

Punk: 1970s and Now
Representations in Music, Fashion and Television

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.



Seán Rock

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Abstract

This thesis looks at Punk, a youth movement originating in the late 1970s, forming out of the hatred of a failing system and an unhappiness with how the world was being run. Punk took a firm stance against the status quo. Even though it does not seem this way, Punk had a large impact on the world and still has an influence today. The ideologies of the Punk movement have survived to be carried on today, the youth of modern times are now carrying the flag to stand up against the problems in the world, to be who they want to be and to express themselves how they want.

It will look at how punk started and where it is now through many different ways, investigating punks' portrayal in the factual and fictional media, the music of Punk itself, the fashion of the movement, and its ideologies, and how these may have changed or not changed to better fit the world and youth of today and how it has been a main stay in the world. It will also, in small part, look at how punk is perceived in other more religiously zealous areas of the world and the effect it has had on the people part of it in these areas.

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Intro

Used by Shakespeare in *Alls Well that Ends Well*, the term “Taffeta Punk” referred to a well-dressed prostitute. Over time the word takes on different meanings from being used to describe a young man kept by an older man for sex in the 17th century to, in more modern, times being used in US prisons as slang for the man used for sex. The word has constant use for people who are deemed worthless or inexperienced. Constantly a derogatory term, it gained popularity to describe a type of music around 1971.¹

This thesis looks at how a small movement in the 1970s had a large impact of the world of today, how it stood against the status quo of its time and continues to do so today. It considers how 1970s punk influences the youth of today to stand up for themselves and to stand out in the world that in certain places, hates them for being who they are. Punk formed out of a failing system and an unhappiness with how the world was being run. Through their fashion and ideologies punks took a stand against everything wrong with the world.

Through the use of old and modern news articles, song lyrics, images and media I’m going to look at the effect the effect 1970s punk had and its influences on the world of today. Using both main stream and smaller underground news articles I will look at the reaction punk had in the UK and USA, how it was perceived by the public. Was it hated and reviled or was it embraced and loved? It will also show how it was perceived further away from those hotspots, in more religious countries for example.

Through the song lyrics I will show what were the problems faced at the time, since punk can be a very personal thing while also being a group-oriented culture, the songs written through the years can easily show the issues being faced. From racism and sexism to a failing government, everything was talked about. The images will be used to show what the punks of the 1970s looked like and how the style may have

¹ Cross, Alan. “The Strange Origins of the Word ‘Punk’ - Alan Cross.” *Alan Cross’ A Journal of Musical Things*, 17 Apr. 2018, <https://www.ajournalofmusicalthings.com/the-strange-origins-of-the-word-punk/>.

evolved and changed through the years to what it may be now. They will also be used as a visual aid in certain sections. The media use will be mainly focused on how punks were shown in fictional media like television and movies, particularly how the stance on different groups may have changed through the years. Were they just seen as a joke trope in shows that, through the years, changed and evolve into something a person could gain influence from?

In chapter one I discuss Punk of the past, in the 1970s, when it originally started, what influenced it to start up and what came out of it. It considers how the music influenced the youth movement to shout about the problems they faced, and how the fashion grew and the influence that Vivienne Westwood, Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols had.

In chapter two, I will discuss the more recent punk scene, how it relates to the past and how it has changed. It considers music is still a massive part of how messages get across, and how fashion is still part of its identity and allows for personal freedom in how people look and present themselves. It looks at how, unlike the past, where punk was mostly the white working class, punk has become a movement of the minority, a movement full of PoC and LGBT+ people.

In Chapter 3 I will look at how punk is portrayed in modern media, looking at television shows and news articles. I will look at the places punk music is used in television shows and how people feel when a big name in punk music uses their influence to sell products. I will also look at how punk is perceived in places other than the western world, in more religious places like the Middle East and Asia. I will also look at groups like Antifa and how they are portrayed through the media, are they a group looking for change or a violent terrorist group.

In chapter 4 I will be looking at punk fiction media, mainly focusing on one modern and one past portrayal of a punk type character in their respective form of media. I will look at their attitude, their fashion, and some of the influence for them.

Through all this I hope to show that punk still has a firm grip in the minds of the youth of today, as much as it did on the youth of the 1970s, and to show that many

places have been influenced by the world of punk. I hope to show that punk is still in a lot of places, even in places it doesn't seem like it is.

Chapter 1: Punk In the 1970s

"Where there is young people and vitality, you're going to find punk rock."²

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, subculture is defined as “an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behaviour sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society.”³

Groups like the Teddy Boys and Hippies to the Gopniks of Russia, even the LGBT community are considered a subculture and within those groups are even more subcultures, branching off in a never ending web.

Punk was a subculture that flourished in England during the 1970s and 1980s, with a failing government, racial tensions, workers strikes and unemployment at a high, the heatwave of 1976 and the riots during The Notting Hill Carnival, gave the youth a push towards showing their anger towards everything they despised. Punks wrote songs about their own lives. As such, they often took transgressive and confrontational stances – like The Clash glorifying riots. Moreover, the fashion of ripped clothing, held together with safety pins, combined with fetish gear, and spikey brightly coloured hair, struck a combative pose against orthodox British society. “No subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval.”⁴

Governments in the UK and USA were very conservative at that time and punk was a direct fight against that. Punks weren’t afraid to say what they wanted, and it made sure it was heard. This ranged from the Sex Pistols becoming infamous for openly swearing on national daytime television⁵, and their boat cruise during the Queen’s Jubilee in 1977 to the likes of The Clash singing about unemployment and civil unrest, and Stiff Little Fingers singing about life in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. In the USA, bands like The Dead

² Fowler, Jonathan and Elizabeth Rodd, directors. *What Is Punk? Big Think*, 30 Sept. 2021, <https://bigthink.com/videos/what-is-punk/>.

³ “Subculture Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subculture>.

⁴ Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Taylor & Francis Group, 1981

⁵ *Today Show* with Bill Grundy, 1976

Kennedys took on politicians head on, directly referencing them in songs such as “California Uber Alles” and Cambodian Dictator Pol Pot in “Holiday in Cambodia”.

