revealing how social actors are positioned within power structures. This perspective helps explain how Green Day's deliberate linguistic structures serve to empower listeners by providing vocabulary for resistance against media manipulation.

The research discovers the construction between Searle's (1969) and Marx's (1975) theory. The results are relevant beyond historical contexts, as intelligence failures remain toward effect public belief. "And can you hear the sound of hysteria?" picture media manipulation and alienation from human nature, while the song's declarative acts challenge conformist power relatives. The linguistic structures from the lyrics demonstrate how inventive countenance can deliver long-term frameworks for critical consciousness. The next research should examine how musical aspects might reinforce or adjust speech actions, how linguistic resistance affects political over time, and how speech acts in political music have changed over time in various historical contexts.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Green Day's "American Idiot" is analyzed using Searle's Speech Act Theory and Marx's Theory of Alienation, revealing its impact on post-9/11 American society. The study highlights the role of political music in reducing false consciousness and raising political awareness. It also reveals media manipulation during the Iraq War through directive acts and declarative utterances, emphasizing the importance of both theoretical frameworks in evaluating political music. Future research on political art should use a dual theoretical framework to explore speech actions and social critique across historical contexts. Educators should use interdisciplinary approaches combining linguistic and sociological frameworks to analyze political music, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how artistic expression challenges dominant narratives. Critical media literacy programs should help individuals recognize and resist manipulation, and contemporary artists should use linguistic structures strategically to create effective political commentary.

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