“WHEN THE MUSIC’S OVER”:

PRESS COVERAGE, PUBLIC MEMORY AND COMMODITY

IN THE DEATHS OF ROCK STARS

by

DANIEL GOLDBERG

(Under the Direction of Janice Hume)

ABSTRACT

Inspired by the extensive press coverage of rock star Kurt Cobain’s death in 1994, this study examines the importance of rock stars to public memory. Using the principle of media frames to locate themes in coverage, ninety-one magazine and newspaper feature articles and death notices commemorating deaths and anniversaries of deaths from 1970 to 2004 were analyzed. Articles were also examined for terms that treated rock stars as commodities. Thus, commodification is also examined for its part in the public memory of rock stars. Six rock icons were included: Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Sid Vicious, Freddie Mercury and Kurt Cobain. Findings revealed that press coverage repeated certain themes reflecting generational ideals and that the commercial aspect of rock stardom plays a significant role in maintaining the cultural importance of those figures.

INDEX WORDS: Public memory, Commemoration, Death stories, Magazines, Newspapers, Rock music, Rock journalism, Obituaries, Generational ideals, Commodity, Youth culture, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Sid Vicious, Freddie Mercury, Kurt Cobain, Media frames, Heroes

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ABJ, The University of Georgia, 1999

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2004

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August 2004

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family – Steven, Marsha, Adam, Jason and Susan Goldberg. Kate and Willie, I'll never be able to thank you enough for your endless support of everything I do and your patience with my many times of uncertainty. I never would have dreamed of undertaking something this big without your encouragement. You were right again. Jay and Sue, thanks for always making me feel interesting, even when all I can talk about is my thesis or the strange alternate universe that is Life With Moe. And Moe – my brother, my roommate. Thanks for putting up with me and keeping things interesting. Your fearlessness, willingness to dream, indefatigable work ethic and charisma will take you far. When you get there, I hope you'll let me crash on your couch. We wanted to play good. We tried to play good. I think we played pretty good these last two years.

I would be remiss in not offering a boundless thanks to my family and all the friends who held my hand through heart surgery. Last fall and winter were the hardest time of my life. I would not be here without the support of so many wonderful people – thank you for getting me through to the beautiful present and future. And a special thanks to Dr. Randy Martin, Dr. Robert Guyton and everyone at Emory and Crawford Long who made it possible for me to (a) continue breathing and (b) graduate more or less on time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thanks to Dr. Janice Hume for her insight and enthusiasm in undertaking this project. Dr. Hume treated my study like her top priority, and because of that we were able to complete this endeavor in a short period of time without any major speed bumps. This master's thesis would not be a reality without such a patient, positive mentor. Many thanks to Dr Jay Hamilton and Dr. Karen Russell for inspiring me to explore new directions in my research, for challenging me to think deeper and for generally leaving your offices open to me when you could have been at home planting sod.

I also wish to recognize the Grady High School class of 2003-04, whose camaraderie and support were vital in completing this journey to enlightenment. A special nod to Marcia Apperson, Carrie Packwood Freeman and Joe Terry, who were worthy opponents during my ill-fated foray into politics. I think we can agree that one turned out for the best.

And last but never least, thanks to my friend Carrie Packwood Freeman for supplying the lack-of-faith bulletin board material ("Oh, you'll still be here in the fall!") that fueled me through many all night writing and revision sessions. Remember, Carrie: I did this for me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

On April 8, 1994, the body of Kurt Cobain, lead singer, songwriter and guitarist for the pioneering grunge band Nirvana, was found in a room above the garage of his Seattle home.[1] Cobain had been missing for several days since leaving a drug rehabilitation facility. An electrician saw the body, and the shotgun used in the suicide, through a window. Immediately after calling the police, another contractor called a local radio station to report the news.

The mainstream and music press went into overdrive. On April 9, the *New York Times* reported on fans crying in the rain outside the home of Cobain and his wife, rocker Courtney Love. "The bond is hard to describe, but he was a lyricist who could feel the way we do," said 21-year-old Jim Sellars according to *The Times*. "I'm still in shock, I feel so numb that someone who helped us understand is now dead."[2] Print accounts of the event echoed that sentiment from coast to coast, as national music magazines like *Rolling Stone* scrambled to put out Cobain covers, hailing the rocker as a poet and "the spokesman for a generation."[3]

Since the birth of rock'n'roll in the early 1950s, every generation has had at least one anointed "spokesman" who has died young. Buddy Holly was arguably the first, dying at age 22 in a February 1959 plane crash that also claimed teen rocker Ritchie Valens and singer J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson.[4] Rock star deaths are especially devastating to young fans striving for a modicum of cultural autonomy, yearning for

sounds and voices relevant to the unique joys and difficulties of young adulthood.[5] A *Rolling Stone* tribute to Janis Joplin shortly after her death described the scene outside the singer's house: a mourning young neighbor recounting a casual encounter with Joplin while two "grandmotherly women" spoke dismissively of the "noise" of the band that came from the house. Of their interview with the reporter, one of the women joked, "I don't think we'll make the 7 o'clock news."[6] More than 40 years later, the death of Holly still strikes a chord among those who experienced his music firsthand, and even those who discovered the music years after his passing.[7] In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of rock'n'roll, rock singer John Mellencamp wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* outlining the relevance of Holly: his influence on songwriting and a sound that inspired generations of musicians from the Beatles onward.[8]

By examining commemorations of deceased rock icons in mainstream newspapers and magazines, this study seeks a greater understanding of their cultural relevance. Many studies have been written regarding the relevance of death among politicians, generational heroes and even public figures like Princess Diana.[9] Books have even been written summarizing the deaths – often violent or tragic – of rock stars.[10] Backgrounds have been established, aftermaths have been analyzed and heroin needle tracks have been counted.[11]

But nowhere have I found a thorough academic analysis of what those countless cover stories and newspaper commemorations, mourning the loss of another "spokesman for a generation," tell us about ourselves as a society and our relationship with these figures. Why do we choose to make a hero out of a suicidal junkie? What is accomplished by remembering a figure who touched our lives only through a radio dial or

music video? This study examines commemoration as a reflection of youth culture and the commodification of rock stars as a factor in collective memory.

Like the death of Holly, and later the post-Summer of Love death of Joplin, Cobain's death was cast by the media as an event of paramount cultural significance to my peers. His status as one of the most significant popular culture deaths of my generation is demonstrated by Cobain's continued presence in the press ten years later: in addition to the cover of American publication *Spin*, the grunge icon was the lead story in the April 2004 issues of British rock magazines *Q*, *Uncut* and *New Musical Express*.[12] In the years that have followed his death, the singer has been tagged as the rock god of my generation. With that in mind, this study purports to understand why Cobain's death – and those of others like Joplin, Morrison, Hendrix, etc. – has left such an indelible mark on public memory.

Public Memory

Of public memory, Connerton says: "It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. To the extent that their memories of a society's past diverge, to the extent its members can share neither experiences nor assumptions."[13] Schwartz elaborates on the function of collective memory by noting that it "works by subsuming individual experiences under cultural schemes that make them comprehensible and, therefore, meaningful."[14] Furthermore, he writes "Modern society sustains a minimum of memories common to all its members, and many American heroes could serve as vehicles to explore these."[15] This study investigates these principles based on the assertion that a rock icon – a figure such as Jim Morrison, for instance, who retains

his status across generations and through various phases of rock music's evolution – represents more than just Morrison himself in public consciousness. He becomes representative of the needs, values and attitudes of his generation and later generations that identify with his iconic status.

The impetus for using magazines and newspapers as artifacts of public memory is rooted in Schwartz's observation that:

> Collective memory affects what individuals think about the past but transcends the individuals because it is constituted by what Alfred Kroeber called "superpersonal" properties, which include narratives, pictorial objects, monuments and shrines, place-names, and observances that are accumulated and transmitted across generations.[16]

Magazines and newspapers, which are ubiquitous in contemporary culture, offer such narratives and pictorial objects. Schwartz recognized this directly in his study of the collective memory of Abraham Lincoln, stating that "newspapers, clergymen, teachers, and politicians" were influential in how the president was remembered in years following his assassination.[17] While this study does not contend that any figure within popular culture could be as important as Lincoln, it does assume that the maintenance and function of public memory works the same.

Further clarifying the importance of memory, Schwartz writes that, "As a model *of* society, collective memory reflects past events in terms of needs, interest, fears, and aspirations of the present. As a model *for* society, collective memory performs two functions: it embodies a template that organizes and animates behavior and a frame with which people locate and find meaning for their present experience."[18] In this manner,

public memory acts as a crystallization of the above concepts in this discussion of youth culture in the rock era.

Understanding that "collective memory is part of the culture's meaning making apparatus," other studies of culture can be used to examine how these concepts. Raymond Williams defines the theory of culture "as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life."[19] According to this theory, analysis of parts of culture – the press, for instance – reveals relationships and functions of the whole. Such relationships are manifested in patterns, which, Williams says, "sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind."[20] By discovering such patterns and discontinuities in obituaries and commemorations, this study intends to create a greater understanding of the significance of rock icons in public memory.

Obituaries and Commemorations

According to Hume, "For more than two hundred years newspapers have recorded for the public the lives and the virtues of American citizens. An obituary distills the essence of a citizen's life, and because it is a commemoration as well as a life chronicle, it reflects what society values and wants to remember about that person's history."[21] In her study of newspaper obituaries between 1818 and 1930, Hume asserts that, "Such an examination can help in understanding the important aspects of American culture, the public memory of its citizens."[22] Newspapers cover a broad range of topics, reflecting the interests of American society as a whole. So, just as Hume uses newspaper obituaries to gain a greater understanding of societal values, commemorations of rock icons are

illustrative of a more specific segment of the population -- youth culture – because, as Simon Frith succinctly states, “Rock is the music of youth.”[23]

Most published accounts of Cobain’s death fall under the guise of commemoration, one of two aspects of historical remembering according to Schwartz. Whereas the other aspect – chronicling – deals with “the direct recording of events and their sequence,” commemoration “celebrates and safeguards the ideal. Commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values.”[24] So by examining the media frames by which dead rock stars are commemorated, we can begin to interpret the cultural ideals with which those figures are associated. I argue that over time, dead rock stars are identified with certain collectively accepted character traits that provide insight into not only who the stars were, but what values are important to youth culture, or more specifically, people in their teens and twenties.

The mainstream music magazines and newspapers used in this study are the perfect forum for such commemorations because, as Kitch contends, “news media have become the public historians of American culture: they have self-consciously taken on the role of selecting the most important people and events of the past and explaining their historical significance.”[25] In another study of the part myth, memory and cultural values played in coverage of John F. Kennedy Jr.’s death, Kitch says the functions of journalism include “unifying readers into communities and nations, articulating and affirming group values and identity, and drawing on and building collective memory.”[26] Kitch’s work contends that “journalists accomplish these goals by telling stories and creating characters that stand for something larger than themselves, something that is cultural and

historical rather than personal and momentary."[27] Since the early days of the rock music press, magazines like *Rolling Stone* have been particularly concerned with reaching the youth culture that is the focus of this study.[28]

Working from the mass media uses and gratifications research of Rosengren and Windahl, Drucker and Cathcart developed a survey "establishing the parameters of the celebrity-fan relationship" – that relationship which would lead an individual to consume the type of commemoration with which this study is concerned.[29] In delineating the attraction of a fan to a celebrity, Drucker and Cathcart conclude that, "Subjects often listed more than one attractive attribute of a celebrity, for example, talent and looks, personality and ability, talent and style. This suggests that the way the media 'packages' a personality establishes a 'trademark' that makes the celebrity more widely known and more admired."[30]

While the packaging of the modern celebrity is concerned with those image components, Wallace argues that another intangible is also at work. "Myth is the necessary element in hero creation because myths… are universal and archetypal – common to all mankind. From culture to culture, throughout time and space, the same myths appear and reappear."[31] Wallace establishes that these myths often center upon the "rites of passage – a rite of separation, initiation and return" as defined by Campbell. Separation is "the call to adventure," at which time the hero seeks his destiny by transferring "his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of society to a zone unknown … a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds and impossible delight."[32] During initiation, "the hero moves in a dream landscape … where he must survive a succession of trials."[33] Finally, "having

fought his trial bravely" the hero "may now return to earth to redeem the waiting public."[34] Wallace offers an alternative to Campbell's three-pronged hero myth, the scapegoat hero, whose "function is also to affirm the basic good of the social order, but rather than performing heroic deeds to redeem that order, the scapegoat achieves redemption by becoming a symbolic vessel to hold the sins of society and carry them away through symbolic or actual death."[35] Commemorations provide an opportunity for examination of such myths as related to rock icons by looking for stories that are repeated from source to source. It may be instructive to keep the rites of separation, initiation and return in mind when considering the unique challenges of rock stardom and the ways in which these figures are judged with respect to character by those commemorations.

Issues of character description are critical to this study and to the evolution of heroism studies through time. According to Schwartz's reading of Emerson's *Representative Man,* the philosopher concluded that individual greatness is not measured by "an absolute moral cannon; instead he made greatness relative to the prevailing standards of society, whatever their moral quality might be."[36] Emerson saw the hero as "someone to be exploited by his admirers and followers." That is, a hero becomes such only when his heroic qualities are relevant to the dominant cultural values of the time. The hero is symbolic of the needs of society, but might otherwise be overlooked in a different setting. Or, as Cooley believed, "the use we make of the great man far outweighs the virtue of the man himself. Like truth, the great man is created, not discovered."[37]

These interpretations tie in well with some other thoughts on the hero that will be of use in considering rock star commemorations. Drucker and Cathcart's study

concluded with a modern twist on Emerson and Cooley's insights: "The celebrity does not have to be great or even heroic by deed or thought. The celebrity need only be a presence, need only be the focus of media attention, someone the audience can readily identify with."[38] That will be an interesting perspective when considering how the subjects of this study, many of whom died as a result of vices that are traditionally unacceptable within society, are remembered. Also worth noting is Wallace's concept of the "scapegoat hero" who has been "sacrificed for the greater good of society." These heroes "unite us in guilt. We make of their martyrdoms a symbol of our culpability for social disorder and renew our idealism in pledges to try to right those social evils."[39] Rock icon commemorations would reveal such guilt if it is a byproduct of tragic death.

Youth Culture and Rock Music

Sociologist and rock music critic Simon Frith says that, "Music … is an aspect of peer group organization. … Whatever the material differences between young people, they still have more problems in common with each other than with the adults of their own class or sex – hence the resonance of rock music, a sound and interest for *all* young people, as the sales figures show."[40] Fifty years after its birth, rock music is still inextricably linked to youth culture. Epstein identifies Elvis Presley's first 1956 performance on Ed Sullivan's late night variety show as a catalytic event. "For the first time, American youth had a hero who was just like them, a young (Presley turned 21 in 1956), defiant, leather-clad dynamo, who oozed sexuality and angst. … The days of the Tin Pan Alley, moon-in-June, carefully-crafted-by-adults, to-be-crooned-by-adults, pop song had ended."[41]

From that point on, rock stars achieved a relevance in youth culture that is eerily analogous to P.M. Pasinetti's description of the artist as a character of vital importance in Romantic literature:

> He becomes a centrally important figure because he is the one who, so to speak, specializes in a mode of life characterized by intensity of feeling; he offers himself… as 'the public man of feeling,' the established 'sufferer.' And the well-known notions of the artist's alienation from society should be partially revised in this light; actually, the eccentric, 'special' position of the artist establishes him in society with a new sort of authority and creates between him and his audiences a new, probably more intense and certainly more conscious form of intimacy.[42]

Pasinetti later discusses the commonality of young death in dealing with such romantic heroes, stating that, "By dying he asserts the uncompromising superiority of his own values, and his example becomes significant through the aura of sacrifices and the good offices of a surviving spokesman or of a faithful circle."[43] It's easy to equate the songs of icons like Joplin and Cobain with that "intensity of feeling," and to liken the young fans who mourned their deaths to the romantic artist's "faithful circle."

Rock Journalism

While rock music quickly gained a foothold in youth culture, it would be some time before a specialized field of journalism developed to provide significant coverage. Frith notes that American rock magazines of the 1950s were mostly limited to teenage fan-style publications long in pictures and fawning profiles, but short on in-depth

reporting and critical opinion. "The music papers presented the industry's own public view of itself and were written, accordingly, in a breathy, adman's prose. Their success was entirely dependent on their readers' interest in the stars they covered…"[44] This format was consistent with more widely circulated, though equally "pop-oriented" British music papers like *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express*, which equated news value with chart success.[45]

Frith credits "the Beatles phenomenon" – particularly the fact that the band's burgeoning audience was not limited to the teenage pop fans targeted by the aforementioned music papers -- with moving rock journalism towards "an alternative music ideology."[46] The pop approach became "inadequate" for serious rock fans seeking an "account of the music as art."[47] Modern American rock journalism finds its roots in the underground press, which "had its origins in the *Village Voice*, but its real foundations were laid by the *LA Free Press* and *Berkeley Barb* in 1964, papers that were not concerned with music as such but with life-style, with 'dope, sex and revolution…'"[48]

According to Frith, later specialist magazines like *Creem*, *Crawdaddy!* and *Rolling Stone* built upon the ideology that, "Rock was defined as the music that articulated the values of a new community of youth; it was opposed to the traditional values of show biz."[49] Most of those original rock specialists have since faded away, but *Rolling Stone* – arriving on the scene in 1967, just in time to commemorate some of the most prominent rock star deaths in the form's history – continues, though, as Frith argues, it has long since "become integrated into the American music business."[50] By the early 1970s, *Rolling Stone* founder Jann Wenner was forced to face the central conflict of running a business intended to serve an underground community: his magazine depended

on advertising dollars from major corporations to survive. Frith writes that, "The contradictions involved were symbolized by CBS's famous advertisements – "The Revolutionaries Are On Columbia" and "The Man Can't Bust Our Music…"[51] Ultimately a symbiotic relationship developed between Wenner's publication and the record industry, a relationship expressed by music executive Howard Bloom in the 1970s: "Within this business all anybody cares about is an article in *Stone*. It has more impact than any other magazine."[52] In the years since Wenner reconciled his underground origins with the realities of corporate culture, *Rolling Stone* has expanded its focus to cover popular culture at large, developments in music industry business and technology, as well as continuing detailed reporting on key events in rock history, such as the exhaustive descriptions of the deaths of icons from Joplin to Cobain.[53]

Death Stories

Death stories like those offered in magazines or passed by word of mouth among fans carry particular historical significance because of their ability to serve as a microcosm of a complex time, culture or movement and almost instantly crystallize positions regarding that movement, creating those communities and group values that Kitch identifies. According to Amato, this storytelling, often expressing a link between the living and dead, is a common phenomenon. "Death causes people to tell stories. …These stories can serve as explanations of why people die, when the mind and body cease to be one… what is the relation between the living and the dead, and what are proper and gracious deaths. They are also means to vent fears and hopes, as well as to recollect unusual, particular, and singular deaths."[54] By describing the deaths of rock

icons – and thus marking them as "singular" – the press identifies them as important representatives of a culture or generation. Furthermore, these deaths stories contribute to expectations of life and death within youth culture. This study will consider the rock icon as a mythic figure within that culture, with particular attention to the "live fast, die young" ethos that envelops the form.[55]

Proper death and the particular treatment of individuals in death tend to be subjective. That is, the public may be less surprised when a rock star overdoses than when a middle-aged accountant does the same. Perhaps influenced by the rash of rock star deaths in 1970-71, dangerous habits are closely identified with the rock lifestyle. Nonetheless, research shows that the "emotional response of strangers to the death of public figures often appears to be out of proportion to the personal loss. … Most of what we knew of the public figure was gathered by the news media and presented to us in an exaggerated form over an extended period."[56] Press coverage of rock star deaths will reinforce this observation, illustrating the heightened response to death of both fans and journalists. Furthermore, Michalowski's informal study of news coverage found that violent deaths – particularly murders, traffic accidents and suicides – get considerably more attention than natural deaths. He theorized that "it is the manner of dying, and not the death itself, that determines the social meaning of any death."[57] To that end, this study examines the importance of how rock icons have died to their prevailing place in public memory.