Take a look where you're livin'
You got the Army on your street
And the RUC dog of repression
Is barking at your feet
Is this the kind of place you wanna live?
Is this where you wanna be?
Is this the only life we're gonna have?⁶



Fig 1. Stiff Little Fingers

In these lyrics we can see the longing to leave an area where a militarised police presence was constant, where a curfew was in place, a place where being in the wrong place at the wrong time would have the “RUC dog of repression barking at your feet”. The song is written about having nowhere to go and having nothing to do as a teenager in Belfast and the boredom associated with that. It presents the annoyance of having the RUC constantly breathing down their necks and wanting to escape from that life.

For three and a half decades, the world’s media trained its attention on the terrorist ‘war’ raging in Ireland’s north-east six counties. Behind a screen of gunsmoke and fire, beyond the macho men in the woollen masks toting their rifles and laying their bombs, stands another narrative, a hidden Ireland.⁷

⁶ Stiff Little Fingers, “*Alternative Ulster*”, Rough Trade and Rigid Digits, 1978, Transcript of Lyrics

⁷ McDonald, Henry, *Colours: Ireland – From Bombs to Boom*, Mainstream, 2004

For some context, during this time in Northern Ireland, neighbourhoods became extremely segregated between Catholic and Protestant, “peace lines” or giant concrete walls were erected dividing communities.



Fig 2. Peace wall built in Belfast

People rarely went out at night out of fear, the city centre of Belfast became a caged off area, locked away at 6 o'clock. A lot of pubs and cinemas were now locked away, so nightlife was restricted to areas far outside the city. Buses also stopped early, so without a car you were very much stuck in place. Teenagers longing for the latest releases in pop music had nowhere to go, not only that they faced joblessness, sectarianism, violence, and lack of any opportunities. It was two years after the emergence of the Sex Pistols that punk reached Northern Ireland. Northern Irish newspapers largely ignored it, but through the British tabloids and word of mouth from people returning from trips to London, punk gained a foothold in the minds of Irish youth. Bands started forming left, right and centre. The Undertones from Derry, SLF, Rudi and The Outcasts from Belfast are a few notable bands that emerged. Many were signed by a man called Teri Hooley, from Good Vibrations, who organised the first ever International Festival of Punk and New Wave.

You're a star-belly snitch
You suck like a leech
You want everyone to act like you
Kiss ass while you bitch
So you can get rich⁸



Fig 3. Dead Kennedys

This song, written around the time the Khmer Rouge, a Cambodian communist party, were carrying out a mass genocide of their own people. Jello Biafra, the lead singer of Dead Kennedys, penned these lyrics as a satirical take on the young, white college student who protest first and think later. The song stood as a warning to people who do things because everyone else is, because it seems to be the cool thing to do.

Earlier in the song the lyric “Braggin’ that you know how the n*****s feel cold and the slums got so much soul”⁹ is talking about how young white males were appropriating black culture to appear “cool”, when they had absolutely no idea what that culture means. The

⁸ Dead Kennedys, “*Holiday in Cambodia*”, Optional Music, 1980, Transcript of Lyrics

⁹ Dead Kennedys, “*Holiday in Cambodia*”, Optional Music, 1980, Transcript of Lyrics

use of the N-Word was used for a shock factor by Biafra, it was later changed by the band to either 'Blacks' or 'Brothers'.

The US had Ronald Reagan to deal with, but closer to home in the UK Thatcher was Public Enemy No.1 for many punk bands. Some, such as Paul Weller (The Jam), Billy Bragg and Tom Robinson (Tom Robinson Band) threw their weight behind a collective called "The Red Wedge", which were aiming get support to the Labour Party to stop Thatcher's conservative party getting re-elected.

It wasn't until the 1990s that punk in America regained its more political stance. The Gulf War was a main factor, with a protest concert being played outside The White House, with bands like Fugazi singing about America's homelessness problem and America's involvement in Iraq.

Fashion in the UK



Fig 4. Malcolm McLaren & Vivienne Westwood in 1976

The fashion of the punks' ties in heavily with the political stance. Starting out in very conservative countries like the UK and US, the norm for people was very clean cut and well dressed, and anything other than that was strange and unusual. Punks stood against that idea, wearing old torn clothes held together with safety pins, sewing zippers and patches onto jackets and pants, cutting, dyeing, and spiking their hair in wild styles (see Figs. 3 and 4). The clothes suited the lifestyle of those with limited money due to unemployment and the general low-income that school leavers or students often experience. All this was to stand out from what was normal at the time, as a way of saying "We won't conform to your view of the world".

It was Vivienne Westwood and the Sex Pistols who brought punk fashion to how it was, the Sex Pistols became her advertisements for her clothing and what Punk should look like. People tried to copy what she did, drawing on their own clothing, attaching safety pins and sewing zippers on anything. Her London fashion boutique SEX sold her designs which featured very controversial and provocative imagery, such as swastikas, modified images of the British Queen, and one shirt had an image of Peter Samuel Cook (also known as 'The Cambridge Rapist') emblazoned on it.

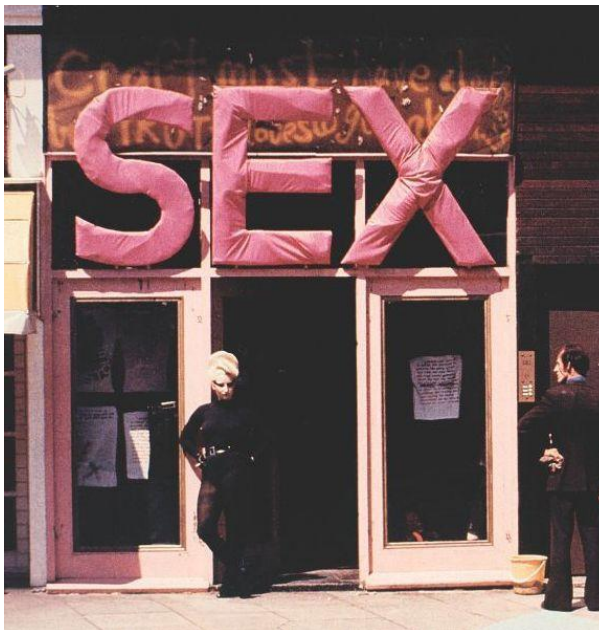


Fig 5. Westwoods "SEX" shop, 1976



Fig 6. Cambridge Rapist Shirt

“I don’t think punk fashion is a spectre or overemphasized—it made a big impression, as there had never been anything like it before.”¹⁰



Fig 7. Jordon, unknown woman, and Vivienne Westwood wearing punk clothing designed by Vivienne, London 1977

The D.I.Y. aspect of punk was also a heavy feature; punks raided their parents’ wardrobes and various charity shops for cheap clothing they could tear up and sew onto. Doc Marten boots became the staple footwear of the punks, razor blades and padlocks became necklaces, anything that could be sewn or pinned down became accessories. Piercings were also done, but in places besides the normal area of the ears, and safety pins through the cheek were popular. The subject and position of tattoos and piercings were specifically chosen to offend normal members of society.

