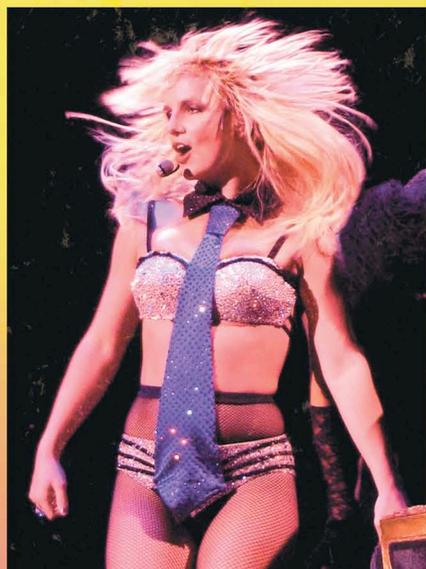
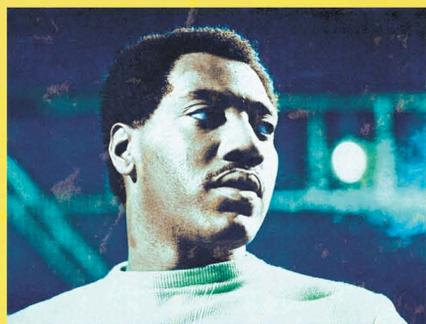


# THE ROCK COVER SONG

CULTURE, HISTORY, POLITICS



DOYLE GREENE

THE ROCK  
COVER SONG

ALSO BY DOYLE GREENE  
AND FROM MCFARLAND

---

*Teens, TV and Tunes: The Manufacturing  
of American Adolescent Culture* (2012)

*The American Worker on Film: A Critical History, 1909–1999* (2010)

*Politics and the American Television Comedy:  
A Critical Survey from I Love Lucy through South Park* (2008)

*The Mexican Cinema of Darkness: A Critical Study of Six  
Landmark Horror and Exploitation Films, 1969–1988* (2007)

*Mexploitation Cinema: A Critical History of Mexican Vampire,  
Wrestler, Ape-Man and Similar Films, 1957–1977* (2005)

# THE ROCK COVER SONG

*Culture, History, Politics*

Doyle Greene



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
*Jefferson, North Carolina*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Greene, Doyle, 1962– author.

The rock cover song : culture, history, politics /  
Doyle Greene.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7864-7809-5 (softcover : acid free paper) ∞

ISBN 978-0-7864-1507-3 (ebook)

1. Rock music—History and criticism. I. Title.

ML3534.G74 2014

781.66—dc23

2014004377

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

© 2014 Doyle Greene. All rights reserved

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.*

On the cover: (clockwise, from top left) Otis Redding, 1967 (Volt Records); Ronnie Wood and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, 1975 (Jim Summaria); Britney Spears, 2009 (Anirudh Koul)

Manufactured in the United States of America

*McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers*  
Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640  
[www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)

For Richard Leppert,  
who not only provided the idea for this project  
but graciously gave me permission to cover it.

## *Acknowledgments*

My thanks to the Greene family (Earl, Hannah, and Danielle), the Lynch family (Rodney, Jeni, and Jack), Ann Klee, Matt Potts, Donn Wingate, Keya Ganguly, Gary C. Thomas, Steve Fier and Phanomvanh Daoheuang (“Nacho and Nikki”), Joe Tompkins and Julie Wilson, John “Ray” Link and Sophia Green, and especially Richard Leppert for advice, comments, and support. A thanks also to the numerous musicians I had the privilege to work with and/or discuss music with over the course of three-plus decades. Additional thanks are owed to the departments of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, Political Science, and History, and the Master of Liberal Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, as well as the departments of Cinema and Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at the University of Iowa.

Last, a big thanks to my late parents for their lifetime of support and patiently enduring untold hours of my stereo, MTV, and playing musical instruments.

# Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	1
<i>Introduction: The Song Doesn't Remain the Same</i>	
• “Reading” through Listening	5
• Covering Cover Songs	7

## Part One—Judging a Song by Its Cover

1. National Anthems: “The Star-Spangled Banner”	
• Jimi Hendrix (Woodstock, 1969)	16
• Whitney Houston (Super Bowl XXV, 1991)	22
2. The “Anti-Cover”: Punk and the Avant-Garde	
• Sid Vicious: “My Way” ( <i>The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle</i> , 1980)	29
• The Residents: <i>The Third Reich and Roll</i> (1976)	36
• Hardcore and the Anti-Cover	41

## Part Two—Anatomy of a Cover: “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction”

3. “Satisfaction” and Rock: The Rolling Stones ( <i>Out of Our Heads</i> , 1965)	
• The Anti-Beatles	50
• “Satisfaction” as Manifesto	52
• Under My Thumb: Altamont and Rock Totalitarianism	56
4. “Satisfaction” and Soul: Otis Redding ( <i>Otis Blue/Otis Redding Sings Soul</i> , 1965)	
• Paint It Black: Race and Rock in the 1960s	59
• Soul Brands: Motown and Stax	61
• “Satisfaction” as Protest	64

5. “Satisfaction” and Punk: Devo ( <i>Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!</i> , 1978)	
• A Postmodern Protest Band (or, Anarchy in Akron)	67
• “Satisfaction” as Deconstruction	70
• Marketing Opposition	72
6. “Satisfaction” and Pop: Britney Spears ( <i>Oops! ... I Did It Again</i> , 2000)	
• The Lolita Next Door	75
• Blonde Alienation	78
• “Satisfaction” as Commodity	79

### Part Three—Signs of the Times: Cover Songs in Context

7. Music from the Waist Down: Covers, Gender and Sexuality	
• King Curtis: “Whole Lotta Love” (Single, 1970)	86
• Van Halen: “You Really Got Me” ( <i>Van Halen</i> , 1978)	91
• The Flying Lizards: “Sex Machine” ( <i>Top Ten</i> , 1984)	94
• Kim Wilde: “You Keep Me Hangin’ On” ( <i>Another Step</i> , 1986)	101
8. Black Musicians, White Songs: Race and Covers in the Late Counterculture Era	
• Rufus Harley: “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” (Recorded in 1969; Released on <i>Courage: The Atlantic Recordings</i> , 2006)	109
• The Isley Brothers: “Ohio/Machine Gun” ( <i>Givin’ It Back</i> , 1971)	115
• The Four Tops: “A Simple Game” (Single, 1972)	123
9. Dance with Laibach: Covers and the Critique of the Nation-State	
• The Laibach Project	129
• <i>NATO</i> (1994)	135
• The Dilemmas of Laibach	144
10. In with the Old: Covers and Generational Politics	
• The Midlife Crisis of Rock and Roll	146
• Frank Sinatra: “Something” (Single, 1970)	147
• “So Bad It’s Good”: Covers and Camp	150
• Pat Boone: “Smoke on the Water” ( <i>In a Metal Mood: No More         Mr. Nice Guy</i> , 1997)	155
• Johnny Cash: “Hurt” ( <i>American IV: The Man Comes Around</i> , 2002)	159

## *Table of Contents*

---

ix

<i>Conclusion: The Politics of Listening</i>	167
<i>Chapter Notes</i>	171
<i>Bibliography</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	195

This page intentionally left blank

## Preface

It seems that any critical discussion of popular music begins with some kind of autobiographical account, and this is no exception in order to provide some context for this project and put forth some of my own musical biases. Thanks to my older brother giving me unrestricted access to his stereo and record collection, by the time I turned 13 in the summer of 1975 I was a dedicated rock music fan. For better or worse, the first two albums that made a considerable impact were Emerson, Lake and Palmer's *Trilogy* and Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick*; I soon after became a devout Black Sabbath fan after seeing them on *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*. As for the classic rock albums of the 1970s, *Led Zeppelin IV*, Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*, and Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* had some great songs interspersed with less memorable moments.