Robert Kastenbaum says that manner of death is not the only variable determining how an individual's passing is treated; he believes that social minorities – particularly women – receive less attention in death than members of a dominant group. "In some

circumstances death seems to destroy or transfigure, but in other circumstances to perpetuate or confirm existing values."[58] That is, if society grants women less social status or fewer employment opportunities than men, they are also likely to receive less attention in death in the form of obituaries and commemorations. While my study is not primarily concerned with issues of race, sex or class, commemorations of female icon Joplin and black rock legend Hendrix offer an irresistible occasion to gain deeper insight into the evolution of cultural values.

Rock star deaths are a magnification of the above concepts. In addition to the obvious "emotional response" elicited by the passing of a public figure, many of the deaths to this point in rock history have been tragic. The demise of figures like Joplin (heroin overdose) and Morrison (heart failure, likely due to alcohol and drug abuse), while not classically violent, especially in light of Cobain's gunshot suicide, were nonetheless unexpected and thus "inappropriate" by Lamers' measure.[59] Such passing offers a unique perspective on Kastenbaum's observation that the manner of death may overshadow the loss of life: certainly press coverage may get tangled up in the facts of the death event, but the body of work left behind also inspires a critical re-evaluation of the artist's life.

Anniversary Journalism

Huyssen says that "The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable."[60] Kitch asserts that today's "mass media are central" to uniting experience and memory in the minds of Americans.[61] She states that, "Marking anniversaries of events – from Pearl Harbor to Woodstock to the debut of the I Love Lucy show – films, mass-market books, and television specials reinterpret their lasting meaning for the country, using these stories to discuss American ideals and identity."[62] In that vein, this study is concerned with the impact of a narrower cultural event like a rock star death – which effects a population of fans or a peer generation, as opposed to a national crisis such as Pearl Harbor. An anniversary commemoration of, for instance, Jim Morrison, not only reaffirms the cultural relevance of that iconic figure, but of an entire generation as well. According to Kitch, "An anniversary is a ritual celebration of the community who observes it, serving to strengthen its identity and values through the remembrance of an event. … A magazine does so by telling the stories of individuals and occurrences that are connected to its specific identity and yet that also represent broader American values."[63]

In this way, "anniversary issues not only invoke, but also create national memory."[64] Events and individuals are designated as significant by their worthiness in being remembered, especially for younger generations who only know of the past through written or oral accounts. So:

> By enlisting readers' participation in the act of looking back and by showcasing 'real' people, the magazines seem to speak for 'everyone.'

> And by explaining the country's history as the story of representative individuals profiled in their pages, the magazines define American values that are presumably definitive and timeless.[65]

This study will consider anniversary articles in both magazines and newspapers with regard to their ability to reinforce the cultural importance of a dead rock star and any changes in the valued characteristics that become evident over time.

The Rock Star as Commodity

Celebrities are often treated as something other than just flesh and bone: they are products, valuable for their particular gifts and marketability for profit. A thread of this study examines the ways in which commemorations contribute to the status of rock icons as commodities. In particular, Frith observes in an analysis of the money-making function of the music industry that records, the artistic creations of rock icons, "are a vital source of income for the record industry, and the licensing and copyright arrangements involved draw attention to music's special status as a cultural product."[66] To simplify the process, one could say that a music artist mines his creative abilities, and record companies provide the means to transform those abilities into a tangible product from which both the artists and the companies reap a profit. According to Marx, "It is clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials found in Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. … But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent."[67] This study will examine how process that turn icons like Cobain into commodities are reflected by terms and reporting practices found in commemorations.

In his discussion of the nature and development of identity and memory as concepts, Gillis states that both "are political and social constructs, and should be treated as such. We can no longer afford to assign either the status of a natural object, treating it as 'fact' with an existence outside language. Identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*."[68] With that perspective in mind, this study is interested in how a rock icon is constructed, who creates and benefits from that image and how that construction is maintained. In her analysis of the relationship between youth and music, which can't help but crack the veneer of youthful idealism, Weinstein links the concepts of art, identity and commodity.

> The standards for a successful commodity sharply contrast with those of art: a commodity is packaged with an audience in mind that is passive and unreflective, and that wants no challenges or surprises. Since rock as a commodity is aimed at the largest possible number of consumers it must be geared to the lowest common denominator. Celebrity and image (hence the crucial importance of public-relations-marketing-advertising specialists) rather than artistic profundity and proficiency are the requirements of successful audience appeal.[69]

Since death stories and obituaries are also written with the audience in mind, it follows that rock icon commemorations provide a unique, powerful opportunity to remind the public of pieces of that figure – records, memorabilia and even the publications themselves – that will be an enduring and attainable reminder of their work. This study intends a deeper examination of where commemoration blurs into commodification.

Media Frames

At least part of the continuing cultural relevance of dead rock stars can be attributed to the principle of media frames. According to Gitlin, "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters. … Media frames, largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports."[70] So, rock icons become part of the organized historical and cultural explanation for rock music's place in America once they have been established as figures that "matter." Entman focuses on the issue of salience, or which information within a story is made "more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences."[71] Consequently, he notes that "frames select and call attention to particular aspects of the reality described, which logically means that frames simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects."[72]

In the case of rock icons, certain personality traits and stories may become salient by their status as a popular visiting ground of the music press. Other than the obvious issue of artistic proficiency, the subjects of this study lend themselves to press discussions of several topics relevant to modern youth culture, such as depression, addiction and suicide. How commemorations deal with these subjects remains to be seen.

OBJECTIVE

This project intends to analyze how rock music figures are remembered in the mainstream American press after their deaths. The image of the rock star has changed

and diversified greatly since the early days of the form. In the late 1950s there was Buddy Holly, the polite, horn-rimmed boy-next-door of such feel-good songs as "Oh Boy" and "Peggy Sue." Longhaired, hard-living "Lizard King" Jim Morrison of The Doors wrote epic dirges about drugs, excess and oedipal fantasies in the '60s and '70s. The early '90s brought Kurt Cobain's vintage of grunge rock, a style that craved primal minimalism and shunned the well-traveled excesses of rock stardom. It is my intention to use such varying character traits – in these and other rock figures – as a window for understanding the predominantly youthful cultures that valued those stars so greatly.

In this span of decades, rock'n'roll has gone from being an upstart counterculture that inspired fear among parents and political leaders to sustaining a major commercial industry of record companies and mass-circulation popular music publications. With that in mind, this project will also consider the impact of commodification – i.e. the status of rock stars as commercial products marketed to music listeners by record companies seeking profit – upon the way that the public remembers rock stars.

This study acknowledges that other texts, such as movies and museum displays, are significant in commemorating rock stars. Examples include the Sid Vicious biography film "Sid and Nancy" and The Rock And Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio. However for the purpose of maintaining a manageable focus, this study is limited to magazine and newspaper sources.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

This study seeks to answer three questions:

Research Question 1: How are dead rock stars commemorated in magazines and newspapers?

RQ2: How have those commemorations changed over time?

RQ3: How do those commemorations portray dead rock stars as commercial products?

With respect to RQ1, a commemoration refers to any article featured within the pages of the analyzed publications that meets Schwartz's standard of lifting "extraordinary events" which "embody our deepest and most fundamental values" from an "ordinary historical sequence." Thus, a commemoration of Janis Joplin's death will not necessarily recount the event-by-event chronology of her death in the manner of a news story, but rather it "celebrates and safeguards the ideal" by describing specific character traits and relevance to the culture. Such commemorations include feature articles, obituaries and regular departmental sections published immediately after death such as "Newsmakers" in *Newsweek* and "Milestones" in *Time*.

RQ2 is concerned with analyzing how character traits are accepted or discarded differently over time, with special consideration for changing generations of listeners and specific movements such as punk rock or grunge. This section of analysis intends to highlight the changing – and possibly cyclical – nature of cultural values.

Anniversary commemorations will be examined to see how these articles change over time. This analysis will look at available anniversaries with regard to temporal relevance, i.e. commemorations may exist for the fifth, tenth, twenty-fifth and thirtieth

anniversaries of the death of Morrison, but only the fifth and tenth for a more recent death like Cobain.

The term "commercial products" in RQ3 is concerned with the part industries such as record labels and mass-circulation magazines play in remembering a dead rock star. This study contends that once a musician becomes profitable within those industries, his image becomes synonymous with the product for sale, i.e. music albums, CDs, cassettes, magazines, etc. Thus, it may become commercially beneficial to those industries to keep the memory of dead rock stars alive through repeated published accounts of the figure's life and death. This study intends to analyze memory of the dead rock star with respect to his standing as a commodity. Particular attention will be paid to commemorations published in conjunction with a post-mortem record release; articles or sidebars that highlight discographies or other products, such as books or videos, released after death; descriptive references to commercial success – i.e. No. 1 albums or music chart hits – or marketable labels such as "the Seattle Sound" as opposed to artistic talents or a connection with fans; and how many industry sources are used in comparison with friends, band mates, fans, family members, etc.

Sources of Evidence

A sample of commemorations will be drawn from a selection of national magazines and newspapers from a local and regional proximity to the home cities or states of the dead rock stars. Initial commemorations will be collected up to three months after the day of death, as monthly publications are often not as timely as weeklies. For example, *Rolling Stone*'s Cobain tribute issue was dated almost two months after the

star's death. Anniversary commemorations will be drawn from regular intervals of five years – i.e. fifth, tenth, fifteenth, etc. – as available. Additional articles for the commodity section of this study will be drawn from the same sources, but will be located using Internet resources Lexus Nexus and ProQuest. These articles -- including product related pieces such as album reviews, articles on career retrospective CD boxed sets and features examining the financial legacy of a rock star -- are scattered and appear more often than conventional commemorations. These commodity articles will be used in conjunction with all other articles for that thread of this study.

Six rock stars, spanning the history of rock'n'roll, have been selected for study. It will be argued that through coverage of their deaths, these figures became symbolic of "something larger than themselves" within American culture. Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison all died within a span of 10 months in 1970-71. The trio was among the top stars during a period that was arguably the most inventive and exciting in rock. For the purposes of this study, Hendrix is of interest for his place as a black blues-based guitarist in the predominantly white psychedelic rock scene. Joplin is one of only a few high profile female casualties in what has long been a male-dominated industry. And to many, Morrison was the embodiment of the quintessential hedonistic, excess-craving rock star. All three stars died at 27, an age that has attained mythic status in the years since. From the late 1970s pinnacle of punk rock, I have included Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious, the aesthetic manifestation of the nihilistic, self-destructive form. Providing a bridge between the '70s and '90s is Freddie Mercury, an influential pioneer of glam rock who died a contemporary death of AIDS in 1991. And finally, I have included Kurt Cobain, the most widely covered rock star death of my generation.

Publications were chosen with regard to their reflection of national scope and authority in covering rock music. National newsweeklies *Time* and *Newsweek* are utilized in all instances, as well as the New York-based *Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone*, which take particular interest in cultural matters. *Spin* is a useful source for deaths in the 1990s and anniversary coverage thereafter; *People Weekly*, with its singular focus on celebrities and public figures, is useful after 1974. Local or regional newspapers relevant to the dead stars will also be examined. For instance, coverage from *The Seattle Times* will be analyzed in the case of Cobain, an Aberdeen, Wash. native and Seattle resident. An exception is made for newspapers covering rock figures born outside the United States, Mercury and Vicious specifically. Because this study is concerned only with American publications and values, New York newspapers will be used in conjunction with those figures due to that city's close association with the punk and glam rock scenes and its singular position as the center of American media. Publications included in the sample are available on microfilm and periodical collections at University of Georgia libraries.

Data Collection and Analysis

Evidence extracted from collected commemorations will consist of patterns of descriptions, terminology and events found in analysis and comparison between texts as discussed by Raymond Williams. This study will examine every word and phrase that describes these stars' attributes and actions, looking – as framing theory suggests – for repeated words and phrases, and for themes that will emerge. In addition, conclusions will be drawn regarding conflicts in those concepts between published materials.

Hume's analysis of American obituaries from 1818 to 1930 used four categories commonly found in those pieces – name and occupation of the deceased, cause of death, personal attributes of the deceased, and funeral arrangements – as touchstones for analysis. This study of commemorated rock icons is informed by that method, but significantly varied so as to remain unique and mindful of the differences between figures from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and modern celebrities.

Categories used in analyzing rock star commemorations will emerge relative to the information presented by the collected articles. Analysis seeks to consider patterns of description in light of cultural and social conditions at the time. For instance, patterns of character description of Jimi Hendrix will be examined with regard to their representation of the '60s counterculture or their relationship to mainstream culture. Other themes are expected to emerge with the crystallization of these patterns and categories; all will be used to better understand the cultural importance of these icons. Examples of the above categories will not be compiled in a quantitative manner, but rather used to establish patterns of commemoration.

Chapter 2 focuses on the cluster of rock star deaths that occurred between September 1970 and July 1971. Commemorations of Jimi Henrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison are analyzed. Chapter 3 provides a bridge between the 1970s and 1990s, examining the deaths of Freddie Mercury, Sid Vicious and Kurt Cobain. Chapter 4 deals with all of the preceding rock icons in terms of the relationship between commemoration and commodity. And finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study with respect to the link between commemorations of the rock era, commodity and public memory.

NOTES

[1] Neil Strauss, "'He was a geek and a god.'" *Rolling Stone* 682 (19 May 1994): 18.
[2] "Kurt Cobain, Hesitant Poet of 'Grunge Rock,' Dead at 27," *New York Times* (9 April 1994), A1.
[3] Anthony DeCurtis, "Kurt Cobain 1967-1994," *Rolling Stone* 683 (2 June 1994), 30.
"No Way Out," *People* (25 April 1994), 38.
Malcolm Jones Jr. ,"The Fallout of the Burnout," *Newsweek* (25 April 1994), 68.
Bruce Handy and Lisa McLaughlin, "Never Mind," *Time* (18 April 1994), 70.
[4] Jim Driver ed., *The Mammoth Book of Sex, Drugs & Rock'N'Roll* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 2001), 583.
[5] Glenn Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock'n'Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31-34.
[6] "Janis Joplin," *Rolling Stone* 69 (29 October 1970), 13.
[7] John Mellencamp, "Buddy Holly," *Rolling Stone* 946 (15 April 2004), 85.
[8] Ibid, 85.
[9] William Merrin, "Crash, bang, wallop! What a picture! The death of Diana and the media," *Mortality* (Vol. 4, No. 1 1999), 41.
[10] Dave Thompson, *Better to Burn* Out (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999).
[11] Ibid, 207.
[12] *Spin* (April 2004); *NME* (April 3, 2004); *Q* 213 (April 2004); *Uncut Legends* #2 (April 2004).
[13] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.
[14] Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xi.
[15] Ibid, xi.
[16] Ibid, 9.
[17] Ibid, 9.
[18] Ibid, 18.
[19] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1961), 46.
[20] Ibid, 47.
[21] Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 12.
[22] Ibid, 12.
[23] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 181.
[24] Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (December 1982), 377.
[25] Carolyn Kitch, "Twentieth-century tales: Newsmagazines and American memory," *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 1 (Summer 1999), 119.
[26] Kitch, "A Death in the American Family: Myth, memory, and the national values in the media mourning of John F. Kennedy Jr," *Journalism and Mass Communication* Quarterly 79 (Summer 2002), 294.

[27] Ibid, 294.
[28] Frith, 169.
[29] Susan S. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, "The Celebrity and the Fan: A Media Relationship," in *American Heroes in a Media Age*, ed. Drucker and Cathcart (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1994), 260.
[30] Drucker and Cathcart 266.
[31] Carol Wilkie Wallace, "Rhetorical Devices for Hero Making: Charles Lindbergh and John F. Kennedy," in *American Heroes in a Media Age*, ed. Drucker and Cathcart (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1994),173.
[32] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), 58.
[33] Ibid, 97.
[34] Ibid, 193.
[35] Wallace, 180.