According to Malcolm McLaren: “The Popularity of Punk was, in effect, due to the fact that it made ugliness beautiful.”¹¹ Punk was a rejection of prettiness, and it was unisex, meaning men and women shared clothing and jewellery styles. This can be seen in Fig.6 where the women are wearing leather jackets and the simple use of tartan, which was seen as a pattern used only by the upper class at that time.

Zines, a term that originated in 1930s and 1940s from sci-fi fandoms, were utilised by punks in the 1970s as an attack on mainstream music journalism, much like their music and

¹⁰ Minthe, Caterina. “Interview: Vivienne Westwood.” *Vogue Arabia*, 7 May 2013, https://en.vogue.me/archive/faces_of_fashion/interview-vivienne-westwood/.

¹¹ Murray Wardrop, Murraywardrop. “Malcolm McLaren: In His Own Words.” *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 8 Apr. 2010,

fashion did to their mainstream counterparts. It was one of the main components of the D.I.Y. aesthetic that punk had, as they were completely a fan made creation, made using newspaper clippings, markers, and a photocopier. Punks could turn to a local fanzine for reviews, interviews, and pretty much anything else related to punk. Zines travelled via touring bands and through the postal service, spreading information and allowing people access to bands and punk news from across the world.

I had an old children's typewriter I had got for Christmas one year and used that. I crossed out in pen where I needed to and used felt tip for the headlines. It was very basic. Looking back, it looks like some kind of DIY statement but the aesthetic template for punk didn't exist at that point. I was just doing the best I could, with whatever was available.¹²

Zines were an important part of the punk subculture, way before the popularity of the internet was ever a thing, zines were the only way punks across the world could find out about the scene in other countries.

One of the most well known in punk circles was the Zine "Sniffin' Glue", produced for about a year starting on July 1976 after a Ramones gig in the Roundhouse. A song that was played there, "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," was the inspiration for the zine's name. Sniffin' Glue represented the punk DIY ethos in its purest form. It was rough and ready, spelling mistakes and crossing out weren't edited out, images were cut from elsewhere and glued in, sections were written in felt tip pen and the whole thing was hastily photocopied. It showed people that ordinary people with a few simple supplies could produce anything no matter the skill involved. A point which was made in the last issue when the author, Mark Perry, encouraged his readers to make their own.

¹² Wray, Daniel Dylan. "How We Made Punk Fanzine Sniffin' Glue." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 10 Dec. 2019

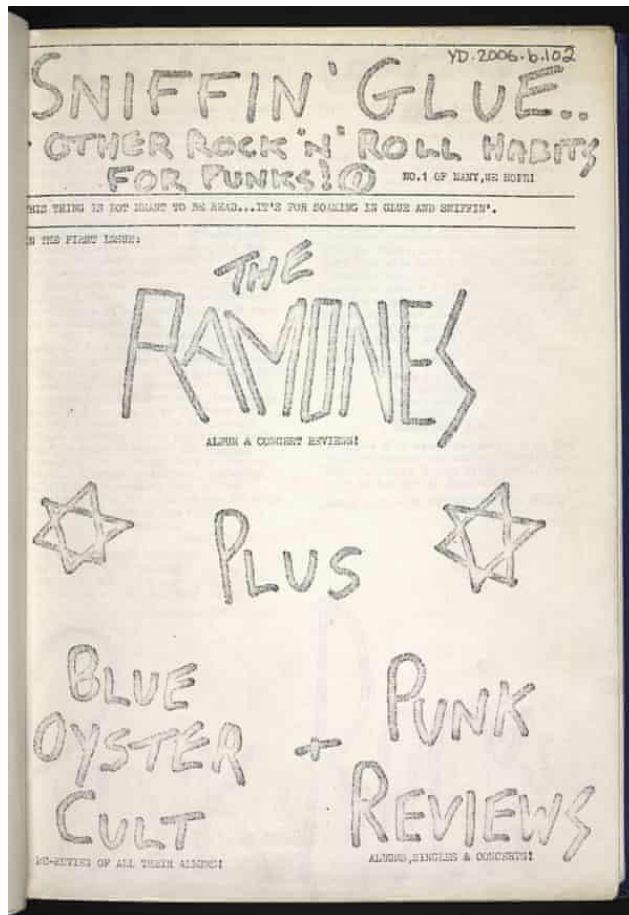


Fig 8.Cover of Sniffin' Glue Issue #1

As we can see, the punk movement of the 1970s was a quite tight knit subculture mainly existing in the UK and the USA. It hadn't the reach it would soon have. It was a movement of rebellion, of standing out and sticking it to the older generations, a way of the youth to voice their unhappiness with the world in the only way they knew how.

Chapter 2: Punk in Recent Times

Punks from the past and in more recent times have very similar standings on many issues, due to current punks taking great influence from the past particularly when it comes to fashion, music and political ideas. There are many recent inventions that have allowed these ideologies to be spread further than they ever have before. The digital age gave punks new places to spread their messages, pictures, and ideas. The internet and websites like Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram have been a great boon to the punk movement, punk activism has become easier much easier to organise, and punk as a potent political force has become harder to ignore.