During the latter half of the 1970s, my band/brand identity and loyalty became constructed around "art rock," and the artier the better. I can safely assume I was the only person in my high school who owned every Van der Graaf Generator album and no Van Halen. One purchase was *June 1, 1974*, a live album featuring Brian Eno, John Cale, Nico and Kevin Ayers. I bought it because I was a big fan of Eno's album *Here Come the Warm Jets*, but the revelation was two startling "anti-covers." John Cale reworked Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" from smoldering rockabilly melodrama into angst-ridden, avant-gospel-metal psychodrama. (The fact that Cale learned Ayers and Cale's then-wife had sex the night before the concert may well have contributed to Cale's extremely intense vocals.) Nico performed "The End" in her trademark Teutonic vocal style accompanied by her minimalist harmonium drones and Eno's ambient synthesizer noises. The Doors' psychedelic account of Oedipal desire and revolt in the context of the counterculture and the Generation Gap—killing dad and having sex with mom—was converted into a bleak, Gothic dirge where transgression amounted to a dreary, numbing stasis. In his

essay “Commitment,” Theodor W. Adorno suggested that “Beckett and Kafka arouse the fear that existentialism merely talks about.” While I would have hardly put it this way as a teenager listening to *June 1, 1974*, John Cale and Nico aroused the fear that Elvis and Jim Morrison merely sang about within the same song. It was the first time that I heard rock songs being covered in a way that not only radically reinterpreted the original versions musically but drastically altered my relationship to the songs as a listener. In short, I could never listen to Elvis’ and the Doors’ versions of the songs in the same way again.

When punk reared its ugly head ca. 1976, the controversy dominated the critical and media discourses at the time, even though it was completely absent from the local radio stations. Being an art-rock snob, I held punk in derision. However, by 1978 I was gradually losing interest in progressive rock as my favorite bands had broken up (King Crimson, Henry Cow, Van der Graaf Generator) and others were moving in more commercial directions (Can, Genesis, Gentle Giant). My overnight conversion to punk occurred on October 14, 1978, when I saw Devo on *Saturday Night Live*. All I really knew about Devo was that Eno produced their debut album, which intrigued me enough to make a point of watching the show. While the matching yellow plastic jumpsuits, robotic stage choreography, and cheap guitars made an immediate visual impact, I could hear the influence of Captain Beefheart and Krautrock amid Devo’s brand of punk rock. It wasn’t until Mark Mothersbaugh began yelping the lyrics that I even realized the jumbled, mechanistic tune I was hearing was a cover of the Rolling Stones’ “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.” I thought it was hilarious and innovative, but I also discerned a “political” motive behind Devo’s determined desecration of the Rolling Stones and a classic rock song.

Given my art-rock leanings and becoming a punk fan well into the post-punk era, I gravitated to the Gang of Four, Pere Ubu, the Pop Group, and Wire much more than the Sex Pistols, the Ramones, the Clash, and the Dead Boys. As hardcore punk emerged in the early 1980s, my art-rock side embraced the Minutemen, Sonic Youth, and the Swans while my heavy metal side took to Black Flag, Bad Brains, and Die Kreuzen. I also became engrossed by free jazz, industrial music, and the work of John Cage. Over the course of the decade, I played bass, saxophone, and sang (read: shouted) in a number of local post-punk and post-hardcore influenced bands. During the 1990s, I worked with a number of musicians influenced by other musical genres, and in order to broaden my musical horizons, I delved into contemporary heavy metal, modern classical, the Motown heyday, and non-Western music.

Entering graduate school in the late 1990s prompted a decision to retire

from performing music. My focus at the time was film studies and I began paying less and less attention to current popular music. Not unrelated, the advent of CDs entailed a huge amount of reissues and I increasingly retreated to the security of my cultural bunker of the 1970s. I adopted the attitude that with few exceptions, music after 1980 was a waste of listening time. By 2006, I sold off the vast majority of a collection that probably numbered between 1,500 and 2,000 CDs, save my personal canon of 1970s art rock, hard rock, and post-punk. The current state of American and English popular music was not a concern, and the few contemporary bands that did interest me ranged from the Mexican *música duanguense* of Los Horóscopos de Durango to the Swedish math-metal of Meshuggah.