[36] Barry Schwartz, "Emerson, Cooley and the American Heroic Vision," *Symbolic Interaction* VIII (Spring 1985), 106.
[37] Schwartz, "Emerson, Cooley and the American Heroic Vision," 110-111.
[38] Drucker and Cathcart, 268.
[39] Wallace, 169.
[40] Frith, 217.
[41] Jonathon S. Epstein, "Introduction," in *Adolescents and Their Music*, ed. Jonathon S. Epstein (New York: Garland, 1994), xvi-xvii.
[42] P.M. Pasinetti, *Life For Art's Sake* (New York: Garland, 1985), 6.
[43] Pasinetti, 50.
[44] Frith, 167.
[45] Ibid, 166.
[46] Ibid, 168.
[47] Ibid, 168.
[48] Ibid, 168.
[49] Ibid, 169.
[50] Ibid, 170.
[51] Ibid, 170.
[52] Ibid, 171.
[53] Ibid, 171.
[54] Joseph A. Amato, "Death, and the stories we don't have," *Monist* 76 (April 1993), 252.
[55] Thompson, xi-xiv.
[56] William M. Lamers, "When a Public Figure Dies," in *Living With Grief: Coping With Public Tragedy*, ed. Marcia Lattanzi-Licht and Kenneth J. Doka (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), 56.
[57] Raymond J. Michalowski, Jr., "The Social Meanings of Violent Death," *OMEGA* 7 (1, 1976), 84.
[58] Robert Kastenbaum, Sara Peyton and Beatrice Kastenbaum, "Sex Discrimination After Death," *OMEGA* 7 (4, 1976-77), 351.
[59] Lamers 54.
[60] Andreas Huyssen, *Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.
[61] Kitch, "Anniversary Journalism, Collective Memory, and the Cultural Authority to Tell the Story of the American Past," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36 (1), 44.
[62] Ibid, 44-45.
[63] Ibid, 48.
[64] Ibid, 60.
[65] Ibid, 60.
[66] Frith, 130.
[67] Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," in *Capital, Vol. One*, 1867.
[68] John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5.
[69] Deena Weinstein, "Rock: Youth and Its Music," in *Adolescents and Their Music*, ed. Jonathon S. Epstein (New York: Garland, 1994), 5-6.
[70] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 6-7.
[71] Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43 (Autumn 1993), 53.
[72] Ibid, 54.

> Janis Joplin knew that the aura of self-destruction was part of her appeal. She also knew that to her contemporaries she was much more than a rock singer. She was a tragic heroine whose character summed up all the contradictions, frustrations and despairs of life under 30. It was her special gift that nightly she seemed to triumph over her burdens in concerts that were a kind of cathartic theater of the young. Her exuberances, her frenzies, her "highs" set off chain explosions in the audiences.[1]

CHAPTER 2

DEATH AND THE COUNTERCULTURE: 1970-1971

A rock star of the 1960s was more than just a singer or musician in a band, more than a name on a ticket or a wax circle on the record player. In an era struggling to reconcile social arguments over the war in Vietnam, civil rights and class differences, figures like Janis Joplin became symbolic of the alternative choices available to young America.[2] Historian George Donelson Moss notes that, "The postwar baby boom had created a large population cluster of young people between the ages of 14 and 25. Such a huge youth population created, for a moment, a consciousness of a separate culture."[3] With that consciousness, rock stars attained a unique social position: the most prominent among that first generation of rock stars were leaders of a counterculture that embraced sex, drugs and rock'n'roll over the steady job and white picket fence ideals of its parents.

The Beatles and Rolling Stones "expressed the central themes and ideals of the hippie worldview"; Bob Dylan sang 'The Times They are A-Changing.'"[4]

That rebellion and testing of cultural boundaries brought several notable casualties. Three of the most prominent deaths of 1960s rock superstars – Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison – occurred mere months after Altamont, a Rolling Stones concert near San Francisco marred by death and violence, and considered the symbolic end of the counterculture by historians and even some members of the movement.[5] Media coverage of those star deaths was representative of the widespread cultural relevance of the pioneers of rock music: articles were published not just in *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice*, magazines that targeted youthful readers, but also in mainstream news sources like *Time* and *Newsweek*.

In the case of the news weeklies, coverage of Hendrix and Joplin appeared within two weeks of their deaths and included both death notices of less than one hundred words and longer features linking the individuals to the greater desires of youth culture. Articles about Morrison were limited to succinct death notices, probably a reflection of the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death. Newspapers like *The Los Angeles Times* published stories the day after death – or in the case of Morrison, as soon as details became available – with the serious tone of any other news article. In contrast, *Rolling Stone* published sprawling retrospectives of the icons' rise to fame, as well as death details and sidebar tributes, music discographies and descriptions of personal reactions within the counterculture.

The language of those pieces is illustrative of the frames through which rock icons of the counterculture were presented. For instance, in less than one full paragraph

excerpted above, *Time* manages to at least hint at a handful of themes that echo through nearly every published account: disillusionment and separation from "straight" mainstream culture, mythic live performances and lifestyles, raw physicality and sexuality and self-destructive behavior and death. It is with those four commemorative elements, repeated in press coverage of Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison, that this chapter will examine the media frames through which their deaths were viewed.

Analysis for this chapter is based on nineteen death notices, tributes and features published from September 1970 to August 1971 in *Rolling Stone, Time*, *Newsweek*, *Village Voice,* and *The Los Angeles Times*. These articles were examined for repeated themes and terminology illustrating the relevance of rock icons to youth culture with particular interest in death stories, public memory, heroes and cultural values. Additionally, five features and news stories from the above sources and *The Seattle Times*, published between 1981 and 2001 in recognition of anniversaries of the deaths of Joplin, Hendrix or Morrison, were analyzed in the same manner to reveal changes and similarities of themes over time.

DISILLUSIONMENT AND SEPARATION

Press coverage describes Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison as being out of place at home, either because of family clashes or goals that differed from other people around them. According to those stories, each made a conscious decision to go against the social roles and occupations common to their upbringing and to make their own way in a country grappling with new possibilities. Although it can be argued that in their time, these were new kinds of heroes, the journey to that status is consistent in many ways with

the traditional heroic rites of passage as outlined by Joseph Campbell. Press coverage of these deaths notes that the appearance of destiny, or the call to adventure, came early for these rock icons, with the realization of family, friends or the individuals themselves that each had a unique artistic or intellectual gift. The articles describe that gift as being stifled by family or social circumstances, a condition that demanded movement into "a zone unknown."[6] Ultimately Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison would all settle in the counterculture epicenters of San Francisco and Los Angeles, but coverage of their deaths uniformly describes a challenging path to cultural relevance.

For example, accounts of Joplin's life unfailingly trace her internal turmoil and desperation for affection to her hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, a small oil-producing town on the Gulf Coast.[7] In an article published two weeks after the singer's death, *Time* details her status as a "the city's first hippie," offering what became a well-traveled Joplin quote. "They put me down, man, those square people in Port Arthur. … And I wanted them so much to love me." *Newsweek* used a more blunt Joplin assessment: "They hurt me in Port Arthur."[8] The standard version of Joplin's story is that she "ran away" to the West Coast at age 17, although those same accounts are somewhat flawed in that they variously place her in college at the University of Texas in Austin and on an initial short-lived move to San Francisco at the same time.[9] Janis had definitely settled in the Bay Area by 1966, and by 1967, after joining Big Brother and the Holding Company, she was one of the biggest stars in the country. But still, stories of that time paint her as a lonely, isolated soul.[10] *Rolling Stone* printed the most vivid example, as told by Joplin acquaintance and *Los Angeles Free Press* music editor John Carpenter, who came across the singer alone, showing off a new red dress, at a local night spot. "Toward the end of

the night she kind of announced that she was leaving. Nobody said anything or offered to take her. Finally I called her a cab and she went home alone."[11]

Every printed account of Jim Morrison's death notes that he was "the son of a naval officer" as faithfully as they repeated career-oriented facts, including that he sang the hit song "Light My Fire" and was arrested after a concert in Miami for indecent exposure.[12] Describing the singer's suburban Virginia up-bringing, *Rolling Stone* states that Admiral Steve Morrison was the latest in a lineage of Morrison Navy men, a tradition that would eventually drive Jim away.[13] Stories noted that while in high school, the singer made the honor roll, often knew more about poetry and literature than his teachers, avoided school activities and spent considerable time cavorting with locals in an Alexandria blues club.[14] Upon graduation, Morrison fled his militaristic upbringing for college, spending time at Florida State University and eventually landing at the University of California at Los Angeles film school. Most articles mention that Morrison harbored a deep love of film his entire life, and at UCLA his subversive artistic sensibilities clashed with those of his classmates. In regards to Morrison's first film, produced for a class project, classmate and Doors band mate Ray Manzarek recalled that, "Everybody hated it at UCLA. It was really quite good."[15] After becoming a rock star, Morrison claimed in his official biography that his family was "deceased," when his parents and two siblings were actually alive and well in Alexandria.[16]

Press coverage of Jimi Hendrix's death portrays his wanderlust as originating not from disharmony within his family or even his peers, but from dissatisfaction with his own options. The Seattle native dropped out of high school during his senior year and took a job as a handyman for his gardener father. But soon Hendrix "told his father that

the work was a drag, and that he'd decided to join the Army instead."[17] He only lasted fourteen months as a parachutist; a back injury freed him from the military and Hendrix took to the blues guitar circuit.[18] Hendrix did not become an immediate sensation in his home country – that did not happen until he moved to England at the urging of Chas Chandler, bassist for popular rock group The Animals.[19]

In Moss' historical evaluation of the young generation that flocked to the hippie-centric Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, many who made the trip were "young dropouts uninhibitedly enjoying the pleasures of the flesh. The reality of what occurred was dismal. Thousands of youngsters showed up, most of them runaways from troubled homes, utterly unprepared to support themselves."[20] While this description certainly has its merits, most articles were not quite as judgmental. In its coverage of Joplin's death, *Time* acknowledges the vices of the wandering lifestyle, but also paints her choices as a digression from the "straight" society that it does not understand her, and does not need to. In the context of Joplin's mistreatment at home, her separation is accepted as a necessary grasp for freedom, with an unfortunate result. *Time*'s writer clearly recognizes the deep affection held by the rock community for Janis. Instead of the scolding tone taken by the "grandmotherly women" interviewed in *Rolling Stone*'s tribute, who dismissed the death as a minor event in a temporary cultural fad, *Time* recognizes that there has been a significant loss.[21]

Essentially the news weeklies examined for this study were sympathetic to youth culture's need to make its own way. For them, Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison showed that it was possible to make a life that did not require college or military service. Although Hendrix signed up for the Army, it is not what made him a hero to his generation. With

America – and the youth of America – split over Vietnam, the counterculture refused to accept the heroes of its parents and grandparents.[22] Even the original rock idol, Elvis Presley, served a celebrated two-year stint in the Army during the 1950s.[23] However the idols during this era in youth culture were not military figures, but the singers who wrote songs against the war, like Hendrix's "Machine Gun" and Morrison's "The Unknown Soldier," for which he created a short film starring himself as a slain American fighter.[24] In highlighting this multi-layered divergence from the status quo, rock star commemorations acknowledge that the deaths of prominent figures within youth culture are not simply isolated acts of carelessness, but the unfortunate result of extremes in testing new frontiers of American living. Nearly all of the articles examined in this study treated this "separation" the same way.[25]

Articles that were less overtly sympathetic towards the icon's estrangement from home, family and country – the *Los Angeles Times* story on Morrison's death, for instance – downplayed that element of the singer's death, focusing instead on other law-breaking behavior like The Doors singer's indecent exposure charge in Miami.[26] Ultimately all of these stories – those that are sympathetic to the plight of the counterculture and those that focus on the negative aspects – set up a battle over public memory. For readers without a direct link to the counterculture, such as young friends attached to the movement or children of a similar age, the icons that were written about in magazines were the closest representation of what was going in that part of the population. Newspapers and magazines provided an enduring context for the events that the press presented as important to youth culture. Readers without other sources or means of creating meaning for what they read would likely accept those articles as

reliable truth. Published accounts were even important to members of youth culture: not everyone who listened to the music could attend the same events or witness the same performances, so the events that received the most press coverage invariably became the most important; the ones people would talk about and remember. Those stories, which could be saved and revisited periodically in published articles, provided the lasting accounts of not just Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison, but of important landmarks to the culture that they represented.

MYTHIC LIVE PERFORMANCES AND LIFESTYLES

Newspaper and magazine articles published after the deaths of Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison present examples of the new mythology that was being constructed for and by American youth culture in the 1960s and early 1970s. While details surrounding the deaths were copious and sometimes graphic, the seminal actions and stories that made those lives relevant reverberate throughout all articles. If Joplin, et al.'s movement west is commensurate with Campbell's concept of separation, the tales of mythic musical performances and social custom-challenging behaviors fulfill the rite of initiation. At the time of their arrival, the burgeoning West Coast counterculture of the mid- to late-60s was in many ways that "dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms."[27] As Moss described it, the scene – especially in San Francisco – consisted of an ever-changing cast of characters seeking personal freedom and unlimited possibility. Sex and drugs were exchanged freely; in some areas communes replaced traditional notions of "home"; rock music, itself still evolving as an artistic form, was the sound of experiments like Ken Kesey's LSD "acid tests."[28] This environment allowed Joplin, Hendrix and

Morrison opportunities to establish their capabilities and push the limits. The "benign power" supporting them was easy to find: youth culture flocked to concerts and rock festivals, and later freely shared the first and second-hand accounts from which myths sprang.[29]

Press accounts portray Morrison as the most cognizant among the three icons of the part that mythic performance played in his fame. In distilling a life of 27 years, even the briefest of articles such as those published in *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times* take care to note Morrison's arrest for indecent exposure during a concert in Miami. The basic story, as repeated in *Rolling Stone* features at least four times since 1970, is that police claimed that "Morrison was drunk, shouted obscenities, appearing to use his hand to steer his sex drive, and attacked members of the group that booked the show."[30] The singer was eventually convicted of the charge, and the story has achieved a prominent place in rock lore, particularly due to the fact that, as writer Mikal Gilmore noted on the twentieth anniversary of the singer's death, while "more than 10,000 people, including band members and police officers onstage, witnessed Morrison's performance, it has never been clearly determined whether Morrison actually succeeded in exposing himself that night."[31]

This fact offers a quirky insight into public memory: if the people who witnessed the event are not even certain of what happened, it is not realistic to expect readers to question the magazine and newspaper accounts immediately following Morrison's death that present the Miami incident as part of the singer's myth. Such ambiguity spurs recollection of the incident, and ultimately a gap develops between memory and reality that makes the situation all the more intriguing.

Morrison's reputation is inextricable from these performances. The Doors built their reputation with a stint as the house band at LA's Whisky-A-Go-Go, which ended after Morrison debuted his Oedipal fantasy "The End," allegedly culminating with the singer writhing on stage and bellowing a desire to unnaturally violate his mother.[32] Another flashpoint was a concert in New Haven, Conn., where Morrison incited a riot by telling the audience that a police officer had temporarily blinded him with Mace backstage.[33] Furthermore, the singer seemed aware of his power, issuing such puzzling statements as the famous quote, repeated in *Rolling Stone*, "I'm interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos, especially activity that has no meaning. It seems to be the road to freedom."[34] That clip, intended as a summary of the mystique cultivated by the singer, appeared in several articles written after Morrison's death.[35]

In the context of articles published after their deaths, the cultural prominence of Joplin and Hendrix is associated more with live performances and recorded music and less with outlaw activities like those attributed to Morrison. The Hendrix legend gained steam with the universal anecdote concerning his post-Army musical apprenticeship as a touring guitarist with luminaries including B.B. King and Little Richard.[36] Other performances that receive considerable attention in summarizing the life of Hendrix include an early morning set at the 1969 Woodstock festival, which included a distorted electric guitar rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" that has achieved legendary status in its own right, and a high-profile concert on Britain's Isle of Wight.[37] But the most notable Hendrix performance came during 1967's Monterey Pop Festival, his first American appearance with his band The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

In a *Rolling Stone* "Appreciation," author John Burke remarked that Hendrix's burning of a guitar onstage was "a heavy routine during those innocent days of 1967."[38] Perhaps, in the months before the demoralizing 1968 assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the image of the wildly dressed Hendrix playing guitar like no one had ever heard was indicative of an optimism that something good and revolutionary could still be created in America.[39] And from that perspective, the burning of the guitar symbolized the rise of youthful idealism from the ashes of the old – Hendrix was playing a cover of the already classic "Wild Thing" before setting his instrument aflame.[40] Regardless, more than any other single image, that one ingrained Hendrix upon the cultural imagination.

It was at Monterey that icons Hendrix and Joplin first crossed paths. In the public memory of the blues singer from Port Arthur, Monterey Pop is the landmark performance.[41] "Janis' greatest moments came at Monterey, really, which was perhaps the finest moments that movement of which she was so integral a part has ever seen," wrote San Francisco columnist Ralph J. Gleason.[42] "Her Monterey Pop appearance made her national news, the film made her national box office." Big Brother and the Holding Company's performance of the blues dirge "Ball and Chain" is on par in rock history with Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" and guitar sacrifice. But in contrast to Hendrix image as a soft-spoken musical perfectionist, an image best described by a tribute published in the *Village Voice*, Joplin acknowledged the embellishment of her persona, and did little to downplay it. "People have a high sense of drama about me," Joplin said in a quote that showed up eventually in nearly every notice of her death. "Maybe they can enjoy my music more if they think I'm destroying myself."[43]

The mythology of early rock and its icons represents another means by which youth culture distinguished itself from previous generations. Traditional heroes of the post-World War II era were military officers like Dwight Eisenhower, whose reputation was built on his status as supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe.[44] Press accounts of Morrison's death bear this out: regular references to the singer's high-ranking father – even in the youth culture-oriented *Rolling Stone* – reinforce the heroic status of the military. Later came the myth of Kennedy's Camelot, seen as a political "golden age" of youthful idealism between "the dull days of Eisenhower and the dark days of Johnson and Nixon."[45] Young president John F. Kennedy, his pretty wife and their children represented a beautiful dream of family stability; Camelot represented American dreams of wealth, power, success and fame. Yet those were not highly regarded goals to a counterculture portrayed as living in communes and craving sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. But even to the less extreme segments of youth culture, those myths were the currency of another generation. If Camelot stood for stability and empire, the riot-inducing antics of Morrison and the emotionally cathartic performances of Hendrix and Joplin told their audience that it was OK to live in the moment. In Joplin's case, this was not just an implied motto. The title of her song "Get It While You Can" said it all, as well as statements like "I'd rather not sing than sing quiet" that were recounted in the press after her death.[46]

Furthermore, Morrison's on-stage flouting of authority spoke to a generation familiar with protests, that watched its peers shipped off to fight a war in Vietnam.[47] Hendrix's guitar burning and alteration of the national anthem contributed to the language of protest. His hyperbolic actions appealed to a younger generation in times

when it might not be practical or possible to stage a sit-in over every perceived injustice. And in the end, the importance of these acts may not have even rested in the acts themselves. Rosemary Breslin's observation regarding Morrison's Miami performance could be generalized across several of the '60s rock myths: "Most of these teenagers couldn't care less whether Morrison actually exposed himself or not; they simply adore the fact that he would even think of doing it."[48]

Inclusion of these stories, weighed with the ultimate consequences of such behavior, is framed differently according to the source. *Rolling Stone*, heavy on this aspect of myth, values these stories for generation-defining qualities. Rather than simply focusing on the question of obscenity in The Doors' performance of "The End" at The Whisky, *Rolling Stone* presents the band's expulsion from the club as a sign that they had become "too strong" for the little stage.[49] They may have started off small, but according to the magazine account, The Doors, and the fans that packed the club to see them, were gaining power and moving on to bigger things. The fact that such reckless spontaneity likely reverberated through other aspects of Morrison's life, ultimately contributing to a premature death, is not taken as a sign that such reckless behavior should be abandoned, but rather the limits should be readjusted. On the contrary, the straight news tone of the *Los Angeles Times* death notice for Joplin describes an individual set up for tragedy by the myths that engulfed her.[50] The newspaper noted that Joplin "had frequently expressed doubts about her health, and had been known to consume a quart of liquor onstage during concerts."[51] In the same piece, the singer was quoted as saying, "Sure, I could take better care of myself. Maybe it would add a couple years to my life. But what

the hell."[52] Rather than acknowledging why the singer was revered within her community, the newspaper urges readers to remember why she died.