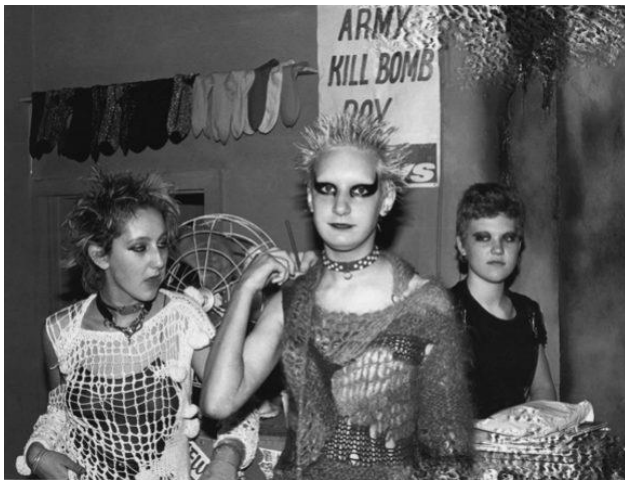


Fig 9. 3 Punk women posing in a shop, 1970s



Fig 10. Punk woman from Australia, 2002

For example, punk bands such as Pussy Riot took on the Russian Government and Russian Orthodox Church by organising a guerrilla concert within the walls of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on February 2012. Three members were arrested as a result and charged with "Hooliganism motivated by Religious Hatred". Information on this gig was not able to be suppressed due to it being posted on YouTube, where it spread worldwide.¹³ This

¹³ imjustevil666. "Pussy Riot-Punk Prayer.mp4." *YouTube*, YouTube, 10 Mar. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALS92big4TY>.

protest and subsequent arrest shone a big light on Vladimir Putin's relationship with the Russian Orthodox church, happening days before the presidential election in Russia.



Fig 11. Pussy Riot Performing in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Banish Putin
Banish Putin, Banish Putin!
Congregations Genuflect
Black robes brag, Golden Epaulettes
Freedom's phantoms gone to heaven
Gay Prides chained and in detention.¹⁴

The case split Russia, with people feeling the women were being harshly treated and made examples of, but others took their actions as a direct insult to the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁵ The trio's fate attracted much international attention. Musicians like Sting, the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Madonna and Yoko Ono called for their release, while human rights groups designated them prisoners of conscience. Pussy Riot's distinctive coloured balaclavas, seen in Fig.3, became a widely recognised symbol of the band and what they stand for. Their outfits in general reflect their name, "Pussy Riot", as the bright colours

¹⁴ Pussy Riot, Lyrics to "Punk Prayer (English Translation)." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Pussy-riot-punk-prayer-english-translation-lyrics>.

¹⁵ "Pussy Riot: The Story so Far." *BBC News*, BBC, 23 Dec. 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25490161>.

and mismatched outfits represented the “Riot” and the feminine “Pussy” is represented by dresses and stockings. They dressed to stand out from the crowd.

So, it’s like, “Riot” is mad, but we needed to identify “Pussy” somehow, and what is pussy? It is stockings and it is dresses. It was super uncomfortable for us to wear the stockings because most of us were all about wearing comfortable clothes at the time. It hurt us and we didn’t like it, but we had to represent “Pussy” in our image.¹⁶

While in prison they were repeatedly turned down for parole, one of them complained of abuses by the guard, and two of them continued their activism by going on hunger strike. They were later released in 2014, after an amnesty law was signed that released 20,000 prisoners. Many, including the women, called this a PR stunt by Putin to avoid controversy before the Winter Olympics.



Fig 12. The three arrested member of Pussy Riot sitting in court

In the U.S, recalling Dead Kennedys “Rock Against Reagan” shows, Punk band NOFX organised a series of “Rock against Bush” shows, which gained major support from the

¹⁶ Lyon, Joshua. “Pussy Riot: Nadya Tolokonnikova Talks Fashion and Identity Politics.” *V Magazine*, 20 Sept. 2016, <https://vmagazine.com/article/pussy-riot-nadya-tolokonnikova-talks-fashion-identity-politics/>.

punk community. Fat Mike, the lead singer of NOFX, is a very politically outspoken person, which is shown in the band's music and the interviews given by the band.

Remember when America had a middle and Upper Class?
That was way before the exodus,
That was the America that we thought was number one
Thought would overcome, Thought would never die.¹⁷



Fig 13. The Members of NOFX

As we can see in Fig 13, members of the band still carry their punk stylings out in the open. Fat Mike on the left of the image is still a rough around the edge's punk, with a band t-shirt, messy dyed hair, badges on his jacket and the lock and chain around his neck, an item made famous by Sid Vicious. Erik Sandin shows his punk style with the blue dreadlocks. Both these men make the choice to stand out from the crowd and show their hatred for the status quo. The other two members of the band show their punk side less so, at least in this image, having a more of an American working man type image, wearing denim and checked flannel.

¹⁷ NOFX, Lyrics to "We Called It America", "NOFX (Ft. Bill Stevenson) – We Called It America." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Nofx-we-called-it-america-lyrics>.



Fig 14. Rock against Bush Poster

These hark back to a time when a person could leave school and work in jobs that paid a decent living wage, something that doesn't exist in many places in America today, such as the manufacturing field. Now getting a decent paying job straight out of school is very difficult and manufacturing jobs have been moved to countries where labour is cheaper. A higher-level education is almost expected for young people to earn a decent living wage.

The middle classes are getting squeezed particularly hard by the rising costs of education, health care and housing, the OECD writes. College fees are up, in the U.S. and elsewhere. Homes are much more expensive relative to incomes.¹⁸

¹⁸ Arends, Brett. "Why the Middle Class Is Shrinking." *MarketWatch*, MarketWatch, 22 Apr. 2019, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/why-the-middle-class-is-shrinking-2019-04-12>.