My renewed interest in popular music came about in an unintended way. Critical interest in television comedy led into work on the teen sitcom genre. In turn, I was struck by the extensive cross-marketing of teen sitcoms and teen pop music—Disney’s *Hannah Montana* franchise being the most successful example—and exploring this relationship became part of my book *Teens, TV and Tunes: The Manufacturing of American Adolescent Culture* (2012). Admittedly, I hadn’t envisioned that my initial critical investigation into popular music would be through performers like Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus, but it spurred a further interest in analyzing popular music not only at the level of the text but the cultural, economic, historical, ideological, political, and social contexts that are part and parcel of popular music. The cover song became a means to this end.

This page intentionally left blank

## Introduction

### *The Song Doesn't Remain the Same*

#### *“Reading” Through Listening*

One primary concern from the outset of writing this book was constructing parameters that would prevent it from becoming a “best/worst” list book of cover songs—an exercise that often amounts to self-indulgent tributes to what one likes and equally self-indulgent tirades about what one hates. Rather than “record reviews,” cover songs were approached in two interrelated ways. One was textual analysis of the songs themselves; second was how an examination of these songs provided a wider inquiry into the cultural, historical, political, and social pressures surrounding the production and reception of popular music.

Methodology and criticism of popular music entails a number of negotiations. One is the balancing act between text and context. Text-driven analysis can isolate music and a specific song into a “timeless” objet d’art divorced from any past or present historical or social conditions in favor of questions of aesthetic worth or cultural value: a debate which often digresses into which listener has “better taste.” With context-driven analysis, the music itself can become marginalized if not bypassed amid discussion of the various factors that surround it (audience-consumers, critics and the music press, the record industry, the changing technology of producing and consuming music, etc.). The goal of this project is to provide textual interpretations of songs while also assessing them within their specific context(s).

Here “interpretation” poses its own set of issues. One is form and content and, more specifically, musical form and lyrical content. Since the 1960s and namely Bob Dylan, lyrics are elevated to the status of “rock poetry,” judged by their literary quality, social conscience, and the ability to stand on their own outside a musical setting.<sup>1</sup> As Robert Christgau cogently stated in 1967, “Poems are read or said. Songs are sung.”<sup>2</sup> Simon Firth similarly pointed out that “the

problem with the ‘poetry of rock’ was its confusion of the use of words in music.... Song are more like plays than poems.”<sup>3</sup> Patti Smith, a critically hailed “rock poet,” put it more bluntly: “I started getting successful writing these long, almost rock & roll poems. And I liked to perform them, but I realized that, even though they were great performed, they weren’t such hot shit written down.”<sup>4</sup> The point being stressed is that lyrics cannot simply be read and interpreted without addressing how music functions to reinforce, problematize, or even undermine the lyrics—intentionally or unintentionally. A cover song entails analysis of *different* musical and contextual settings of the *same* song and how they can convey vastly different meanings. While the lyrical messages of specific songs are discussed, no lyrics are quoted. Song lyrics, photo images of performers, and recorded as well as live performances of the songs discussed are widely available on the Internet, specifically on YouTube.

The second problem is that formalist analysis can be daunting enough for readers with some expertise in music (i.e., ability to read sheet music, musical training on one or more instruments, familiarity with musical or technical terminology, etc.). It can be incomprehensible for readers who do not have such knowledge, much like someone trying to decipher theoretical physics without a background in higher math. Most popular music consumers “understand” music by listening to it and the affect produced, not by studying written notations; in this respect, interpretation is dependent on music as *sound* as much as the verbal “poetry” of the lyrics. Sheet music, guitar tabs, YouTube live performances and tutorials, and playing along to the recorded versions of songs on bass guitar were variously employed in order to analyze specific songs with some degree of accuracy.<sup>5</sup> However, the formalist discussion is limited to main riffs, chord progressions, and song structures. Any errors, discrepancies, omissions, or oversimplifications are ultimately the responsibility of the author, not the sources utilized.