RAW PHYSICALITY AND SEXUALITY

Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. It was the motto of youth culture, a way of life, and a cause for fear and outrage all at once. As such, articles about the deaths of Morrison, Joplin and Hendrix exhibit a fascination with the physical lives and sexual stage mannerisms – both explicit and implicit – of these icons. And while these articles show little overt variation in the way each is treated regarding the above elements of disillusionment and myth, differences show up in the sexual details of the white military son, the female blues singer and the black guitar god.

Framing of Morrison's sexuality varies from publication to publication, the unifying element being his fondness for tight black leather pants and allusions to the lyrical come-ons of songs like "Light My Fire."[53] (Which few mention was actually written by Doors guitarist Robby Krieger.) The more positive accounts of Morrison's powers refer to things such as a face "so beautiful and not even handsome in an ordinary way."[54] The same passage recalls a relatively tame performance, during which the singer "only tried to rape the microphone stand once." Short death notices like those published in *Time* and *Newsweek* still devoted particular attention to that part of Morrison's persona, noting, among other things, "keenly suggestive lyrics," a "lascivious style" and "orgiastic performances" that "turned on teeny-boppers by the millions."[55] If those descriptions intended to discredit or devalue the singer's sexual appeal as somewhat immature, the *Village Voice* leveled a more straightforward attack, referring to

Morrison's sexuality as "adolescent."[56] But in the next breath, the alternative weekly likens Morrison to boundary-pushing comedian Lenny Bruce, allowing that "in his own way" Morrison was a crusader against censorship because the singer refused to be silenced by those who did not share his subversive taste.[57]

If Morrison's famous leather pants were alternately tools of teenybopper titillation and freedom of speech, accounts of Janis Joplin's escapades are no less conflicting in the context of the late 1960s and early '70s. At the time, the women's liberation movement was battling for "control over their own bodies" with regard to birth control, while radical feminists considered "the sexual act a form of male domination."[58] Stardom allowed Joplin a freedom that she had never experienced. A friend of the singer's quoted in *Newsweek* said that Joplin had "'been called many things … but never desirable.'"[59] The same article described "the animal sensual grace of Joplin's body" and her tendency to "bound from person to person."[60] *Rolling Stone* provided more detail, noting a New York concert at which Joplin announced from the stage that she had "'gotten together'" with football star Joe Namath and later went on vacation in Brazil with "a big bear of a beatnik named David Niehaus."[61] Confounding the perception of Joplin as a young woman enjoying the celebrated sexual freedoms of '60s youth culture is the nearly universal commemorative detail that, shortly before her death, the singer had "acquired her first steady beau, Seth Morgan" and was talking about marriage.[62]

To the extent that newspaper and magazine articles focused on the Morrison myth, equivalent news reports fixated on the Hendrix sexuality, in some cases in a stereotypical manner. A benign account in the *Village Voice* describes the guitarist's "earthy sensuality" or takes care to note the attributes of the "girl on his arm."[63]

Elsewhere in the same tribute, a male writer tells of a female friend who "popped a few" pills with Hendrix and spent the night as his "electric lady."[64] More demonstrative are the newsweekly accounts, such as the death notice in *Newsweek*, which refers to his "explosively erotic" antics – "grinding his hips, making love to and with his guitar ('Oh, baby, come on now, sock it to me!')…"[65] *Rolling Stone*'s tribute is bolder in its assessment of "straight" culture's feelings about Hendrix's performance. The magazine recalls that The Daughters of the American Revolution complained that the guitarist's act was "too sexy," and the tribute writer acknowledged that Hendrix was "what every mother feared when she expressed doubts about rock'n'roll's effect on her daughter."[66] John Burks' "Appreciation" sliced right through the innuendo, referring to Hendrix stage persona as the "sexual savage electric dandy rock and roll nigger Presence! The voodoo child run wild in electric ladyland!"[67]

In death Morrison's aggressive sexuality was easily dismissed as a stage act or rationalized as a crassly intellectual challenge to social boundaries. Coverage of Joplin reflects a tenuous divide concerning the role of women in America, a divide that existed even among women themselves. Maybe Joplin played the role of free love hippie, maybe she was desperately seeking true love, or maybe she was both. Meanwhile, journalists grasping for a clear take on Hendrix were prone to slipping into age-old stereotypes of the primal, recklessly virile black man. Perhaps this is an indication that while youth culture was willing to accept a black guitarist as one of its heroes, America as a whole still wasn't quite ready for Hendrix to represent the many whites who followed rock'n'roll. The inability to easily define any of these figures is relevant: feature articles and death notices attempt to distill the lives of complex individuals in a few paragraphs

or pages, a feat that lends itself to generalizations and contradictions. As with other themes that recur in newspapers and magazines, coverage of rock icons' sexuality encounters gaps between reality and memory. Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix are used to represent broad portrayals of new relationship sensibilities like free love and communal living, so details about multiple love interests and lascivious behavior make for interesting stories. However, those stories make lesser points of the fact that, of the three icons, Joplin and Morrison were involved in what were portrayed as serious, monogamous relationships at the time of their deaths.

SELF DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR AND DEATH

Previous incarnations of youth culture had seen heroes die prematurely – Buddy Holly, James Dean – but there was something different about the manner in which Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison flamed out. While Holly and Dean died in a plane and car crash, respectively, accidents beyond their control, articles covering counterculture rock icon deaths recognized that reckless lifestyle choices were at fault.[68] These articles detailed deaths that were tragic, sad and less than heroic. Here Campbell's rites of passage meet an inconsistency. It could be argued that the continuing cultural relevance of Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison (to be discussed later in this chapter) fulfills the rite of "return" – in which the hero "having fought his trial bravely … may now return to earth to redeem the waiting public."[69] Taking a literal interpretation, this analysis works. However, all three died during a lull or a slump in their ability to command public attention: Hendrix was juggling backing bands, Joplin was behind the scenes finishing a new album and Morrison was taking time off in Paris to write poetry. So an available alternative is that

the public details of those deaths frame the three as representative of Carol Wilkie Wallace's scapegoat hero. This hero myth asserts that "the scapegoat's function is also to affirm the basic good of the social order, but rather than performing heroic deeds to redeem that order, the scapegoat achieves redemption by becoming a symbolic vessel to hold the sins of society and carry them away through symbolic or actual death."[70] Family, friends and the stars themselves acknowledged repeatedly the dangers of their lifestyles; press coverage tentatively broached a social need to re-evaluate the virtue of those choices.

Among the articles analyzed, the only significant variance in death stories from version to version was the degree of graphic detail. Fittingly, the announcement of Morrison's death aroused controversy due to the fact that it was kept secret for six days.[71] His wife Pamela reported that he had been coughing up blood and got up in the middle of the night to take a bath. She found him dead in the bathtub, with a "half-smile on his face, and at first Pamela thought he was kidding, putting her on. But he was dead."[72] Doctors ruled that the singer died of heart failure, not a direct result of drug or alcohol abuse. Morrison was quickly buried in the famous Pere Lachaise cemetery, also the final resting place of writers such as Balzac, Oscar Wilde and Edith Piaf. Doors manager Bill Siddons explained that he waited to make the announcement until after Morrison was buried to avoid the "circus-like atmosphere that surrounded the deaths of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix."[73] Press coverage of the death alluded to the singer's awareness that his life could be short. *Rolling Stone* describes a poorly attended concert during which Morrison nonetheless displayed his full range of stage antics. Afterwards he explained, "You never know when you're giving your last performance."[74] One of the singer's lyrics

– often generalized as a call-to-arms for youth culture – summed up his approach to life: "We want the world and we want it now."[75] But another power of Morrison's death story is not so clearly outlined. The singer's demise becomes a singular event when one considers that some published portrayals of it focus on the element of mystery, which underlines a lack of understanding between young and older generations. *Rolling Stone* leads with the reality that Morrison is dead: one of the generation's heroes is gone.[76] Yet *The Los Angeles Times* story instead zeroes in on the vagaries of his death. That article reports that a spokesman for the group "could give no explanation for the delay in announcing the death."[77] As later discussion of Morrison's legacy will show, the circumstances surrounding his death only deepened his myth.

A handful of quotes attributed to Janis Joplin after her death echo the same outlook. "Whatever you need, get it now," she said. "The other way you end up old and who needs it?"[78] In October 1970, Joplin was hard at work in Los Angeles with a new band, Full Tilt Boogie, on her next album. Producer Paul Rothschild got worried when the singer was late arriving at the studio; road manager John Cooke was sent to her room at Landmark Motor Hotel in Hollywood.[79] The graphic version is that Joplin was found "wedged between the bed and a nightstand, wearing a short nightgown. Her lips were bloody when they turned her over, and her nose was broken. She had $4.50 clutched in one hand."[80] Police reported fresh hypodermic needle marks on her left arm and quantities of liquor in the room, but no drugs. Officially Janis Joplin died of a heroin overdose.[81]

Jimi Hendrix died in London under conditions that death notices reported as similarly undignified. The guitarist had recently completed a tour of Europe and was

spending the night at the apartment of friend Monika Danneman. When she awoke, Hendrix was unresponsive, and Danneman called an ambulance. Police determined that he had taken nine sleeping pills and choked on his own vomit.[82]

Except for *Time*'s brief Hendrix death notice, which classified the guitarist as "grating" and "screechy," the dominant tone of these articles conveyed a sense that these losses were unfortunate cautionary tales to a youth culture that would survive.[83] Another *Time* article, this one written after Joplin's death, remarks that the singer died "at a time when life seemed ready for a change, to offer some answers."[84] Whether the magazine was referring only to changes available to Joplin, the continuation of youth culture after her death provided hope that others could also benefit from those answers. Like the music festival at Altamont, the message was that Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison had taken the counterculture's ideal of freedom further than it needed to go. One rock insider, Kip Cohen, manager of the Fillmore East music club in San Francisco blamed the fans themselves for Joplin's death, insisting that they demanded more of her than she could give.[85] Through this perspective, Joplin became representative of the scapegoat hero: her death illuminated the excesses of the movement and defined the limits for a youth culture seeking new boundaries.

But even as youth culture searched for new boundaries, the power of Joplin's death story – and those of Morrison and Hendrix – is the implied fear that, on the heels of Altamont and at the dawn of a new decade, the ideals and possibilities embodied by the counterculture would not last. Those deaths elicited strong responses in death articles because, for one thing, a writer like Ben Fong-Torres was essentially a part of the scene and maintained some personal connection to the icons. His response to Morrison's death

filtered down to readers, humanizing the singer for people who had no personal connection to the singer other than his songs or concerts. Thus, the power of death stories in this case is that they can inspire a response that is out of proportion to the actual day-to-day impact that a singer or musician has on fans.

ANNIVERSARIES

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Jimi Hendrix's death, the guitarist's hometown paper, *The Seattle Times*, described the scene at his grave.[86] Baby boomers and Gen Xers alike, in BMWs and "ramshackle vans," paid tribute with photographs and flowers. One 28-year-old made grave rubbings with paper and a black pastel; he talked about how his love for Hendrix's music had been passed on to his nine-year-old daughter while he made rubbings for friends and family, some of whom came from as far away as Amsterdam. Among the details contained in the short, 688-word article, only one sentence mentions the manner of his death.[87] There are no allusions at all to the sexually charged performances discussed in great detail by earlier articles. According to *The Seattle Times*, the legacy of Hendrix is his music, which has expanded to unite not just youth culture, but generations and continents.

This may explain why only one such anniversary tribute for Hendrix was located within the parameters of this study. None were located for Janis Joplin; every article connected to the Texas blues singer was a reprint of a previous album review or an evaluation of a new CD boxed set. In contrast, Jim Morrison remains a figure of considerable fascination: *Rolling Stone* alone has published extensive re-evalutions of the singer's cultural relevance coinciding with each of the tenth, twentieth and thirtieth

anniversaries of his death. Like the Seattle Hendrix article, these pieces gloss over details of the Doors singer's famous sexuality, instead dissecting the stories and character traits upon which his myth was built.

Even his death has grown more mysterious over time. In the thirtieth anniversary piece, *Rolling Stone* writer Mikal Gilmore introduces a rumor that Morrison actually overdosed by snorting heroin, and Pamela Courson Morrison placed him in the bathtub in an attempt to revive him.[88] The official cause of death remains heart failure, and Pamela died of an overdose in 1974, leaving her unable to respond to the rumors. Succeeding generations have built upon those rumors with their own twists: a teenage fan interviewed for the 1981 *Rolling Stone* commemoration embellishes a well-traveled Morrison myth – that his wife was the only person who ever saw the body, and therefore the death could have been a hoax – with a rumor that Morrison is alive and living in Africa or Brazil.[89] By comparison, the deaths of Joplin and Hendrix lend themselves to conclusion: definitive evidence of overdose was found, details were released in a timely manner, living witnesses attempted to clarify those details over time and perhaps just as importantly, the public had an opportunity to process that straightforward information and grieve. Mystery has allowed later generations to play an active role in propagating Morrison's fame, giving young fans new to the music of the Doors a chance to claim some part of the singer as their own.

Something that the three icons do have in common is again best illustrated by Morrison's tenth anniversary commemoration. In discussing the generational rebirth of Morrison as a sex symbol and champion of revolt, writer Rosemary Breslin observes that while living idols such as Mick Jagger age and become less representative of youth

culture, "The Jim Morrison the girls fall in love with, the one in the pictures, is about twenty-five and always will be."[90] Likewise, Joplin and Hendrix will remain young in the imagination of both youth culture and their baby boomer fans. They will never have the opportunity to consciously "sell-out" to a car commercial (even if the proprietors of their estates do); neither will have the time to sully their creative reputations by making a long string of sub-par recordings. In public memory, both can remain on stage at Monterey, at the pinnacle of rock'n'roll. Furthermore, Gilmore asserts that "many of the issues that characterized the Doors' history are still vital concerns in today's popular and media culture," specifically that youth culture is rebellious and possibly a threat to itself and America.[91] Some of the same parental concerns associated with the '60s icons are now projected upon current youth culture figures like Marilyn Manson and Eminem, reinforcing the pioneer status of Morrison and company.

The '60s counterculture's relationship with the war in Vietnam has been another unique factor in the cultural staying power of Morrison in particular. In 1979, the Doors song "The End" was featured prominently in director Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam epic "Apocalypse Now."[92] Breslin credits that prominent film with introducing a new generation of teens to the band. Ten years later, as America invaded Iraq, both Gilmore and the *Village Voice* noted that "a generation later – at a time when, at home, antidrug and anti-obscenity sentiment has reached a fever pitch and… the Doors' music is once again among the favored choices of young Americans fighting a war – Jim Morrison seems more heroic to many pop fans than ever before."[93]

But probably the most transparent theme in these articles is the need to reaffirm not just the performer's relevance, but a generation's as well. Gilmore – author of two

extensive articles about Morrison published ten years apart – admits to hearing a voice that "recognized and embraced" him as a 16-year-old Doors fan in 1967.[94] His articles betray an unyielding fascination with the Morrison myth and allow witnesses to its creation ample time to stoke the flames. Doors producer Paul Rothschild recalls turning to a sound engineer during recording of "The End" and saying, " 'Do you understand what's happening here? This is one of the most important moments in rock & roll…'"[95] Gilmore again invokes Morrison's burial place among "respected authors, poets, philosophers and musicians" and even compares the "brandy-tone world-weariness" of the singer's voice to that of vocal legend Frank Sinatra.[96] In celebrating Morrison's contributions and acknowledging that the singer "might have had a longer life, but that's not the way he chose it," Gilmore at once reasserts the autonomy of his generation and renews its mythology.[97]

Thus, anniversary articles revisit the cultural relevance of rock icons – for both witnesses to the original events and younger generations who know of these stars only through music and second-hand accounts – that was first established by initial death notices and features. Descriptions that show Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix as representative of a youth culture seeking to establish its own ideals in a world built by generations with differing ideas are of primary interest in these newspaper and magazine accounts. By repeatedly referring to the disillusionment and separation of the rock icons from "straight society," as well as their mythic live performances and lifestyles, raw physicality and sexuality and self destructive behavior and deaths, mainstream press coverage amplifies the importance of the lives and deaths of Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix to youth culture.