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Fig 15. Example of unreasonable job posting in America

NOFX along with bands like Green Day, Anti-Flag, Bad Religion and Propagandi came to the forefront of the punk movement during the Donald Trump era by releasing songs about the President of the United States, one of the most controversial American presidents of our time, so far. Green Day changed the lyrics to “American Idiot” to describe Trump¹⁹ and the Anti-Flag song “American Attraction” rose in popularity due to the increased gun violence in America. Bad Religion wrote “The Kids are Alt-Right” in response to the

¹⁹ Smith-Engelhardt, Joe. “Green Day Call out Trump with ‘American Idiot’ Lyrics Swap at Iheartradio.” *Alternative Press Magazine*, 21 Sept. 2019, <https://www.altpress.com/news/green-day-trump-american-idiot-lyrics-iheartradio-music-festival/>.

crossover between Neo-Nazism, Racism and Trump supporters.²⁰ Propaghandi wrote “Fuck The Border” about how corporations are allowed jump borders and ruin the social, economic and environmental situations of different countries with no repercussions, but a single person trying to jump a border to gain a better life, and leave the situation caused by the corporations, is turned away.²¹

In the U.K the distrust of the government can always be felt, The Specials released the song “Vote For Me” in 2019, which takes on the political elite who had become “Drunk on Money and Power”:

If we vote for you, do you promise
To be upright, decent, and honest?
To have our best interest at heart?²²



Fig 16. The Members of The Specials

²⁰ Breihan, Tom. “Bad Religion – ‘The Kids Are Alt-Right.’” *Stereogum*, 20 June 2018, <https://www.stereogum.com/2002593/bad-religion-the-kids-are-alt-right/music/>.

²¹ Propagandhi. “Fuck the Border.” *Fuck the Border* –, <https://propagandhi.com/lyrics/fuck-the-border>.

²² The Specials, Lyrics to “Vote for Me.” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/The-specials-vote-for-me-lyrics>.

In the lyrics we can see a criticism on various government parties promises and their lack of wanting to keep those promises, and how this is a thing that happens time and time again. In 2013 when Margaret Thatcher died, an internet campaign was started trying to get people to play “Ding Dong The Witch is Dead”, which rose to number 2 in the charts in the UK and Number 33 In Ireland. This shows that the hatred for the Prime Minister and her government for what they did in the 1970s and 1980s is still a longstanding stain in the minds of working-class people. This prompted the BBC to ban the song from being played.²³



Fig 17. Celebrations for the death of Margaret Thatcher

This somewhat mirrors the 2009 campaign to get Rage Against the Machine’s “Killing in The Name” to Christmas Number 1 instead of a cut and paste *X-Factor*’s winners’ song, and it won, with the 18-year-old song becoming Christmas Number 1 in Britain. Standing up against the system, whether it be the government turning on its people, large music labels churning out the same old songs over and over or standing up against religious persecution, punks have always stood outside the mainstream, stood against the status quo.

²³ “BBC Defends Decision to Ban 'Ding, Dong, the Witch Is Dead' Song After.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 3 Dec. 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/bbc-defends-decision-to-ban-ding-dong-the-witch-is-dead-song-after-lady-thatcher-s-death-8980678.html>.

Moving away from music, fashion has always been the biggest aspect for people when wanting to express themselves, and the D.I.Y aspect of punk has been a great draw to people. In a world where people are trying to move away from “fast fashion”, the fashion of punk can be a more practical option. It teaches you to make clothing last as long as possible through sewing and safety pinning, and also has the emphasis on buying cheaply from charity shops and 2nd hand shops. This has allowed people to stand out in a world where in places like UK and Ireland, tracksuits are the uniform of the youth. In personal experience dressing in a punk style, with my spiked leather jacket, patched pants and boots, I stick out so much in my town that I am near invisible, I have experienced a time where a person in a tracksuit is picked up by the Guards before I was even looked at. The look of a working-class hooligan has changed. The tracksuits are cheap and easily picked up from most clothing shops, Nike and Adidas being most popular.

“... it only encouraged the UK government to equate trackies with the antisocial. Soon enough the garment fell victim to extreme politicisation and was often associated with violence and crime.”²⁴

For new people getting into the scene, many fashion designers have taken heavy influence from the punk scene, including companies like TrippNYC, Underground and Disturbia.

²⁴ One Block Down. “How Tracksuit Became a Symbol of Anti-Establishment Fashion.” *One Block Down*, <https://eu.oneblockdown.it/blogs/archive/samutaro-tracksuits-nike-culture-gopnik-grime-skept-sopranos?redirect=true&shippingCountry=FR>.

These, while expensive, options give people greater access to punk clothing that can later be modified by the owner.



Fig 18. Bondage Pants from TrippNYC

We can see that in Fig 10 the pants are a very punk style, with zippers sewn on them and belts hanging off them. The pattern of the pants, the Black and tartan split, is also a difficult thing to replicate at home without decent sewing knowledge. These pants while a very good option, they are not very personal to the owner, and with the price that they can be, around \$120, many wouldn't want to sew onto them. While expensive, these options also open punk fashion to people with disabilities that don't allow them to be able to sew.

LGBT+

These aspects of punk make it a great place for people who feel they don't fit in, a great place for the LGBT+ Community, for P.O.C, for people who are getting hate just for being who they are. Referring back to the introduction, the word Punk has itself queer connotations.

Some punk scenes have been especially aware of, and sensitive to, issues of social justice, often being the group to further the causes of the feminist and gay rights movements. Significant transatlantic communication has allowed many movements within punk to gain

traction on both sides of the Atlantic. As is the case with most issues, punk has never had a clear stance regarding gender and sexuality, and it comes as no surprise that the community has not been immune to misogyny and homophobia. Especially the masculine elements of the hardcore scene, a subgenre from the United States, have reflected badly on the punk scene as a whole.

“The rejection of sexism by the Punk movement is a continuing fight to educate those who enter the movement with their stereotypical images still intact.”²⁵

The same is true for sexism and homophobia, which are themes of many punk songs. The song ‘Less Talk, More Rock’ by the band Propaghandi talks of a same sex sexual experience the singer had when he was younger, it calls out homophobic punk fans:

“Cause if you dance to this, you drink to me
And my sexuality”²⁶



Fig 19. The members of Propaghandi

The lead singer Chris Hannah’s intentions are made very clear, that by dancing or moshing to this song, the listener must admit that they are raging to a song about a man admitting to very personal homosexual experiences.

Another song that speaks about the hardships that members of the LGBT+ community is

²⁵ O'Hara, Craig. *The Philosophy of Punk: More than Noise!* AK, 1999.

²⁶ Propagandhi, Lyrics to “Less Talk, More Rock.” *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Propagandhi-less-talk-more-rock-lyrics>.