A third problem is that as much as one tries to be “objective,” interpretation is subjective and ultimately one listener’s opinion. In their *highly* divergent readings of Led Zeppelin’s “Black Dog,” Simon Reynolds and Joy Press contended “[Robert] Plant is wracked with desire, shivering and stuttering like he’s going through cold turkey; the turgid, grueling riff incarnates sex as agony and toil,” while Susan Fast countered that “Plant’s tone, which sounds like the whine of a spoiled child ... makes it fairly clear his perceived victimization is intended as a parody.”<sup>6</sup> My interest in the debate is around the charges of sexism often leveled against Led Zeppelin and heavy metal as a whole. From my vantage point as listener-critic, I do not hear the main riff of “Black Dog” as “turgid [and] grueling” but powerful and disorientating in its sheer heaviness

and highly irregular meter shifts, nor do I hear anything in Plant's wailing that "makes it fairly clear his perceived victimization is intended as a parody." My interpretation is that "Black Dog" musically manifests the desperation and disorientation of unrequited lust, and the vocals—which are largely sung a cappella between the instrumental sections to manifest a sense of isolation or "aleness"—express the position of a male who cannot possess the object of his desire being consumed by self-pity and resentment. In this respect, "Black Dog" is sexist to the extent the song expresses a highly "masculinist" view of sexuality where the woman is represented as some form of "object-Other" who becomes idealized and/or vilified: something Led Zeppelin is hardly alone in doing as far as the schema of rock music, let alone popular music and popular culture as a whole.

### *Covering Cover Songs*

Authorship varies in different forms of cultural production. In literature, the person who wrote the novel, play, or poem is designated as the author, although in translated works the translator becomes a kind of "co-author." In film, the director is designated the author despite the multitudes of people involved in the production of a film. Another collective form of cultural production is television where authorship is usually designated around the creator of the show (Norman Lear sitcoms, Chuck Lorre sitcoms, Dan Schneider sitcoms) or the star of the show (*Home Improvement* and *Last Man Standing* are Tim Allen sitcoms). For the most part, music is also a collective form of cultural production involving an ensemble of performers ranging from a small amateur band to a full professional orchestra, outside songwriters and arrangers, concert and studio personnel (producers, engineers, session musicians, sound and lighting techs, etc.), and people on the business end of music (managers, publicists, record company artist and repertoire staff, major label executives, etc.).<sup>7</sup> While classical music designates authorship around the composer—a Mozart concerto, a Beethoven symphony, or a Rossini opera—what popular music and politics share is that authorship is primarily assigned to the *performer*.<sup>8</sup> A singer may work with songwriters and studio producers and a politician may employ speechwriters and policy experts, but in the end, the song or political message is assigned to the messenger—be it Britney Spears or Barack Obama.

In the scope of this project, a "cover song" is defined as a different recorded version of a song against a previously recorded *standard version*. This

standard version is not necessarily the original version in the sense of being the *first* recorded version of the song; it is the *best-known* version associated with a specific performer and performance of a song. For instance, the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" is the original version and the standard version of the song, and can be designated the "original/standard version." However, the original version of "It's All Over Now" was recorded by the Valentinos in 1964 and soon after covered by the Stones, who had a hit single with their version. "It's All Over Now" is commonly known as a Stones song (standard version) rather than a Valentinos song (original version). For this reason, the terms "original version," "standard version," or "original/standard version" are used when and where applicable; in comparative analysis, the term "version" is used to discuss songs as a matter of convenience.