NOTES

[1] "Blues for Janis," *Time* (19 October 1970), 54.
[2] George Donelson Moss, *Moving On* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 199.
[3] Ibid., 200
[4] Ibid., 199
[5] Ibid., 200
[6] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), 58. For examples of these descriptions, see "Janis Joplin," *Rolling Stone* 69 (29 October 1970), 7; Ben Fong-Torres, "James Douglas Morrison, Poet: Dead at 27," *Rolling Stone* 88 (5 August 1971), 35-36; "Jimi Hendrix," *Rolling Stone* 68 (15 October 1970), 6; "Rock Idol Hendrix Dies; Drugs Blamed," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1970, sec. I, p.1; "Blues for Janis," 54.
[7] "Janis Joplin," 7; "Blues for Janis," 54; Hubert Saal, "'Singing is better than any dope,'" *Newsweek* (19 October 1970), 124-125; Ralph J. Gleason, "Perspectives: Another Candle Blown Out," *Rolling Stone* 69 (29 October 1970), 16.
[8] Saal, 124-125.
[9] "Janis Joplin," 7; Saal, 125; "Blues for Janis," 54.
[10] "Janis Joplin," 7; Saal, 124; "Blues for Janis," 54; Gleason, 16.
[11] "Janis Joplin," 6.
[12] Tom Paegel, "Death of Rock Star Jim Morrison Disclosed," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 July 1971, sec. I, p. 3.
[13] Fong-Torres, 36; Paegel, sec. I, p.3.; "Milestones – Died. Jim Morrison," *Time* (19 July 1971), 59.
[14] Fong-Torres, 1.
[15] Ibid.,36.
[16] Ibid., 34.
[17] "Jimi Hendrix," 6.
[18] Ibid, 6.
[19] Ibid, 7.
[20] Moss, 200.
[21] "Janis Joplin," 9.
[22] Moss, 201.
[23] Moss 101.
[24] Fong-Torres, 37.
[25] In particular, see Fong-Torres, 1; "Janis Joplin," 1; "Jimi Hendrix," 1; Saal, 124-125; "Blues for Janis," 54.
[26] Paegel, sec. I, p.3.
[27] Campbell, 97.
[28] Moss, 199.
[29] Campbell, 97.
[30] Fong-Torres, 39.
[31] Mikal Gilmore, "The Legacy of Jim Morrison," *Rolling Stone* 601 (4 April 1991), 30.
[32] Fong-Torres, 37.
[33] Ibid., 38
[34] Ibid., 38.
[35] Fong-Torres, 38; Mikal Gilmore, "The Legacy of Jim Morrison," 30; Gilmore, "The Unforgettable Fire," *Rolling Stone* 876 (30 August 2001), 52;
[36] "Rock Idol Hendrix Dies; Drugs Blamed," sec. I, p.1.
[37] Ibid., sec. I, p.1.
[38] "Jimi Hendrix, 8.
[39] Moss, 206 and 212.
[40] John Burks, "An Appreciation," *Rolling Stone* 68 (15 October 1970), 8.
[41] Gleason, 16; "Janis Joplin," 8; "Blues for Janis," 54; "Rock Singer Janis Joplin, 27, Found Dead in Hollywood Motel," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 1970, sec. I, p. 3.
[42] "Janis Joplin," 16.
[43] "Blues for Janis," 54.
[44] Moss, 107.

[45] Moss, 165-166.
[46] Saal, 124.
[47] Moss, 189.
[48] Rosemary Breslin, "Jim Morrison, 1981: Renew My Subscription to the Resurrection," *Rolling Stone* (17 September 1981), 31.
[49] Fong-Torres, 37.
[50] William Endicott, "Janis Joplin Death Laid to Drug Overdose," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 October 1970, sec. I, p.3.
[51] Ibid, 3.
[52] Ibid, 3.
[53] "Milestones," 59; Paegel, sec. I, p.3; "Death Disclosed: Jim Morrison," *Newsweek* (19 July 1971), 45.
[54] Fong-Torres, 37.
[55] "Blues for Janis," 54 and Saal, 124.
[56] Don Heckerman, "Jim Morrison," *Village Voice* (15 July 1970), 36.
[57] Ibid., 36.
[58] Moss, 210.
[59] Saal, 124.
[60] Ibid., 124.
[61] "Janis Joplin," 10.
[62] "Blues for Janis," 54.
[63] Lucian K. Truscott IV, "Jimi Hendrix," *Village Voice* (24 September 1970), 35.
[64] Ibid, 38.
[65] "Transition – Jimi Hendrix," *Newsweek* (28 September 1970), 103.
[66] "Jimi Hendrix," *Rolling Stone*, 7.
[67] Ibid., 8
[68] In particular, see "Blues for Janis," 54; Endicott, sec. I, p.3; "Rock Idol Hendrix Dies; Drugs Blamed," sec. I, p.1; Heckerman, 36.
[69] Campbell, 193.
[70] Wallace, 180.
[71] "Death Disclosed: Jim Morrison," 45.
[72] Fong-Torres, 34.
[73] Ibid., 1.
[74] Ibid., 36.
[75] Heckerman, 36.
[76] Fong-Torres, 1.
[77] Paegel, sec. I, p.3.
[78] Saal, 124.
[79] "Janis Joplin," 1.
[80] Ibid., 1.
[81] Endicott, sec. I, p.3.
[82] "Jimi Hendrix," *Rolling Stone*, 1.
[83] "Milestones -- Died, Jimi Hendrix," *Time* (28 September 1970), 67.
[84] "Blues for Janis," 54.
[85] "Janis Joplin," 6.
[86] Alex Tizon, "25 Years later, faithful say Jimi's music will never die," *The Seattle Times*, 18 September 1995, B1.
[87] Ibid., B1.
[88] Mikal Gilmore, "The Unforgettable Fire," *Rolling Stone* 876 (30 August 2001), 52.
[89] Breslin, 96.
[90] Breslin, 34.
[91] Gilmore, "The Unforgettable Fire," 52.
[92] Breslin, 31.
[93] Gilmore, "The Legacy of Jim Morrison," 30.
[94] Gilmore, "The Unforgettable Fire," 52.
[95] Ibid., 52.

[96] Ibid., 52.
[97] Ibid., 52.

> The fact that the world is weeping with his family is a testimonial to the power of Cobain's shared confusion and catharsis. No matter how much people might try to paint him as otherwise, Kurt Cobain was not the reincarnation or manifestation of some other generation's idols. He was simply Kurt Cobain, a singular and paradoxical member of a generation full of singular and paradoxical individuals.[1]

CHAPTER 3

FROM GLAM TO GRUNGE: 1979-1994

Rock icons of the late 1960s and early 1970s – including others not specifically discussed by this study, such as Bob Dylan, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones – created a template for a new musical form. While those stars went about the measured task of defining what a rock star was, their fans and the media that covered both had a hand in deciding what a rock star *meant*. As rock music evolved, it continued to diversify – even splinter – from the seminal blues and jazz-based works of Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison. Over the next three decades, new sensibilities stretched, and at times utterly destroyed, the idealistic, blues-based template for rock music and stardom that thrived in the 1960s. In the early and mid 1970s, English bands Queen and T. Rex pioneered glam rock, a style that embellished classic guitar-laden sounds with glittery theatrics and live show excess.[2] By the late 1970s, another rebellion was brewing, this one more raw and nasty than the counterculture ever dreamed. Punk rock was rooted in the noisy

disillusionment of American bands like Iggy Pop and the Stooges, but found a home with angry, nihilistic teens and twenty-somethings in working class England.[3] Ill-tempered, musically amateurish punk band The Sex Pistols were at the center of that movement.[4] Although they were widely dismissed in America at the time, The Sex Pistols were an invaluable influence on another angry generation given voice by a new style known as grunge that arose most prominently in early 1990s Seattle.[5]

Deena Weinstein places grunge under the broader heading of "alternative" music that became popular within youth culture during the same period. She says that grunge and alternative "come from music that was once exclusive to college radio stations, the last bastion of the 1960s' progressive, free-format FM" stations that programmed against the tide of safe, mainstream AM radio.[6] Furthermore, she cites the Lollapalooza Festival, "a touring festival, with a variety of alternative music bands, and political and artistic sideshow," as a "self-conscious attempt … to reinvoke the sixties counterculture."[7] But the comparisons between 1960s and 1990s youth cultures were only superficial. Whereas idealism was the hallmark of the Woodstock generation, by the early '90s the "sense of impending doom, ecological, economic, political, educational, and social, has replaced a sense of progress and of hope for a future world that is better than the current state of affairs."[8] Weinstein sums up the prevailing attitude of commercial radio in the late 1980s and early '90s with the title of a popular anthem from that time: "Don't Worry, Be Happy." That song does not represent fans of grunge and alternative music because "young people belonging to youth subcultures worry a lot."[9]

Punk and grunge sharply rejected the trademark excesses and ideals of the early rock years, yet each maintained its own vices. Glam rock, on the other hand, maintained

and built on the excesses of its predecessors.[10] With new generations of rockers and new styles came new casualties; this chapter will examine the cultural relevance of rock icons through the window of newspaper and magazine articles in much the same way as the last section. However, the changing nature of rock music and its icons demanded a shifting of focus. Whereas some mainstream sources dismissed early rock music as a passing phase of youth culture, the form's continued survival and growth into the last decades of the twentieth century garnered considerable coverage. For example, the Sex Pistols first – and only – U.S. tour was a national media event.[11] So by the time Kurt Cobain committed suicide in 1994, he was so prominent that it was a cover story in major news magazines, including *Newsweek*.[12]

Press coverage of these next generations of rock stars revealed similarities and differences in themes compared to the articles about Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix examined in Chapter 2. Rather than leaving home in search of an ideal cultural and artistic setting like their predecessors, Vicious and Cobain spent their peak creative years near home, or at least in similar living conditions. That familiarity informed the anger and disillusionment towards those conditions that reverberated through their music. Although Vicious died in America, his musical fame was attached to his time in Britain with The Sex Pistols. Considering his early death, it is impossible to say whether he would have become a permanent British expatriate. Freddie Mercury is unique in this study in that, while he was a British citizen, and lived and died in Britain, he was born elsewhere to British parents. So it is difficult to attach him to just one home. Regardless, the theme of separation and disillusionment is not strongly echoed in this chapter. Neither are mythic live performances and lifestyles or raw physicality and sexuality.

Articles written after the deaths of Mercury, Vicious and Cobain focused more on the recorded works and personal details of the stars than on particular live performances. This could be indicative of either a decline in the importance of live concerts as a cultural experience or the emergence of the recording industry as a commercial power. A later section of this study will discuss the latter in detail. Furthermore, issues of sexuality were only prominent in articles related to Mercury. The grunge and punk movements to which Cobain and Vicious were so important rejected the sexual extravagances of past rock styles, preferring displays of anger and destruction to the establishment of new sexual customs.

In an article published after the death of Cobain, *Rolling Stone* highlighted some of the complications of rock stardom that did continue to resonate with youth culture at the end of the twentieth century: fame, dysfunctional personal relationships and death and social impact. Note that death is the one thematic holdover from the press coverage study of Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix. Relative to Cobain, the deaths of Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious and Queen singer Freddie Mercury were not recognized nearly as universally. These textual silences, such as the outright exclusion of any coverage of Mercury's death in *Time* and the *Village Voice*, may illustrate several things. At the time of his death, Cobain was one of the biggest rock stars in the world, and inextricably linked to youth culture, much like Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix. Vicious and Mercury enjoyed only a fraction of that attention at the time of their deaths, which in part explains the shortage of coverage. Furthermore, Vicious' status as an artist was dubious among much of the mainstream press and, as a murder suspect, he was not a sympathetic character likely to

inspire a demand for details of his life and death except from a small core of punk enthusiasts.

If the press ever believed the Sex Pistols hype in the first place – coverage shows that most writers did not – many publications considered Vicious already past his prime by the time he died at age twenty-one. In Mercury's case, there was no doubt: his prime as a prominent figure in youth culture was ten to fifteen years before his death. The lack of press coverage may have reflected this fact, or just that Mercury had withdrawn from the spotlight in the final years of his life. Other issues, such as the part AIDS may have played in the textual silence surrounding Mercury, will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. Regardless of how many articles were written about Mercury and Vicious, press coverage of their deaths still provides significant insight into the values of youth culture.

Forty features and death notices published from 1979 to 1994 were examined in this chapter. Sources include *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Seattle Times*, *The New York Times*, *Village Voice* and *People*. Analysis revealed themes, phrases and textual silences that illuminate the importance of rock icons to youth culture. In addition, ten features recognizing the anniversary of a rock star death, published between 1999 and 2004 in the same sources, were analyzed in the same manner. These articles show changes over time in culturally important themes related to these figures.

FAME

Articles published after the deaths of Mercury, Vicious and Cobain devote much attention to the quest for – and rejection of – fame.[13] In the beginnings of rock, fame was

often actively sought by the would-be rock icon rather than bestowed upon him by a media looking for the next cover subject or a record companies looking to cash in on a musical trend. As this study will later demonstrate, that changed as rock evolved from a phenomenon of youth to a viable commercial art form. As new genres sprang forth from stagnant rock forms – from rock to glam to punk to new wave to hair metal to grunge – perspectives regarding fame changed as well.

It is interesting to note that one of the sources for this chapter – the celebrity magazine *People* – was launched after the deaths of Morrison, Joplin and Hendrix and before that of Vicious, right around the time Queen was reaching prominence. Magazines like *People* are indicative of the American fascination with celebrity: while heroes are revered for their representation of ideals, a celebrity can be merely recognizable without embodying those redeeming qualities. Press coverage of rock icons reveals figures who reject the ideals and responsibilities of being a hero, but are bound to the demands of celebrity by their well known musical talents or outrageous personalities.

Some icons, like Freddie Mercury, relished the rock star role, actively courting it and simultaneously using the attention to mock society's prejudices, and even those of his fans.[14] On the opposite end of the spectrum, fame was a shock that Kurt Cobain claimed he never wanted and tried to shake until his dying day. Somewhere in-between was Sex Pistol Sid Vicious, a young man who seemed to enjoy the attention, yet posthumously became the poster boy for a punk aesthetic that rejected not just celebrity, but most other elements of the traditional social order as well. From this perspective, Mercury, Vicious and Cobain were heroes only in that they were idolized and emulated by millions of young fans. They did not set out to "redeem" society or youth culture, but rather, as press

coverage illustrates, their lives and deaths – particularly those of Vicious and Cobain – were an indictment of the society that lifted them to such heights. More appropriately, these were new templates for the rock anti-hero.

Articles published after the death of Freddie Mercury invariably describe the Queen singer with words like "outlandish," "decadent" and "dramatic."[15] The son of a British accountant, Mercury was born on the African island of Zanzibar, spent considerable time in India and discovered the music of his two disparate favorites, Jimi Hendrix and Liza Minnelli, as a teenager in England. According to Queen guitarist Brian May, "Freddie always looked like a star and acted like a star even when he was penniless."[16] *Rolling Stone* recalls the singer saying that he had the idea for band named Queen even before he had band mates.[17] Once realized, the band forged a "hugely popular hybrid of hard-rock, pop, heavy-metal, cabaret and a hint of opera," a style most identified with international hits such as "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Killer Queen" and "We are the Champions."[18] In its coverage of the star's death, the *New York Times* described Mercury's stage manner as "by turn campy and almost militaristic" as the frontman "strutted and preened."[19] *Rolling Stone* noted his appearances in storm trooper outfits and women's clothes, indicative of an "arch, gay-macho stance that both challenged and poked fun at the decidedly homophobic hard-rock world."[20] Or, as Mercury friend and glam rock colleague David Bowie observed, "Of all the more theatrical rock performers, Freddie took it further than the rest. He took it over the edge."[21]

Punk rock aimed past the edge and into oblivion. Rather than pushing the boundaries of existing rock styles, Sid Vicious and The Sex Pistols were leaders of a punk rock movement that wanted to destroy the establishment. If nothing else, the Pistols

succeeded in destroying themselves: the band only recorded one album and failed to complete its first much-hyped American tour, breaking up before returning home to England.[22] Press coverage of Vicious' death notes this thirst for destruction in advance of any considerations of musical content or contributions.[23] The *New York Times* describes the band as "now defunct" and refers to the punk fashion statements of "safety pins worn through flesh" and "torn clothing," but says nothing about what punk rock sounds like.[24] Most publications mention Vicious' working class background, his rough upbringing by a drug-addicted mother and his enjoyment of the fame that came with being in one of the most talked-about bands in the world. According to *Newsweek*, Vicious "never seemed to get over the failure" of The Sex Pistols, ultimately becoming more famous for a life that became "nihilistic and violent."[25] Rock critic Robert Christgau said that musically the bass player "contributed nothing" to the band, "or at least nothing unique to Sid Vicious."[26] By the time of his death at age 21, Vicious, whose real name was John Simon Ritchie, had finally achieved a unique fame, dependent upon the alleged murder of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen and his heroin overdose.[27] Thus, public memory of Vicious reflects the minimal impact made by his band on the American mainstream at the time of his death. The failure of The Sex Pistols to complete their tour or sustain a musical presence means that coverage of Nancy Spungen's murder was likely more prevalent in the mainstream press than clips about Vicious' music.

Kurt Cobain's distaste for fame was well known even before he shot himself in the head with a shotgun in April 1994. It was a distaste that the press – at least partly responsible for propagating that fame – recalled vividly in coverage of his death. Cobain's rise to superstardom is told again and again, in almost exactly the same terms.

After starting a band influenced by both noisy punk acts and the melodic Beatles, Cobain moved from dreary Aberdeen, Wash., to Seattle, where Nirvana recorded its first album for $606.17.[28] By 1991, Nirvana had signed to a major record label and soon after the band's first single "Smells Like Teen Spirit" gave Cobain's "generation an anthem."[29] That second record, "Nevermind," sold more than 10 million records and made the singer "a superstar overnight."[30] *Rolling Stone* called it "the first punk rock record ever to reach No. 1."[31] But, as a friend told *People*, Cobain was "just a nice guy who didn't like fame. He was not your typical rock star exhibitionist."[32] *Newsweek* said that, "The more famous Nirvana became, the more Cobain wanted none of it. The group… was meant to be a latter-day punk band. It was supposed to be nasty and defiant and unpopular."[33] Nirvana might have succeeded in being nasty and defiant, but Cobain could not hold onto the unpopularity part. The singer was so ubiquitous by the end of his life that everyone from a waitress at an Aberdeen bar[34] to an interventionist hired by his wife[35] to Ray Manzarek,[36] keyboardist for The Doors, had an opinion to share with the press regarding why Cobain killed himself and what it meant to youth culture. But perhaps Cobain said it best in his extensively quoted suicide note, stating that stardom did not turn him on "the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury."[37]

Press accounts of the three rock icons show a greatly varying interest in their fame. Mercury coverage focuses largely on Queen's music, which is noted mostly for its stylistic excess rather than its social impact, and the singer's stage persona rather than details of his personal life. Queen's style of glam rock illustrates a departure from the counterculture, which believed that music would change the world, creating a utopia of peace. Instead, articles examined for this study show that Mercury pursued a sound and

image that valued style over revolution and his fan's taste for performance over emotional attachment to the performer. Perhaps still reeling from the tragedies of some of its countercultural heroes, youth culture in the glam rock era favored bombast and flash over idealistic vision. In contrast, press coverage of Sid Vicious gives little indication of the music's sound or relevance, discrediting the punk movement by showing Vicious as a one-dimensional thug.[38] Rather than presenting punk as an important style the represented the social frustrations of young listeners on both sides of the Atlantic, magazines like *Newsweek* take the "ignore it and it will go away" approach. Vicious is incriminated as a symbol of a dangerous anarchy, and no mention is made at all of the band's fans. Essentially the press affirms that segment of the generation's feelings of being left behind by not even recognizing their existence.