Anti-Flags 'Right To Choose'. This song speaks to the hatred that some people get from their own families, going so far as to get kicked from their home, just because of who they love

"Thrown out by her family
In the midst of anger
Mom and dad can't make sense
Of her sexual preference."²⁷

It's in more modern times that the plight of LGBT+ people has come to the more mainstream punk, bands whether straight or LGBT+ have made it clear that homophobia is not accepted in the punk scene and life in general.

Feminism

The most major aspect of punk was that girls learned to stand up and be the equivalent of boys. And that changed the world. All them girl bands stood on the stage and took it just like the blokes, right? It changed everything. The Slits, X-Ray Spex, Raincoats, right? Absolutely fantastic. I don't know if young kids these days realize how open and creative and challenging to society that was.²⁸



Fig 20. Image of Johnny Rotten

²⁷ Anti-Flag, Lyrics to "Right to Choose." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Anti-flag-right-to-choose-lyrics>.

²⁸ Jeff Perlah On 4/4/17 at 11:45 AM EDT, et al. "John Lydon Says Rotten Things about Donald Trump, Green Day." *Newsweek*, 9 Apr. 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/john-lydon-says-rotten-things-about-donald-trump-green-day-578640>.

The feminist movement was strong in the punk scene, and women could give it as good as the men. Bands like X-Ray Spex and The Slits paved the way for more female fronted bands in the punk scene. The feminist punk bands subvert the view that the general populace had about women, they are no longer the gentle, soft things that need to be protected, they are now angry and taking a stand against the problems that women face in the world. The Riot Grrrl movement started in America in the 1990s was a big help to the feminist side of the punk subculture. It gave young girls and women a name to look to for themselves, and made it easier to find bands to look up to. Riot Grrrl songs often addressed issues of rape, domestic abuse, sexuality and racism. The Riot Grrrl Punk subgenre is very open in its support of marginalised groups like Transgender people, Gay and Lesbian people and other communities.

You were seen as deviant. There was a lot of anger and self-mutilation.
In a symbolic sense, women were cutting and destroying the established image of Femininity, aggressively tearing it down.²⁹

Modern punk bands have been heavily influenced by the likes of X-Ray Spex and Bikini Kill and have continued the Riot Grrrl Movement. The Riot Grrrl movement has been attractive to many women all over the world, inspiring bands from Brazil to Malaysia. Riot Grrrl provided women across the world access to an outlet that put a challenge to their cultures view on females through a form of self-expression, especially to women in non-western places where something like that isn't widely accepted.



Fig 21. Members of X-Ray Spex



Fig 22. Members of Bikini Kill

²⁹ DOWNES, JULIA. "The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures." *Women's Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2012, pp. 204–237.,

We can see through these examples that modern punk has become more of a safe place for members of different cultures, sexualities, and genders. Punks haven't become stuck in the past, albeit there are some outliers that want to live in the past, the punk movement has become a place where the outsiders of society can come and express themselves, a place where they can voice their grievances with the world.

Chapter 3: Punk in the Media

Unlike the 1970s, when punk was in everyone's face and couldn't be ignored, punk rock in contemporary times has become much more hidden away, and news sites don't report on it as they used to. Punk based characters are very often background characters, movies about punk are more in the documentary style, aimed towards people reminiscing about the past, and punk music has become background songs for television shows.³⁰ As of writing this, the most recent punk based television show was Channel 4's *We Are Lady Parts*, a show from May 2021 about an all-girl Muslim punk band in London trying to make it big.



Fig 23. Characters from Channel 4 TV show 'We Are Lady Parts' in a bathroom, May 2021

Newspapers such as *The Guardian* run stories about punk bands when a member dies or, in the case of the most well-known punk band The Sex Pistols, when Johnny Rotten says or does something ridiculous that will get them views. An example of this is when they reported on him voicing his reasons why he voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 US election: "I'm working-class English, it makes complete sense to me to vote for a person

³⁰ DyingScene. *10 Punk Rock References on Popular TV Shows - Dying Scene*. 16 Aug. 2012, <https://dyingscene.com/10-punk-rock-references-on-popular-tv-shows/>.

who actually talks about my kind of people.”³¹

These opinions have caused punks, young and old, to turn their back on The Sex Pistols singer, many calling him a sell-out. This was especially shown when he decided to do various Country Life Butter advertisements. This is considered selling out as Johnny Rotten was considered the father of punk, seeing him do something for a pay-out have been seen as him leaving his poor working class punk roots behind.

And Lydon attacked people who accused the former Sex Pistols frontman of selling out by his appearance in the Country Life ad. He told the *Camden New Journal*: "Why are they questioning me? What manual am I supposed to adopt?"³²



Fig 24. John Lydon featuring in a Country Life Butter advert

³¹ Lewis, Isobel. "Sex Pistols' John Lydon Shouts at Susanna Reid While Defending Trump." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 4 Nov. 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/john-lydon-trump-sex-pistols-gmb-b1586651.html>.

³² Staff. "John Lydon Defends Role in Country Life Ads." *Campaign*, CampaignUK, 13 Nov. 2010, <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/john-lydon-defends-role-country-life-ads/966725>.

In the UK punk has become a part of history, a well-known part of British life and has become recognisable as such. Festivals such as Riot Fest keeping the movement alive. The punk look has become a part of British identity. Moving east outside of Britain is where things take a different turn, as the punk look and sound can still cause as much outrage in countries such as Indonesia, Burma, Iraq and Russia, places where stepping out of cultural norms can result in very harsh punishments. You may experience torture, imprisonment, something referred to as “Moral Rehabilitation” or death.