Part One examines music as an ideological product and producer of social order versus dissonance and noise as symptoms and signifiers of social disorder. Chapter 1 analyzes two well-known and decidedly different cover versions of America's national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner": Jimi Hendrix at the Woodstock festival in 1969 and Whitney Houston at the 1991 Super Bowl. At the immediate level, Hendrix's discordant instrumental version was performed at one of the largest counterculture music festivals at the peak of Vietnam while Houston's soul-pop vocal version backed by an orchestra was done at the biggest sporting event in America and nationally televised during the first weeks of the Gulf War. Beyond the issue of war, both Hendrix and Houston offer a musical representation of America as a liberal-democratic society in specific historical moments of crisis. Whereas Hendrix infused the national anthem with dissonance and noise to represent America cracking at the seams in the turmoil of the late 1960s, Houston's version of the national anthem as a majestic nexus of classical, pop, and soul music represented America entering the post-Cold War era of global capitalism and neoliberalism.

Jimi Hendrix's "Star-Spangled Banner" was arguably the first "anti-cover" done in rock music, and chapter 2 examines the idea of anti-covers. Covers can be replications, reverential, referential, or reinterpretations. Anti-covers are consciously overt deconstructions—and, in some cases, willful desecrations—of a previous version as far as message as well as music. For example, Fergie's cover of "Barracuda" is almost musically identical to Heart's original/standard version, the lyrics are an indictment of a male-dominated recording industry's exploitation of women, and both versions are sung by women. The post-hardcore power trio Phantom Toolbooth's version of "Barracuda" (*Power Toy*, 1988) is an anti-cover in that it is much faster, infused with an ample amount of guitar noise, and the careening rhythm section threat-

ens the internal stability of the song rather than reinforcing it. Moreover, it is sung by a man about his subordinate status in the music industry. Rather than assailing the pervasive sexism in rock, "Barracuda" becomes an attack on the economic power and commercial control exerted by the major recording companies.

In the 1970s, the punk movement exploded as an alleged repudiation of rock and roll while at the same time relying on traditional rock form. Anti-covers became a staple of punk, and one of the landmarks was Sid Vicious' mauling of Frank Sinatra's "My Way," converting it from a self-aggrandizing MOR anthem of self-determination to an equally self-aggrandizing punk anthem of self-destruction. While unintended, the punk movement also generated greater public exposure for bands already working in areas combining rock primitivism and avant-garde experimentalism, especially as punk evolved into post-punk in the late 1970s. One such band was the Residents, who engaged in a full-scale assault on rock tradition with *The Third Reich and Roll* (1976)—a "collision" as opposed to "collection" of avant-garde butchering of classic rock songs and a none-too-subtle critique of the authoritarian aspects of rock ideology's supposed oppositional and progressive tenets.<sup>9</sup> This chapter also analyzes several anti-covers done by various hardcore bands in the 1980s. Emerging in the wake of the growing commercialization of punk and "New Wave," hardcore was a faster, more aggressive brand of punk and soon faced the same crisis of early punk as two strains of hardcore developed. Traditionalist "thrash music" was exemplified by the Dead Kennedys and the Circle Jerks whereas more avant-garde/experimental "post-hardcore" bands included the Minutemen, Big Black, the Butthole Surfers, and Killdozer.

Part Two provides a genealogy of the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," (aka "Satisfaction"). Chapter 3 focuses on rock and the Stones' original/standard version released in 1965. On the surface, "Satisfaction" is an indictment of conformity, consumer society, and mass culture that has been canonized as one of rock's defining "oppositional" statements. However, the underlying theme of "Satisfaction"—like many of the Stones' songs—is male sexual gratification and alienation. In this respect, "Satisfaction" laid the groundwork for subsequent Stones' songs and imagery, pursuing related themes of alienation, sex, power, and apocalypse that reached a head at the disastrous Altamont festival in 1969.

Chapter 4 considers soul music through Otis Redding's cover of "Satisfaction" which was also released in 1965. As rock became the generational signifier for young white people in the 1960s, rock and its black music components developed a complicated relationship as rock consciously adopted