Among the contradictions of Cobain's fame, published portrayals illustrate a press that recognizes fame had a hand in the singer's demise, yet still builds on that celebrity. This is consistent with a generation's need for a hero; a youth culture searching for something real and embraceable after nihilism and the excesses of '80s pop and metal that followed. Even though youth culture claimed to identify with Cobain's rejection of celebrity, and the desire for a new sensibility of equality, fans nonetheless made him an icon. In articles written after his death, Cobain became the ambassador to a generation – like himself – searching for something to feel and hold as its own in the wake of rising divorce rates and sinking job opportunities.[39]

DYSFUNCTIONAL PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Another recurring theme of death coverage is that free love is over and rock'n'roll relationships have not gotten any easier. In actuality, articles written after the deaths of Mercury and Vicious say little specifically about the dysfunctional personal relationships of those icons, but their significant others maintain a spectral importance in their lives and cultural relevance. *People* makes a quick reference to the Queen singer's bisexuality and flamboyance, but for the most part resists connecting AIDS to a reckless lifestyle.[40] While this can be viewed as a positive portrayal – avoiding the dismissive stereotyping of all alternative lifestyles as dangerous and irresponsible – it nonetheless misses a high profile opportunity to discuss an important social issue. *Rolling Stone* goes a little further, noting both his cohabitation with longtime "girlfriend Mary Austin" and Mercury's boast that he had "had 'more lovers than Elizabeth Taylor.'"[41] Still, other published portrayals of Mercury veil his lifestyle in shadows, preferring only short descriptions invoking AIDS and the singer's "campy" performance style.[42]

Articles about Vicious similarly say little about his relationship with Nancy Spungen, only that he was charged with her murder. That fact, however, is nearly interchangeable with descriptions of Vicious' death. In the opening paragraphs of articles reporting his death, he is as much "the twenty-one-year-old former Sex Pistol accused of murdering his girlfriend" as he is the victim of a "drug overdose."[43] *Rolling Stone* recounts the former before getting to the latter. Only Christgau delves into the Vicious-Spungen connection as more than a killer-victim relationship. "And more importantly," Christgau said, "I'd say he was obviously very sorry Nancy was dead – a lot more so than those who purport to be horrified by her grisly story."[44]

If Vicious and Spungen's relationship had any far-reaching descriptive value besides its natural place as a crime story, it created a new mold for the dysfunctional rock star relationship. Sid and Nancy became the John Lennon and Yoko Ono of punk nihilism. Perhaps more importantly, for the press anyway, they created a context for understanding the chaotic marriage of Kurt Cobain and punk rocker Courtney Love. *Newsweek* remarked that Cobain and Love were "widely referred to as a '90s version of 'Sid and Nancy.'"[45] Though the emotional and romantic attachments of other icons – questionable though they were in Vicious' case – were relegated to the fringes, Kurt and Courtney were as much the main event as either of their bands or the eventual tragedy. Press accounts of Cobain's death are rife with details of Cobain and Love's hardships, beginning with their bonding "over pharmaceuticals" and 1992 wedding.[46] Soon after, it was reported that Love had used heroin during her pregnancy with daughter Frances Bean, which led to a "protracted battle" with the Los Angeles County Department of Children's Services (where the Cobains were living at the time) for custody.[47] In later years, domestic disputes led to several calls by Love to Seattle police, variously reported as arguments over drug use and guns in the house.[48] In 1993, Cobain described the relationship as "a whirling dervish of emotion, all these extremes of fighting and loving each other all at once."[49] Famously the child of divorce, a bitter time that Cobain's mother said changed him "completely," the singer struggled to keep his family together.[50] A longtime associate of the couple told *Rolling Stone* that Cobain "lived several more years because of Courtney Love. When I met him, he was very depressed; his love for her was one of the things that kept him going."[51]

Coverage of Mercury's death casts light on a segment of culture that was still determined to test the boundaries of traditional relationships in the early 1970s, not just by bringing alternative lifestyles out of the closet, but also in the continuation of a rock'n'roll lifestyle of groupies and promiscuity that carried the torch of the free love '60s.[52] The dangers of that lifestyle came to light with Mercury's death, but still press coverage reflected hesitation towards discussing bisexuality and homosexuality within the confines of rock and youth culture.[53]

Similar textual silences are present in the omission of details about Vicious' relationship with Spungen, such as how they met or any characterizations of their relationship besides her death. Thus, the press further dismissed punk as a violent movement, and something less than a viable musical form. Articles distracted attention from the music's artistic purposes by instead focusing on the Spungen murder, in turn making Vicious representative of the movement – hardly a good public relations situation for punk as a whole. Vicious was presented as a one-dimensional caricature of hollowness and inhumanity, a status that reflected upon an entire culture that found a voice in the disillusion of punk. Vicious' status as the essential representation of that culture was unfair to thousands of young punks who believed there was something more important to focus on, like jobs and better living conditions, than heroin and murder.

Built upon the tabloid-baiting relationship of Sid and Nancy, the marriage of Cobain and Love was definitive of a tabloid fascination with personal detail that the Nirvana singer wanted to destroy. For the press, it was an easy story: two prominent rockers involved in drugs and marital discord. But for Nirvana fans, it might have been the second part that really struck a chord. Young fans, many children of divorce

themselves, related to Cobain's family problems and his fight to find a home, somewhere, anywhere. Thus, coverage of the Cobain-Love marriage illustrates a unique influence of the press on public memory. These articles reveal personal details that are not generally available to the public, but in publication it is just those details that transform an individual such as Cobain into a representative of youth culture through more than just his music, but also his domestic conditions. As much as any descriptions of Cobain's artistic abilities, those personal details were common to many members of youth culture and established a lasting image of the rock idol.

DEATH AND SOCIAL IMPACT

The newspaper and magazine articles collected for this study illuminate important themes and stories, and thus show how the press finds meaning in events. But even so, it is difficult to find meaning in the death of 21-year-old Sid Vicious, at least in a traditional sense. After the death of Nancy Spungen, Vicious spent a few days in prison before being bailed out by his record label, Virgin Records.[54] He was only free for 10 days, during which he tried to commit suicide by slashing his wrists.[55] A violent attack on musician Todd Smith landed him back in Rikers Island prison.[56] Vicious was bailed out on February 1 by his mother, who had come to be with him after Spungen's death, and had taken him to a welcome home party at the Greenwich Village apartment of a friend. Less than 20 hours later, he was found in bed, dead of a heroin overdose.[57] *Newsweek* used his death to illustrate punk rock's swift "rise and fall."[58] If mainstream press coverage amplified any themes it was that: Sid Vicious death was the nail in the coffin to punk rock, a questionable splinter of rock music accompanied by more destruction that

creativity. Though Vicious illuminated what Christgau referred to as "the dead end of the punk continuum," he also recognized that Vicious lived an extreme idealism that remained attractive to troubled segments of youth culture that felt abandoned or ignored by the ruling parties.[59] In that way, the death story of Sid Vicious was powerful because of the fears that it revealed. For the mainstream press, his death illuminated the extreme nihilism of punk, the nadir of rock artistry and the rock bottom of youth culture. Punk threatened the very mainstream that newspapers and magazines appealed to, and Vicious was the face of their fears. And although the press believed that Vicious' demise signaled the end of punk rock, the legacy of The Sex Pistols proved influential in ways that will be highlighted further by the "Anniversary" section of this chapter.

In contrast, the deaths of Cobain and Mercury had immediate, tangible repercussions. Along with details about Cobain and Love's marital problems, new details of the Nirvana singer's troubled last days multiplied on magazine covers and front pages across the country.[60] Accounts of Cobain's quick demise took on a mechanical cadence, as each publication essentially presented the same details in various forms from feature to sidebar and back again. *Rolling Stone* devoted an entire issue to Cobain, in effect casting the same troubles in the context of the standard death story, his dreary upbringing in Aberdeen, a typical tour and various personal columns.[61] Most articles point to a March 1994 overdose of alcohol and pills in Rome as the beginning of the end. At the time it was written off as an accident, but insiders – including a widely quoted source that said, "You don't take 50 pills by accident" – knew better.[62] Cobain recovered from a 20-hour coma and weeks later was talked into entering rehab by Love and an intervention of friends and record executives.[63]

Before Cobain checked into a California clinic, Love left for Los Angeles to begin her own detoxification from tranquilizers; in the meantime, Cobain talked a friend into buying him a shotgun under the pretense that prowlers had been staking out his Seattle home.[64] On March 31, after two days at the clinic, Cobain told the staff he was stepping out for a cigarette and disappeared. His mother, Wendy O'Connor, filed a missing person's report on April 4, stating that he might be armed and suicidal.[65] Eight days after Cobain's disappearance, an electrician installing a security system at the singer's house noticed what he thought was a mannequin on the floor of a guest room above the garage. Gary Smith "noticed it had blood in the right ear. Then I saw a shotgun lying across his chest, pointing up at his chin."[66] Among the litany of quotes that would be repeated almost uniformly in magazine and newspaper accounts of Cobain's suicide included O'Connor's plea with her son "not to join that stupid club," referring to the list of rock stars – including Joplin, Hendrix and Morrison – who died at 27.[67]

Freddie Mercury is the lone figure within the confines of this study who outlived the pinnacle of his fame, but ultimately it was still that fame that killed him. *Rolling Stone* noted that by the late 1980s, Mercury was "panicked about his promiscuity."[68] It is not known when the singer was diagnosed as HIV positive, but among the publications that wrote about his death, only *Rolling Stone* cited explicit details of his condition in his final days. Mercury was "slowly dying of AIDS," stricken with "Extreme body aches and blind spells," unable to eat and under heavy sedation.[69] *Newsweek*, *People* and the *New York Times* avoided such details, and while they could perhaps be dismissed as unnecessary tabloid fodder, Mercury's death story caused people to talk about a difficult topic.

More than any other figure in rock music, Mercury's death inspired discussion about AIDS. "I think the fact that he was so beloved – straight or gay – will focus some people on the fact that AIDS knows no boundaries," said David Bowie in *Rolling Stone*.[70] One AIDS researcher criticized Mercury for not revealing his illness sooner, sacrificing his privacy to be a living testament to the reality of the virus, while the director of a fundraising foundation noted rock bands' unwillingness to participate in AIDS-related events.[71] It is interesting that *Time* published nothing regarding Mercury's death, which is either a grievous missed opportunity or an acknowledgement that Magic Johnson's own HIV-positive announcement just the week before Mercury's death said all that the news source wished to say on the matter.[72] Perhaps Mercury's death was not a watershed event in overcoming homophobia within the rock community and youth culture at large, but it does illustrate a willingness to foster a dialogue regarding social problems such as AIDS.

Cobain's death inspired similar discussion of suicide within the press, with more personal reactions from youth culture. *Time* outlined suicide warning signs, and *Rolling Stone* recruited a sociologist to write a sidebar discussing the realities of the act in language his fans could understand. Dr. Donna Gaines characterized Cobain's final act not as a way out, but as a "broken promise" to his fans. Rather than redeeming a generation through his continued embodiment of their ideals, "He just walked."[73] According to articles published after his death, the singer's suicide did inspire at least one copycat death, but for the most part Cobain's act encouraged fans to consider alternative problem solving methods and a re-evaluation of fame's allure.[74] "Kurt took the wimpy way out," said one Seattle boy. "He could have gone somewhere to gather his thoughts.

I know places like that to go."[75] Elsewhere, another student wrote that Cobain "shouldn't really be made into the depression and divorce survivor poster child…either. I do think there is room for viewing KC as a human being."[76]

ANNIVERSARIES

Fittingly, Sid Vicious and The Sex Pistols are not represented by anniversary journalism in the traditional manner. No sprawling theoretical discussions of Sid's cultural relevance were written to coincide with the tenth or twenty-fifth markers of his death. In fact, no articles were written at all within the parameters of this study. Nonetheless the echoes of The Sex Pistols noise and chaos did not remain completely off the radar. Like a dutiful fan paying homage to his own influences, the death of Kurt Cobain dragged Sid Vicious in for a curtain call through the back door. In distilling the hybrid of sounds that became grunge, nearly every article about Cobain mentions "the Sex Pistols and other groups" as the foundations of both what many critics consider the revolutionary new style of the 1990s and the most important figure of that time.[77] This recognition at long last gives punk its due as a viable form within youth culture, and admits that perhaps Vicious' icon status was due to something more than a famous murder or overdose.

Cobain is the only icon among the three discussed in this chapter for whom traditional anniversary of death articles were written. So many detailed descriptions of his life and legacy were presented at the time of his death that hardly any new details emerge, a fact which itself could be an affirmation of Cobain's assertion that celebrities were smothered by popular culture. Instead of re-hashing details, anniversary articles

about Cobain mostly build on the singer's legacy by establishing that he was not only all the things ascribed to him in life – "punk, pop star, hero, victim, junkie, feminist, geek, avenger, wiseass" – but also more.[78] "There's part of him that was a cultural revolutionary and part of him that was a classic song craftsman," said former Nirvana manager Danny Goldberg.[79] Writers for *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*, many of the same ones who covered Cobain's death, self-consciously re-evaluate his legacy in terms that secure both his relevance and youth culture's unfailing need for his voice.[80] Chris Norris cites a Seattle musician who said that anytime Nirvana's music "comes on the radio, you almost have to pull over – still. Since he's not around anymore, the music becomes a stronger reminder of that time."[81] That broad ascription of character traits to Cobain is indicative of a youth culture that still looks to its heroes to fulfill several disparate, often unrealistic, roles.

In criticizing the media's giving of a "specific cast" to Cobain's "quickly cooling image," writers ignore the fact that their own publications played a part in converting the singer from human to icon, much less that these anniversary articles serve the same purpose. There is broad discussion of Cobain's famous conflicts with fame and art as a commodity, the effort to be OK with oneself, but not "cool," and the underground aesthetic that once something subversive is recognized by the mainstream it is corrupted.[82] Writers older than Cobain's generations, like Greil Marcus, discuss Cobain in a self-congratulatory tone that reaffirms the pioneering tastes of early rock disciples.[83] Vernon Reid, a *Rolling Stone* writer of Cobain's generation, recalls the day he discovered grunge in a manner that claims the form as a unique product of his time.[84] These accounts clash with Cobain's own fear of being turned into a commodity. Perhaps more

ironically, they build on the corruption of the one thing original coverage of Cobain's death claims the singer wanted most – to be left alone. So if these critical re-evalutations of the singer's life and relevance illustrate anything about youth culture and the press itself, it may be that Cobain was right: rock culture continues to smother its icons.

These anniversary articles illustrate the evolution of press interest in rock icons as celebrities as well as musicians. At the time of his death, Cobain was the pinnacle of this sort of interest, although coverage of Sid Vicious revealed that newspapers and magazines were just as drawn to stories with little or no connection to musical issues. In addition, this chapter showed, as recognition for the cultural importance of rock icons has deepened, figures like Cobain and Freddie Mercury have been used to further discussion of complicated social issues like suicide and AIDS. Analysis of themes such as fame, dysfunctional personal relationships and death and social impact has illustrated the growing importance of rock icons to youth culture.

NOTES

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[3] Tony Schwartz, "Rockbottom," *Newsweek* (20 June 1977), 80.
[4] Ibid., 80.
[5] Jeff Giles, "The Poet of Alienation," *Newsweek* (18 April 1994), 46; Bruce Handy and Lisa McLaughlin, "Never Mind," *Time* (18 April 1994), 70.
[6] Deena Weinstein, "Expendable Youth: The Rise and Fall of Youth Culture," in *Adolescents and Their Music*, ed. Jonathon S. Epstein (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 79.
[7] Ibid., 80.
[8] Ibid., 81.
[9] Ibid., 81.
[10] Thompson, 79.
[11] Tony Schwartz, "Bang! It's the Sex Pistols," *Newsweek* (16 January 1978), 71.
[12] Giles, 46; Handy and McLaughlin, 70.

[13] Jeffrey Ressner, "Freddie Mercury: 1946-1991," *Rolling Stone* 621 (9 January 1992), 13; "A Punk Way to Die," *Newsweek*, (12 February 1979), 37; Neil Strauss, "The Downward Spiral," *Rolling Stone* 683 (2 June 1994) 35; Giles, 46; Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[14] Ressner, 13.
[15] "Freddy Mercury, 45, Lead Singer of the Rock Band Queen, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 25 November 1991, D12; "A Stilled Voice," *People* (9 December 1991), 46; Ressner, 13.
[16] Ressner, 13.
[17] Ibid., 13.
[18] "Freddy Mercury, 45, Lead Singer of the Rock Band Queen, Is Dead," 25 November 1991, D12.
[19] Ibid., D12.
[20] Ressner, 13.
[21] Ibid., 13.
[22] Michael Sigell, "Sid Vicious dead at 21," *Rolling Stone* (8 March 1979), 10.
[23] John Kifner, "Sid Vicious, Punk-Rock Musician, Dies, Apparently of Drug Overdose," *New York Times*, 3 February 1979, 24; "Milestones: Died. John Simon Ritchie," *Time* (12 February 1979), 72; Sigell, 10.
[24] Kifner, 24.
[25] "A Punk Way to Die," 37.
[26] Robert Christgau, "Sid Vicious, 1957-1979," *Village Voice*, 12 February 1979, 46.
[27] "Milestones: Died. John Simon Ritchie," 72.
[28] David Fricke, "Heart-Shaped Noise," *Rolling Stone* 683 (2 June 1994), 63; Mundy, 51; Giles, 46; Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[29] "No Way Out," People (25 April 1994), 38.
[30] Ibid., 38.
[31] Mundy, 51.
[32] "No Way Out," 38.
[33] Giles, 46.
[34] Peyton Whitely, "Kurt Cobain's Troubled Last Days – Drugs, Guns and Threats; And Then He Disappeared," *The Seattle Times*, 9 April 1994, A1.
[35] Neil Strauss, "The Downward Spiral,"35.
[36] "No Way Out," 38.
[37] Neil Strauss, "'He Was a Geek and a God,'" *Rolling Stone* 682 (19 May 1994), 17.
[38] Kifner, 24; Sigell, 10; "Milestones: Died. John Simon Ritchie," 72.
[39] Ann Powers, "No Future," *Village Voice*, 19 April 1994, 34.
[40] "A Stilled Voice," 46.
[41] Ressner, 13.
[42] "Freddy Mercury, 45, Lead Singer of the Rock Band Queen, Is Dead," D12; "A Stilled Voice," 46; "Transition: Died. Freddie Mercury," *Newsweek* (9 December 1991), 81.
[43] Sigell, 10.
[44] Christgau, 46.
[45] Giles, 46.
[46] "No Way Out," 38; Mundy, 51; Giles, 46; Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[47] Mundy, 51.
[48] Whitely, A1.
[49] Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[50] Mundy, 51.
[51] Strauss, "'He Was a Geek and a God,'" 17.
[52] Ressner, 13.
[53] "Freddy Mercury, 45, Lead Singer of the Rock Band Queen, Is Dead," D12; "Transition: Died. Freddie Mercury," 81.
[54] Sigell, 10.
[55] "A Punk Way to Die," 37.
[56] Kifner, 24.
[57] Ibid., 24.
[58] "A Punk Way to Die," 37.
[59] Christgau, 46.