In Iraq during 2012, 14 young people were stoned to death for the simple crime of wearing western style ‘Emo’ clothing and hair styles, Emo being a more emotional sub-genre of punk. The Militant Shi’ites of Iraq at the time were circulating leaflets which contained lists of names of targets. The Iraqi interior ministry equating Emo to satanism. They later denied that Emo stylings had anything to do with the murders, stating that: “no murder case has been recorded with the interior ministry on so called ‘emo’ grounds. All cases of murder recorded were for revenge, social and common criminal reasons.”³³ It should be said that these actions were condemned by leading Shi’ite clerics, stating that “Such a phenomenon which has spread among young people should be tackled through dialogue and peaceful means and not through physical liquidation.”³⁴

In Indonesia, in a province that has a special police force used to maintain Sharia Law, a punk gig was shut down with 64 attendees being arrested. They were taken to a remedial school where they were stripped of their punk style, having their Mohawks forcibly shaved because they were deemed to be “insulting to Islamic traditions”.³⁵ They were later forced to undergo a re-education, a process where people are forced into military style training and discipline and read passages of the Quran repeatedly. Protests were organised in

³³ Rasheed, Ahmed, and Mohammed Ameer. “Iraq Militia Stone Youths to Death for ‘Emo’ Style.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 10 Mar. 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-emo-killings-idUSBRE8290CY20120310>.

³⁴ Rasheed, Ahmed, and Mohammed Ameer. “Iraq Militia Stone Youths to Death for ‘Emo’ Style.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 10 Mar. 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-emo-killings-idUSBRE8290CY20120310>.

³⁵ Person. “Police Give Punks a Forced Haircut.” *Independent*, Independent.ie, 1 Dec. 2012, <https://www.independent.ie/breaking-news/world-news/police-give-punks-a-forced-haircut-26802184.html>.

Indonesia, London and San Francisco.



Fig 25. Group of people protesting outside Indonesian Embassy in London

These actions show that the shock value of punk rock is still alive and well, albeit the ramifications of being a punk or from a punk sub-genre in these countries is far more serious than it ever was in Britain or America.

In Western countries, Antifa (or Anti-Facist) groups are the punk movement's answer to radical right-wing Christian groups, taking on the likes of the EDL (English Defence League) and National Front in the UK and the Proud Boys in the US.

There's a huge overlap between radical left politics and the punk scene, and there's a stereotype about dirty anarchists and punks, which is an oversimplification but grounded in a certain amount of truth.³⁶

Antifa got its start in the UK during the 1970s, when right-wing political parties were starting to become popular. They would turn up at right-wing events and shut them down

³⁶ Thomson, Jamie. "'No Fascist USA!': How Hardcore Punk Fuels the Antifa Movement." *The Guardian*, 9 Sept. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/sep/09/no-fascist-usa-how-hardcore-punk-fuels-the-antifa-movement>.

any chance they got. Inspired by this, left-wing skinheads in the USA formed groups there and this gained traction within the punk scene, even giving the rise to the S.H.A.R.P (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) movement. The first use of the term Antifa was used in Germany in the 1980s, along with the Antifa symbol and it spread from there. One of the symbols were a circle with three arrows inside, this is taken from the German anti-fascist group The Iron Front. The two flags were adopted later, the flags are considered to represent Anarchy (Black) and Communism or Socialism (Red).³⁷



Fig 26. Antifa member waving a flag containing the Antifa symbol during a protest

In recent times, from 2016 onwards, Antifa has been in the limelight for taking on supporters of Donald Trump, whose many followers have right-wing Christian ideologies. All through Trump's political campaign and his presidency, his followers have been closely followed by Antifa groups, trying to put a stop to the racial prejudice being spread, through any means necessary. In response Trump has labelled Antifa as a terrorist group. Punk has its roots in anti-fascism, with many songs being written about anti-fascism, notably 'Nazi Punks Fuck Off' by The Dead Kennedys.

³⁷ Friedmann, Sarah. "What Do the Antifa Symbols Mean? the Flags Often Feature Three Arrows." *Bustle*, Bustle, 15 Aug. 2017, <https://www.bustle.com/p/what-do-the-antifa-symbols-mean-the-flags-often-feature-three-arrows-76629>.

Punk ain't no religious cult
Punk means thinking for yourself
You ain't Hardcore when you spike your hair
When a jock still lives inside your head.³⁸

This verse shows that if you aren't willing to accept the diversity of people and ideas in the punk scene, you are unwelcome, and just because you look the part doesn't mean you can be the part. It shows the disgust Jello Biafra has with the bullying and exclusion that are the basis for racism, homophobia, misogyny, and other types of bigotry.

These sentiments are carried on in the punk scene today, and antifa is a part of that, even though the media portrays antifa as the bad guys, due to their often violent means of protest, they are also pushing the message that to be Antifa and Anti-Fascist is wrong too, going so far that President Donald Trump tried to have the organization as a terrorist organization.³⁹

Back in the UK, around 2016, the punks in the UK became outraged. Joe Corr , the son of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, announced that he would be destroying  5 million worth of Sex Pistols memorabilia in a large fire, saying that Punk had become a "McDonald's brand ... owned by the state, establishment and corporations".⁴⁰ He was doing this in response to the 'Punk London' event, a celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Sex Pistols' *Anarchy in the UK* album, which Corr  claimed was supported by the British Queen. Many called on Corr  to sell the memorabilia and donate the money to charity to which Corr  said: "the job of the state is now taken up by the charity sector. We have charities where people are earning  250,000 a year to sit on the board, these things are becoming

³⁸ "Dead Kennedys - Nazi Punks Fuck Off." <https://Lyricsjonk.com>, <https://lyricsjonk.com/dead-kennedys-nazi-punks-fuck-off.html>.

³⁹ Wilson, Jason. "What Is Antifa and Why Is Donald Trump Targeting It?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/06/what-is-antifa-trump-terrorist-designation>.

⁴⁰ Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. "'Punk Is a McDonald's Brand': Malcolm McLaren's Son on Burning  5m of Items." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 Nov. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/nov/24/malcolm-mclarens-son-punk-has-become-a-brand-like-mcdonalds>.

corporations in their own right”.⁴¹

This quote shows that in Britain people rely more on charities than they can their own country and how a lot of the main people in these charities take what they want from donations to feed their own pockets. An example, from Ireland at least, of this would be David Moloney, the chief executive of Bóthar, who was caught stealing money from his own charity, meant to be used in an event to aid widows of the Rwandan Genocide among other charitable causes.⁴²

In the USA, activism started by the members of the punk movement of the 1980s is still going, the organisation Positive Force was started in 1985 and has organised hundreds of concerts in aid of various communities and activist groups since, most famously being the group that helped set up the Punk Percussion Protest and War on Poverty Not in The Middle East, the infamous demonstration in front of the White House in 1991.

Sara Marcus, author of *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Girrrl Revolution*, who was a teenager during this time once said: “Probably half the shows I went to, if not more, were benefits for a cause that was put together by Positive Force. It was kind of my musical and political education.”⁴³ Through much of its history, Positive Force offered communal meeting and living spaces for various individuals. They also provided many organisations with financial support such as The Flemming Centre, which houses the group. Their activism still continues today, and in the movie *More Than A Witness* it is said that since 1985 Positive Force has organised more than 300 concerts and raised more than \$200,000 for

⁴¹ Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. “‘Punk Is a McDonald's Brand': Malcolm McLaren's Son on Burning £5m of Items.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 Nov. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/nov/24/malcolm-mclarens-son-punk-has-become-a-brand-like-mcdonalds>.

⁴² Keena, Colm. “Charity Boss Stole Money Said to Have Gone to Victims of Sex Trafficking.” *The Irish Times*, The Irish Times, 30 Apr. 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/charity-boss-stole-money-said-to-have-gone-to-victims-of-sex-trafficking-1.4552435>.

⁴³ Anderson, Stacey. “Positive Force: The Film That Remembers When Punk Took on the White House.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 21 Aug. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/aug/21/positive-force-punk-activism-washington-dc-documentary>.

organisations that work to help residents of Washington D.C.

From these different sections we can see that the punk movement, depending on your source, is portrayed as a driving force for change, battling racial prejudice through groups like Antifa. Some may say Antifa are a menace with their violent actions, while others may say they are the only people showing they want a change. While on the other hand, with Positive Action we see that punk can be a peaceful movement offering aid to those who need it, helping marginalised groups and organisations with fund raising and giving small bands a place to showcase their talents.

We can also see how the punk movement is taken in other countries, in the UK in the 1970s you could be beaten up for looking punk whereas now because punk has become a part of British history, the punk look has become a more normalised thing. This contrasts the stories in Iraq and Indonesia where dressing in a punk way or partaking in punk activities like concerts, can make you a target for severe punishment like re-education schools or just being murdered for standing out.

In less serious areas, we can see how much a part of UK history the punk movement was and how much it meant to people whether they hated it or loved it, when the news came out that Corré was going to destroy the memorabilia, there were uproars in the country.

Chapter 4: Punk in Fictional Media

In fictional media people of the punk ideology are often seen as a joke character, more so in television shows of the past. We can take the example of Vyvyan Basterd from the BBC show *The Young Ones* (1982-84). Sporting a spikey orange hair, a studded denim vest and jeans, heavy boots and four stars embedded in his forehead, this character portrayal shows how people saw punks back then, as brash, and violent people (see Fig. 27). However, Vyvyan also has a very scientific mind and is a medical student in the show.

“Neil, are you gonna come down and make breakfast or am I going to have to kick your teeth in?”⁴⁴ His many violent outbursts are targeted towards his flatmates, but mostly towards Rick, a self-proclaimed anarchist, who had an upper-class upbringing, hopped onto the anarchist band wagon because it was looked cool but doesn’t have a clue.



Fig 27. Vyvyan Basterd from BBC’s The Young Ones

In current times the punk character in television and movies are less commonly seen, and a lot of the time it will just be their styling that has punk influence. An example of this is the character Ramona Flowers from *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, a movie based on a comic book. While in the comic her style would be considered more punk, in the movie her use of

⁴⁴ “‘The Young Ones’ Oil.” *IMDb*, IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0752260/quotes/qt0265896>.

military style wear, fishnets and leather would have a punk influence on the character. Her general “I Don’t Care” attitude towards certain things could also be considered part of the punk influence, especially when it comes to how people perceive her.

Her first on screen appearance her hair is bright pink, she wears steampunk goggles over her head, a faded green military parka over a blue hoody over a purple sweater, a short blue skirt over pink fishnet stockings to her final appearance wearing a black leather dress, Her hair colour is constantly changing, and her outfits always make her stand out from the crowd. This is what the style of punk was all about.



Fig 28. Ramona Flowers’ outfits throughout the movie

All this shows the love/hate relationship that punk has with the media, albeit it is always determined by the source you choose to look at.

Conclusion

We can see that after more than 50 years, punk still has influence in the world today. While some may not consider themselves as “Punk”, they would have the same ideologies and styling that would be considered as punk. Subgroups such as Goth, Grunge and emo have their influences in punk, either through sound, style or the general “I Don’t Care” attitude, so punk is still around. Bands mentioned above like NOFX and Propagandi carry on the mantle of the Punk attitude with songs taking issue with the government or different industries.

Punk in the world of today is a wonderful thing, it has allowed people an output for their creativity and a way to express themselves and voice their concerns in a more forward way. While to some it is seen as a weird and freaky thing, as it was seen in the past too, the invention of the internet has made punk a much more accessible and accepting place.

The fashion industry takes great inspiration from the past with various brands taking the stylings of punk and changing them to be more acceptable to a mainstream audience. Vivienne Westwood being the inventor of the styling that everyone associates with the punk movement still uses her punk roots in her designs, but people like Theresa May, former Prime Minister of the UK, have been spotted wearing suits of her design. The DIY aspect is also still alive, with people making and decorating their own clothes to fit their personal style and preference.

The accepting nature of Punk was an attractive aspect, the openness and in your face nature of the style and music gave people an outlet for their problems. The DIY aspect lets people be who they want to be, how they want to be. The loud and aggressive sound of the music can hide the lyrics that can sometimes be quite caring towards certain marginalised groups or very aggressive towards another lesser liked group, which can be attractive to some people because it allows them to show their anger for things that they care about. Many people from minority communities have been drawn to the punk movement, and particularly PoC and LGBT+ have an outlet for their frustrations and have a group of likeminded people around them to help them in their causes.

People who weren’t there in the 1970s during the first wave of punk now have so many resources to look back through for influence, whether it be Johnny Rotten’s fashion sense, or the messages spread through a Bad Religion song. They also have the wealth of knowledge that’s available through the internet from new music from across the world to

just sharing ideas and even selling different homemade products that opens up Punk to people who can't make the stuff themselves due to disability

Punk has opened up a world of possibilities for people of every type.

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