[60] Powers, 34; "No Way Out," 38; Giles, 40.
[61] *Rolling Stone* 683 (2 June 1994).
[62] Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[63] Strauss, "The Downward Spiral," 35.
[64] Ibid., 35.
[65] Strauss, "'He Was a Geek and a God,'" 17.
[66] Ibid., 17.
[67] Giles, 46; "No Way Out," 38; Strauss, "The Downward Spiral," 35.
[68] Ressner, 13.
[69] Ibid., 13.
[70] Ibid., 13.
[71] Ibid., 13.
[72] Pico Iyer, "'It can happen to anybody. Even Magic Johnson.'" *Time* (18 November 1991), 26.
[73] Donna Gaines, "Suicidal Tendencies," *Rolling Stone* 683 (2 June 1994), 59.
[74] "No Way Out," 38.
[75] Powers, 34.
[76] Malcolm Jones Jr., "The Fallout of the Burnout," *Newsweek*, (25 April 1994), 68.
[77] "No Way Out," 38; Giles, 46; Handy and McLaughlin, 70.
[78] Chris Norris, "The Ghost of Saint Kurt," *Spin* 20:4 (April 2004), 59; Greil Marcus, "Artist of the Decade," *Rolling Stone* 812 (13 May 1999), 46.
[79] Norris, 59.
[80] Ibid., 59; Marcus, 46.
[81] Ibid., 59.
[82] Ibid., 59.
[83] Marcus, 46.
[84] Vernon Reid, "Nirvana," *Rolling Stone* 946 (15 April 2004), 108.

> But as his band Nirvana became more successful, the lawyers, agents and record company executives who knew of Cobain's problem were loath to intercede. "He was a druggie," concedes one such acquaintance. "But you can't go around giving urine tests to artistic geniuses who are paying you money."[1]
>
> Addressing the recent Doors boom, Sugarman contends, "No one is *selling* the Doors. Business is great. We don't need to take advantage of anything."[2]

CHAPTER 4

GET IT WHILE YOU CAN: DEAD ICONS AND COMMODITY

According to press accounts, Joplin, Hendrix, Morrison and those that followed gravitated to rock music as a means of expression, a way to reach like-minded members of their generation who were disillusioned with the political, social and economic conditions of the time, or frustrated by their own inner turmoil. Previous chapters have established the relevance of rock music icons to youth culture, particularly those figures' representation of ideals that challenge the sensibilities and institutions of a society that is not designed with them in mind. Most of those performers disdained commercial interests, as evidenced by Joplin's frequent proclamations of her love of stardom itself and the kindness of the beatnik scene, Hendrix's lack of concern with "bread" and

Cobain's ubiquitous conflict with his status.[3] Ironically, by the late 1960s the recording industry was thriving, as young fans bought millions of copies of albums like Hendrix "Electric Ladyland" and Big Brother and the Holding Company's "Cheap Thrills."[4] Rock music's subversive success spawned a web of corporate interests that included international record companies, recording studios, book and magazine publishers, memorabilia dealers, concert promoters, lawyers and ultimately the artists themselves. As rock music's influence grew, musicians found it harder to maintain a distance from commercial institutions, and eventually found it necessary to make occasional concessions in the name of maintaining a career.[5]

This study seeks to demonstrate that as the opposing forces of art and commerce continue to do battle, the line between commemoration and commodification has blurred. Commercial forces not only take a greater interest in the lives and work of rock stars, they also realize that opportunities for profit do not end with burial. Record company executives, managers and other insiders have a financial stake in the continued visibility of rock icons, thus they are frequent sources in articles recognizing death anniversaries. It is also no coincidence that magazines like *Rolling Stone* regularly feature those icons or publish reviews of re-mastered albums and compilations. Figures like Jim Morrison have established fan bases that cross generations; compared to a new artist who might appeal only to teens and twenty-somethings, a rock icon on the cover of an issue reaches a broad audience.

This study seeks to untangle the relationship between commemoration and commodification of rock icons by analyzing the seventy-four articles already collected for this study, as well as eighteen additional features and reviews dealing with

posthumous icon-related products such as books and music releases. Sources for these articles include *Rolling Stone*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek* and *Time*, all between 1970 and 2004, although the vast majority of new product releases analyzed are since 1990. Articles were examined for implicit commercial interests present in press coverage (such as industry sources, references to new product releases and marketing catch phrases including "the Seattle Sound" that are absorbed as casual references) and explicit commercial markers, like chart ratings, album sales figures and consumer guides. Additionally, this chapter will look at products such as bootleg recordings and personal journals that have been mass marketed, but were not originally intended for release by the musicians themselves. Mercury and Vicious are largely absent from this chapter. Having played on only one official album during his lifetime, Vicious-related products are mostly limited to a few documentary films or books that have been made about the Sex Pistols or Johnny Rotten.[6] Thus, there is little opportunity for the posthumous release of new material that is often accompanied by renewed press coverage of a rock icon. In contrast, Mercury lived long enough to create a considerable commercial legacy. His death in middle age was not met with the same powerful reaction that accompanies death in the prime of a career and inspires magazine covers, CD bootlegs and book releases.

In consideration of the interests that did arise in conjunction with rock star deaths, this chapter examines three themes: explicit commodification, which deals with overt commercial markers such as sales figures and product guides; implicit commodification, which illustrates veiled references to commercial impulses such as record industry sources and marketing catch phrases; and artifacts related such as

previously unheard recordings or personal journals that were not intended for consumer release by the artist.

EXPLICIT COMMODIFICATION

The burgeoning industries that grew around rock music quickly recognized the link between memory and consumerism. That is, the more present a rock icon is in the public consciousness, the more likely consumers are to sustain a connection with that figure, and in turn, products associated with that figure. Commerce had become a way of remembering and re-enforcing the cultural legacy of a rock icon from generation to generation. Business vernacular became increasingly common in rock star death coverage by the early 1970s. Profits, album sales figures and discussions of estate ownership became as common in commemorative articles and magazine features as details of legendary performances and personal backgrounds.[7] While record sales and chart positions had long been a measure of success in popular music, other explicit references to ownership rights, annual earnings and merchandising strategies run counter to the idealistic claims of rock culture.[8] The considerable worldwide commercial success of Jimi Hendrix marked a change in coverage, and by the time Cobain died, Sub Pop records publicist and former Nirvana fan club head Nils Bernstein recalled seeing "12-year-old kids on the bus discussing record deals, dollar amounts. … They know way, way more than they should about the industry."[9] According to Bernstein, many young fans are "already over the mystery that not long ago fueled much of the average outcast's passion for rock and roll."[10]

In 1970, at the time of Hendrix's death, the average outcast rock and roll fan may have still been unconcerned with the business side of the form, but the *Los Angeles Times* was not. An account of the guitarist's death contains nearly ten explicit references to sales figures, chart position and profit, using phrases such as "millionaire idol of the rock generation," "sold more than a million copies" and "current best seller."[11] Not only does such discussion favor a commodified view of his death, rather than focusing on the cultural impact of the loss, it overtly undermines the ideals of that young generation. Fans interested in Hendrix's life and death are likely not concerned with sales information, and while this article does not reflect the marketing approach to commemoration of later pieces, it does not serve those who might be more concerned with non-business details. It is not possible to conclude whether *The Los Angeles Times* article belies a lack of concern towards the ideals of youth culture or just ignorance towards them, but it does show favoritism towards a common, bottom-line-oriented language of mainstream America, which effectively discredits the movement to which Hendrix was so vital. This fascination with the commercial power of Jimi Hendrix is indicative of Marx's belief that "materials found in Nature" – in this case, the guitarist's musical ability – become "transcendent" when they become useful as commodities.[12]

Even *Rolling Stone*, the publication most closely aligned with youth culture, takes a detour into mainstream motivations in its tribute to Janis Joplin.[13] The magazine describes brisk sales at a Sam Goody's record store in New York, where "clerks were bringing up Janis and Jimi albums from the basement." Posthumous demand for an artist's material has become a ritual, described again in *The Seattle Times* after Cobain's death: "There was a run on Nirvana records at most stores; at least one was predicting it

would be sold out by the end of the weekend."[14] In this case the *Times* is merely reporting on a common reaction to such a tragedy, but in doing so it illuminates a fact of the recording industry. For popular artists, death is an ideal time to sell records. Perhaps feeling like something has been lost, fans reach out for any piece of the artist that they are certain will not unexpectedly cease to exist. A Nirvana fan in the Seattle newspaper piece sums up this view, expressing anger over Cobain's death. "I don't know if I was surprised. … I was looking forward to more music from the guy."[15]

In general, coverage of Cobain's death displayed a fascination with sales and chart position similar to the above Hendrix article. For example, *Newsweek* observed that Nirvana's first album "Bleach" was recorded for $606.17 and *People* noted that "Nevermind" sold "more than 10 million copies worldwide," reflecting universal journalistic interest in those details. The "Bleach" figure was intended to illustrate the bare-bones sensibility of the movement best represented by Nirvana, while the spectacular sales of "Nevermind" showed the improbably success of that sensibility. But ultimately the view of Cobain as an underdog who became an international celebrity and multi-millionaire ran counter to that central, small-scale aesthetic of grunge rock, corrupting the form as it proclaimed it a success. Perhaps Cobain felt the weight of defeat when he agreed to change the title of his song "Rape Me" – ironically a song about the consuming demands of his status – to "Waif Me" for a version of the "In Utero" album marketed by conservative retail powerhouses Kmart and Wal-Mart.[16] If his record company was still concerned with the artistry of the album at all by that point, those concerns were clearly outweighed by mass market influence of retail on sales numbers.

But at least Cobain got to have a part in that decision during his lifetime. Even *Spin* magazine, which took advantage of the continuing interest and marketability of Cobain with an issue devoted to the tenth anniversary of his death, recognizes the vulgarity of products that cash in. A consumer guide to Cobain albums, videos and books – titled "Selling Out" with winking irony – disparages bootleg CD copies of Courtney Love reading the singer's suicide note at a Seattle vigil and a book written by "Love's crackpot father" about the death.[17] *Spin* reviews a range of materials, including the obvious and well-received ("In Utero," the biography "Heavier Than Heaven"), and more questionable work (the documentary movie "Kurt and Courtney," which is referred to as "total nonsense").[18] Nonetheless, *Spin* proceeds to the blur the memory of Cobain as a person and artist by devoting two pages to Cobain the product.[19]

References to posthumous album releases and other products become even more blatantly tied to commercial interests as a rock star becomes less a part of the current cultural environment and more a part of public memory. Dead artists like Morrison and Hendrix have no way to control their own legacies; as the interests of the musicians become further entwined with the interests of others, commercial issues overshadow artistic ones. Hendrix's appeal as a powerful commercial force has only grown in the past 34 years, to the point that the guitarist is essentially a brand name. Jeffrey Ressner wrote about a 1993 international tour of Hendrix memorabilia that claimed to be "a way of putting Jimi on the road again."[20] Skeptics "suggested that the show is a ploy to boost sluggish merchandise sales and hype a new greatest-hits album, 'The Ultimate Experience.'"[21] A representative of the tour admitted that it was financially supported by "record companies."[22] In 1995 *The Seattle Times* wrote about Jimi's father Al Hendrix

winning a long-running lawsuit to regain ownership of his son's recordings.[23] The article refers to "Jimi's legacy," which, in this context only refers profits from the music that has been issued and future releases.[24] According to the article, "the Hendrix family will keep music coming, but on the family's terms."[25] *The Times* further notes that "rights to Hendrix's music alone are worth between $50 million and $75 million."[26] Even for the artist's family, maintaining the memory of Hendrix's work has become inextricably tied to monetary profit. *Rolling Stone* describes Al Hendrix's appearance at the unveiling of his son's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame: "A press announcement given to reporters at the ceremony not only included biographical information but also noted each album's catalog number and highest chart position."[27] That article goes on to illustrate just how tangled Jimi Hendrix's business assets became after his death, with various management figures and lawyers attempting to keep records going out and money coming in. Even Jimi's old band mate Mitch Mitchell published a "lavishly illustrated coffee table book" about Hendrix.[28]

It is not uncommon for less-recognizable band mates to keep themselves in business by clinging to the memory of an icon. A *Rolling Stone* overview of several new Doors albums released in conjunction with the thirtieth anniversary of Jim Morrison's death notes that two of the surviving Doors members actually play on a tribute to the band.[29] According to the magazine, those albums "continue the long-running expansion of the Doors franchise. For a group that managed only six studio albums while Morrison was alive, the Doors never seem to run out of product."[30] Few terms can better illuminate the disconnect that exists between memory and art than "franchise" and "product." While the articles above are not commemorations in the traditional sense, for artists who

died decades ago, these reviews and promotions serve the same purpose as the less frequent anniversary pieces: they maintain the viability of the icon's influence and career.

IMPLICIT COMMODIFICATION

Rock icons are not commidified only by articles that discuss products and monetary issues. Sometimes commodification is implied: it looms in subtext, manifested in sources and descriptive phrases. Who is interviewed for a story reveals a lot about not only who is close to the subject at hand, but also who has a personal stake in the visibility of that subject. Furthermore, descriptions of youth culture's reaction to a rock star death can illustrate to what extent fans "buy into" those business motivations.

Rolling Stone's tribute to Janis Joplin shows the splintering of artistic and commercial motivations within the music community. Coverage of the singer's early recording career recounts a bad business deal with small Chicago record label Mainstream, which recorded "Big Brother and the Holding Company" on a small budget, allegedly refused to pay band member for their work, only promoted the album after their success at Monterrey Pop and then demanded a substantial fee for Janis and Big Brother's contractual release to major label Columbia records.[31] Ostensibly the move put Big Brother on the roster of a record label that was more concerned with its artistic growth, and while that may be true, the fact that Columbia was still a bottom-line oriented corporation with its own concerns can be read between the lines of the *Rolling Stone* article. Keeping in mind that record company funds via advertising revenue were vital to the early survival of *Rolling Stone*, it should not be a surprise that industry sources were used. However, this example is still indicative of the struggle between artist

and corporation. Paul Rothschild, who produced Joplin's final album "Pearl," disputes an anonymous source that claimed the recording sessions were not going well, saying, "the record may not have been going smoothly for Columbia, but it was for Janis Joplin."[32] While this statement does not betray a marketing strategy by Joplin's record company, it does serve as promotion for a soon-to-be-released product that might encourage cautious Joplin fans to buy the new album, and further convinces casual fans moved by her death that this music is authentic.

The broad investment in Joplin's career is further illustrated by the inclusion of sources from her publicist's office, her publishing firm, her lawyer, the Full Tilt Boogie Band's road manager, legendary concert promoter Bill Graham, pioneering Columbia Records president Clive Davis and even Ken Threadgill, the owner of a Texas bar where Joplin began singing in 1961. But the magazine grounds the story with a folksy visit to "the Airplane House," the San Francisco residence of The Jefferson Airplane, a popular national act and friends of Joplin.[33] By talking to Joplin's peers, *Rolling Stone* re-establishes that rock music is still essentially a youthful endeavor dedicated to living outside – sometimes communally – the corporate conventions of mainstream society.

Whereas Rothschild is quoted as an expert source in regards to musical issues, industry figures have provided increasing insight into the affairs of rock icons. In *Rolling Stone*, Elektra records president Jac Holzman and Doors manager Bill Siddons outline the band's recording plans before and after Morrison's death; their accounts are essentially limited to a professional relationship.[34] Young Doors associate Danny Sugarman took a more personal interest in Morrison and the band. At age 13, Sugarman began answering Morrison's fan mail for ten cents per letter. "He gave me hope," Sugarman told *Rolling*

Stone regarding his relationship with the singer. "He was my hero, my friend."[35] By 1981, Sugarman had co-authored the definitive biography of his hero, "No One Here Gets Out Alive," become Doors member Ray Manzarek's manager, started a management and public relations firm in Los Angeles and, "because of the demand for product," he launched the official Doors fan club in an effort to police bootlegging of the group's music and merchandise.[36] Perhaps Sugarman's interest in Morrison remained altruistic, but clearly his relationship with the art of the Doors became entangled with more commercial motives. It is impossible to say whether the progression of rock music from an art form that was the muse of youth culture to a booming commercial industry was a natural evolution. And regardless of whether his work is self-serving or not, Sugarman's efforts are an attempt to preserve the legacy of Morrison in a different economic reality than the one in which the Doors formed. Nonetheless, the clash between the corporate infrastructure that has been built around The Doors and the idealistic origins of rock as a movement exposes how commercial the form has become.

Industry sources included in press accounts of bands active after 1970 exhibit a knowledgeable insider relationship with the performer rooted in a business context, in contrast to the Sugarman-Morrison connection that began on an ostensibly personal level. For example, Rolling Stone quotes Capitol-EMI president and CEO Joe Smith, who speaks affectionately of Queen's front man: "Freddie was clearly out in left field someplace, outrageous onstage and offstage," said the man who headed the band's American label during their commercial peak. "He was the band's driving force, a tremendously creative man."[37] Smith's insight into Mercury's offstage demeanor and the band's creative process indicates that the divide between business and personal had

narrowed; artist and businessman now work closer together, performing their duties in a less independent environment. Nirvana manager Danny Goldberg is an even better example of the melding of art, business and personal. By his own account, the Cobain confidant attempted to get the singer professional help for his depression "on numerous occasions."[38] He told *Rolling Stone* that Cobain was "a walking time bomb, and nobody could do anything about it."[39] Goldberg, a frequent source in Cobain commemorations, eventually leaped from management to president of Atlantic Records, a substantial change in status that likely had much to do with his knowledge of the inner workings of bands.[40]

Coverage of Cobain's death reveals another subterranean commodification of the icon's work. Articles frequently refer to "grunge" and "the Seattle Sound," a broad style of rock music that flourished in the Pacific Northwest during the early 1990s.[41] Countless bands and several distinct styles throughout America were lumped beneath those familiar headings because it was easier for record labels, radio stations, magazines and other commercial entities to market those bands as one style than to individually describe each band.[42] Ultimately Cobain and Nirvana were the figurehead of that sound. Such labeling diminishes the individual artistic achievements of a musical act and, in the case of an icon like Cobain, further distills his distinctiveness for mass consumption.

Other signatures of the growth from band to business show up in press coverage of rock star deaths. In Breslin's piece, a 17-year-old fan wears a T-shirt bearing a picture of Morrison and the slogan, "MORRISON LIVES!" and a young woman buys a shirt for her boyfriend that also features an image of the singer.[43] On the tenth anniversary of Cobain's death, *The Seattle Times* interviewed a teenage fan "dressed in a black hooded

sweat shirt adorned with Nirvana patches and a large screenprint of Cobain on the back."[44] These descriptions serve no overt commercial purpose, but they are indicative of the transformation of an individual rock music figure from artist to commodity. No longer just a musician or a voice connected to meaningful songs, the icon has become disembodied from his original context – and even from a commercial artifact like a record that remains within that aural context – and is now a symbol that can be bought and sold. The image of Morrison and the Cobain patch have nothing to do with music directly; they are just a suggestion that fame has been chipped away for profit.

NOT INTENDED FOR CONSUMER RELEASE

Rolling Stone writer Greg Ko says that if Morrison were alive "he'd probably want to kick the ass of just about everybody involved in 'Stoned Immaculate,'" the tribute put together by the surviving Doors.[45] Even worse than a contrived, shamelessly exploitive posthumous release are the products created from existing works that were never meant for public consumption. Laura Joplin tried to normalize her older sister's rock star image with *Love, Janis*, a book "built around a stack of letters home Janis wrote the family."[46] *Rolling Stone* published an excerpt of the book and, while the letters do make the singer seem more like the girl-next-door than most accounts, it is hard to ignore the fact that she wrote them with her family in mind, not a book deal. The release of *Love, Janis* and the accompanying coverage in *Rolling Stone* illuminate Gillis' point that identity and memory are "political and social constructs" rather than concepts that just exist.[47] Even if publication and promotion of the book carried forth under the idealistic pretense of clarifying details of Janis Joplin's life, it is still impossible to strip away

political motivations, such as contradicting other constructed images of Joplin that the singer's family found to be disagreeable.

Perhaps even more intrusive was the publishing of Kurt Cobain's personal diaries, drawings and letter as *Journals*, originally a hard-cover coffee table edition that was later released in a soft cover that reproduced the worn, handwritten notebooks from which they were taken. The media gave considerable attention to the $4 million dollar purchase of the materials by Riverhead Books from Cobain's estate, which is controlled by Courtney Love. *Journals* was widely reviewed, but according to Spin, "it's hard to imagine the 'author' *not* being horrified."[48] That sentiment reveals the greater purpose of this type of commodification: rather than maintaining or expanding the cultural relevance of a rock icon, the printing of personal letters and diaries capitalizes on the public's fascination with celebrity and death for purpose of profit. In these instances, the press – and to a greater extent the keepers of the dead rock stars' estates – fail to recognize that even the most demonstrative of stars, like Joplin, may not want to be remembered for everything they create.

The release of such private documents is a good indicator of what Frith referred to as "music's special status as a cultural product."[49] Private journals and letters home have become profitable artifacts by their association with famous rock stars. The inability of the rock icons in question to control the release of products attached to their names further indicates the social and political nature of identity: as long as consumers value the work of a certain rock icon, those who stand to profit will continue to construct that icon's image in the most marketable way possible. Themes that were revealed through examination of articles in this chapter -- including explicit commodification, implicit

commodification and products not intended for consumer release -- show that dead rock icons continue to have a significant commercial presence.

NOTES

[1] Malcolm Jones Jr., "The Fallout of the Burnout," *Newsweek* (25 April 1994), 68.
[2] Rosemary Breslin, "Jim Morrison, 1981: Renew my subscription to the resurrection," *Rolling Stone* (17 September 1981), 31.
[3] See "Love, Janis," *Rolling Stone* (3 September 1992), "The Legacy," *Rolling Stone* (6 February 1992) and any Cobain article included in this study.
[4] See "Rock Idol Hendrix Dies; Drugs Blamed," *Los Angeles Times* (19 September 1970) and "Janis Joplin," *Rolling Stone* (29 October 1970)
[5] Neil Strauss, "The Downward Spiral," *Rolling Stone* (2 June 1994), 35.
[6] Jeffrey Resner, "A Rotten Good Time," *Time* (17 April 2000), 81;
A.O. Scott, "A Rock Band That Hurled Rocks at 70s Britain," The *New York Times* (29 March 2000), E1.
[7] "'Al' is sole heir to Hendrix estate," *The Seattle Times* (18 September 1990), D5;
Jeffrey Ressner, "The Legacy," *Rolling Stone* (6 Februrary 1992), 45;
Thomas W. Haines, "Big thrill for Jimi's proud dad – Al Hendrix, family envision new releases of rock star's music," *The Seattle Times* (26 July 1995), B1.
[8] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 73.
[9] Ann Powers, "No Future," *Village Voice* (19 April 1994), 34.
[10] Ibid, 34.
[11] "Rock Idol Hendrix Dies; Drugs Blamed," A1.
[12] Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," in *Capital, Vol. One.*
[13] "Janis Joplin," 7.
[14] Vanessa Ho, "Fragile Idol – Kurt Cobain – Disbelief, Anger from Forlorn Fans," *The Seattle Times* (9 April 1994), A10.
[15] Ibid, A10.
[16] "The Downward Spiral," 35.
[17] Charles Aaron, "Selling Out," *Spin* (April 2004), 74.
[18] Ibid, 75.
[19] Ibid., 74-75.
[20] Jeffrey Ressner, "Hendrix to tour U.S.," *Rolling Stone* (18 February 1993), 17.
[21] Ibid, 17.
[22] Ibid, 17.
[23] "Big thrill for Jimi's proud dad – Al Hendrix, family envision new releases of rock star's music," B1.
[24] Ibid, B1.
[25] Ibid, B1.
[26] Ibid, B1.
[27] Jeffrey Ressner, "The Legacy," *Rolling Stone* (6 February 1992), 45.
[28] Ibid, 45.
[29] Greg Ko, "Reopening the Doors: Celebrating the brilliant BS of Jim Morrison," *Rolling Stone* (1 Februry 2001), 54.
[30] Ibid, 54.
[31] "Janis Joplin," *Rolling Stone*, (29 October 1970), 8.
[32] Ibid., 6.
[33] "Janis Joplin," 7.
[34] Ben Fong-Torres, "James Douglas Morrison, Poet: Dead at 27," *Rolling Stone* (5 August 1971), 34.
[35] Breslin, 96.
[36] Ibid, 96.
[37] Jeffrey Ressner, "Freddie Mercury 1946-1991," *Rolling Stone* (9 January 1992), 13.

[38] Strauss, 35.
[39] Ibid, 35.
[40] See also Neil Strauss, "He was a geek and a god," *Rolling Stone* (19 May 1994), 17.
[41] Jeff Giles, "The Poet of Alienation," *Newsweek* (18 April 1994), 46;
Bruce Handy and Lisa McLaughlin, "Never Mind," *Time* (18 April 1994), 70;
Chris Mundy, "The Lost Boy," *Rolling Stone* (2 June 1994), 51.
[42] "The 20 Greatest Grunge Albums of All Time," *Spin* (April 2004), 62-63.
[43] Breslin, 31.
[44] Tina Potterf, "Remembering Kurt Cobain: Fans pay homage at park near musician's home,"
The Seattle Times (6 April 2004), B1.
[45] Ibid, 54.
[46] Joel Selvin, "They're fighting over Janis' Story," *The San Francisco Chronicle* (16 September 1992), E1.
[47] Gillis, 5.
[48] "Love Janis," *Rolling Stone* (3 September 1992), 55.
[49] Frith, 130.

CHAPTER 5

TURN OUT THE LIGHTS: CONCLUSIONS

From its birth in the 1950s and into the twenty-first century, rock music became one of the most ubiquitous creative forces in American popular culture. Rooted in the youthful need for self-expression and subversion of limiting social institutions, rock music inspired the growth of its own press – magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Creem* and *Crawdaddy!* – and was ultimately covered by mainstream publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times*. This study sought a starting point for analyzing the importance of rock music icons to youth culture, the form's central demographic of teens and twenty-somethings. That importance is particularly apparent in newspaper and magazine coverage of rock star deaths between 1970 and 1994, as well as articles published in commemoration of the anniversaries of those deaths. This study asked three questions, which will now be addressed one at a time.

RQ1: How are dead rock stars commemorated in magazines and newspapers?

Newspapers and magazines present rock stars as simplified images of three-dimensional people. Rock icons are described in themes that occur with little variance relative to each star from publication to publication, an approach that makes the realities of these figures' lives and deaths easier to comprehend. For instance, press coverage of Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix – who were all a part of the same generation

and died within ten months of one another in 1970-71 – invariably discussed the stars' disillusionment from straight society, mythic live performances, participation in the "free love" ethos of the 1960s counterculture and details of their deaths. Coverage of Freddie Mercury, Sid Vicious and Kurt Cobain revealed a broader set of themes that reflected a longer passage of time between Vicious' death in 1979 and Cobain's in 1994. Nonetheless, all articles still exhibit common themes, including fame, dysfunctional personal relationships and death. The echo of certain terms, facts and descriptions throughout press coverage constructs an image that, while fascinating and complex, is easily maintained because it can be summarized by a few familiar topics.

In the case of the counterculture icons, that image humanizes the stars by illustrating their weaknesses and describing their close connection to a centralized movement of friends, be it the counterculture or the California rock scenes. Essentially, those articles connect the stars to youth culture by showing that they were still a part of it: Joplin still idolized musical masters like Otis Redding, Jimi Hendrix still prowled the Greenwich Village coffee house scene and Jim Morrison still had dreams of being something else, such as a writer or poet. Press coverage of these stars performed the commemorative function by presenting these icons as representative of the ideals of youth culture, including communalism, love and independence from the mainstream. According to press coverage of the deaths of Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix, these stars were taken from life at the pinnacle of their pursuit of the counterculture ideals. Discussion of how the press covered later generations of rock stars transitions into the next research questions.

RQ2: How have those commemorations changed over time?

From 1970 to Cobain's death in 1994, mainstream press coverage of rock star deaths expanded dramatically. Whereas in 1970 and 1971 Hendrix and Morrison respectively warranted only death notices of approximately one hundred words in magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, Cobain's death was a cover story. This indicated the status of rock as an established cultural force, rather than the passing fad that the mainstream press coverage of the late '60 and early '70s sometime presented. The focus of coverage changed as well. Articles written in 1970-71 focused mainly on performance-related details; even scandalous incidents were usually tied to music, such as Morrison's indecent exposure charge in Miami. Personal details about relationships and emotional states were present, but scattered and interspersed with death stories.

In contrast, Cobain and Vicious were covered like celebrities. Details of Cobain's tumultuous marriage to Courtney Love, sketches of his early torments in Aberdeen and comments from music peers and industry insiders were as prevalent as details of his death. Several articles in *Rolling Stone* focused only on re-constructing every element of Cobain's doomed life, but reported nothing about his death. Meanwhile, Vicious' musical background was almost completely overshadowed by the murder charges against him in the death of Nancy Spungen. On a more positive note, rock star death coverage from 1979 to 1994 demonstrated a greater willingness to discuss causes of death, such as suicide and AIDS, from a social perspective than previous death coverage, which mostly noted the impact on youth culture but did little to inspire prevention of similar dangerous lifestyles. Coverage of the deaths of Vicious, Mercury

and Cobain illuminated the ideals of those generations, but also revealed the shortcomings of youth culture much more than death coverage in 1970-71.

Changes in press coverage were also indicated by articles published on the anniversaries of rock star deaths. With the perspective of years behind them, these articles idealized rock icons by discussing the sounds and bands that were influenced by them, often caught up in how someone like Cobain changed music. Over time, these stories shed most of their fascination with the tabloid details of personal relationships, focusing instead on the myths that reverberated across generations, like the incomplete details of Morrison's death and the prevailing image of Cobain as "St. Kurt," a nice, complicated guy who loved music but hated fame.[1]

RQ3: How do those commemorations portray dead rock stars as commercial products?

Ultimately it is those myths that remain in public memory. Record companies and book publishers do not explicitly sell death: they promote the myths in things like a tour of Jimi Hendrix memorabilia or the latest book presenting a Jim Morrison death conspiracy theory. Magazines and newspapers do their part in extending the legacy of a dead rock star by publishing features revisiting the myths, such as the Mikal Gilmore pieces analyzing the legacy of Jim Morrison, and reviews of new posthumous album releases. Repeated mentions of commercial performance (sales numbers, chart positions, etc.) and inclusion of industry sources in articles have blurred the boundaries between art and commerce. Essentially, what began as artistic expression – a song like "Smells Like Teen Spirit" – is touted over and over again in press coverage as a piece of the culture

that anyone can buy. The irony is that rock music, which is rooted in youth culture's attempt to carve out its own niche, is now a big business for magazines, newspapers and various endeavors tied to the record industry that are owned and operated by someone other than the target audience.

Furthermore, these research questions were built around three central concepts – public memory, death stories and commodity. Discussion of findings relative to these concepts follows.

PUBLIC MEMORY

By repeating certain events and personal characteristics in feature articles and death notices, magazines and newspapers select and define the important cultural contributions of rock icons. For instance, repeated descriptions of the breakout performances of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix at Monterey Pop not only select that event as important to the lives and careers of those icons, but also universalize that event as a landmark of youth culture in the late 1960s. An event that singular subsumes "individual experience."[2] Monterey Pop is presented as a shining example of what the press defined as the ideals of that generation -- peace, music and collectivism -- and that association transfers an ideal status upon Joplin and Hendrix as well. Thus in the shared memory of the public, rock icons become representative of something greater than themselves. They are the light and dark sides of the counterculture generation. They are the destructive impulses of punk rock. They are the flamboyance and consequences of the 1970s glam rock scene. And they are the hopeless disillusion and complexity of a "lost generation" that came of age in the early 1990s. By presenting these images and myths in a manner

that can be "accumulated and transmitted across generations" in the form of features, death notices and later, anniversary coverage, magazines and newspapers assume the status of the "superpersonal" properties discussed by Schwartz.[3] Thus they play an important role in shaping public memory.

Press coverage of rock icons shows that the meaning of an event is not found solely in the event itself, but in the relationship between the event and the collective memory of it. This property of public memory is especially evident in occasions such as the Jim Morrison's arrest for indecent exposure in Miami, where a dearth of direct witnesses limits the indelible facts of the event, but augments its status as a myth of great symbolic significance. In such cases, the memory of the event is illustrative of which events or values a culture regards as important, more so than the actual details of the event itself.

DEATH STORIES

Magazines and newspaper coverage of rock star deaths proves Amato's assertion that "death causes people to tell stories."[4] In the case of stars from Joplin to Morrison, the stories told in death coverage present the essential images and deeds that will be etched in public memory for generations to come. In addition, because rock icons represent the ideals of generations, death coverage also illuminates fears. For instance, coverage of the deaths of Joplin, Morrison and Hendrix in *Rolling Stone* revealed fears among the counterculture that their ideals would not survive into a new decade. In that vein, death coverage of the first era of icons touches on limits that had been reached relative to the countercultural lifestyle. More notably, if only for the forwardness and

depth of the discussions, coverage of rock star deaths in the 1990s attempted to promote examination of important social problems such as AIDS and suicide. Thus, press coverage of rock star deaths reflects and influences which issues are important, or should be important, from generation to generation.

COMMODITY

By highlighting the commercial side of rock music careers and continuing to cover books like "Love, Janis" and recordings like any of a number of Doors albums released after the death of Jim Morrison, magazines and newspapers reveal what Frith referred to as "music's special status as a cultural product."[5] Music is more than just a creative endeavor; it is a piece of the culture that can be taken home by anyone that wants it. That reality plays a vital role in maintaining the legacy of rock stars from generation to generation. As long as new products continue to roll out, the press will revisit the lives, deaths and myths of stars like Kurt Cobain, posthumous records and products will still be covered and younger generations will discover the sensibilities and ideals of past eras in rock history.

THE PRESS

Of course, the culture of the press influences which stories are told and how. Rather than existing as a wholly objective entity that merely relates the important stories of the day, the press demonstrates Gitlin's principle of media frames by selecting which stories are worth telling, and in the case of rock star deaths and public memory, which stories are worth re-telling.[6] From an idealistic perspective, magazines and newspapers

want to be authoritative sources of news; from a more cynical angle, those publications know that a cover story or feature about the death of an important public figure will sell issues. Furthermore, competition between publications, for instance *Newsweek* and *Time* or *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, dictates that magazines and newspapers will cover the same stories, thereby reinforcing themes and details relevant to a rock star death. The publications analyzed in this study used many of the same sources and cited the same generational landmarks, such as Hendrix's performance at Woodstock and Nirvana's album "Nevermind," resulting in stories that essentially reinforced other articles printed elsewhere.

So, in summary this study finds that rock star deaths are important to public memory because youth culture sees itself, or what it wants to be, in the actions and press descriptions of musicians. Myths that grow from stories that are repeated across generations become a timeless currency, as worthy of publication on 2004 as they were in 1971. Magazines and newspapers realize based on the success of publications like *People* that now more than ever, the public is interested in the personal details of celebrities. That reality will keep tragic figures like Kurt Cobain on the cover of magazines and in the public consciousness for years to come.

FURTHER STUDY

This study was limited to the analysis of press coverage of only six rock icons, and thus only provides a small window into mediated youth culture. More work should be done in other areas. Topics for further study include an examination of how press interest in rock icons evolved to take a celebrity view of Cobain. Such a study is rooted

in the treatment of stars like Joplin as part of a centralized scene and might consider coverage of musicians in magazines like *People* and changes in the reporting style of *Rolling Stone,* which at least superficially is more concerned with gossip-style details now than it was at its founding. Also of interest would be a deeper examination of the changes in rock as a commodity from the 1960s to the present. Such a study might consider the changes in album promotion within newspapers and magazines, including the focus and presentation of feature articles, reviews and advertising banners such as the colorful album ads common to rock magazines like *Rolling Stone*, *Spin* and others. Those magazines publish articles about many "up-and-coming" bands, yet lots of them seem to fade away from the charts and radio quickly. So it would be interesting to examine changes – if any – in the time and space music magazines devote to those bands in the hope that they become the next big thing, and thus profitable to both the record companies that advertise and the magazines that need cover subjects.

NOTES

[1] Chris Norris, "The Ghost of Saint Kurt," *Spin* 20:4 (April 2004), 59.
[2] Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xi.
[3] Ibid., 9.
[4] Joseph A. Amato, "Death and the stories we don't have," *Monist* 76 (April 1993), 252.
[5] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 181.
[6] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1980), 6-7.

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