



**SOCIAL UNREST IN THE SONG LYRIC OF  
GREEN DAY'S "AMERICAN IDIOT"**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Bachelor Degree Majoring Literature in English Department  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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## **PRONOUNCEMET**

The writer honestly confirms that he compiles this project entitled “Social Unrest in The Lyric of Green Day’s “American Idiot”” by himself and without taking any result from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and in diploma degree of any other university. The writer ascertains also that he does not quote any material from other publications or someone’s paper except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, 21 Mei 2018

Amru Asbaron

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

----- **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

*This final project is dedicated to my beloved family and everyone who supported me  
to accomplish this final project.*

**APPROVAL**

**THE SOCIAL UNREST IN THE LYRIC OF GREEN DAY'S  
“AMERICAN IDIOT”**

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The writer realizes that this final project is far from perfection. Therefore, he will be glad to receive any constructive criticism, recommendation and suggestion to make this final project better. I expect this final project will be useful for the readers.

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## **ABSTRACT**

“American Idiot” is a song title arranged by band called Green Day from their *American Idiot* album. The song lyric implies a social value from the band about the American society. The condition of society is the reason why the writer uses this issue to makes the project. The objectives of this study are to show social unrest which Billie Joel Armstrong, the lyric writer, felt within the song lyric and its relation to the current situation of the society. This study adopts Marxist literary theory to analyze the song lyric. To collect the data, the writer uses library research and it applies textual analysis. The study is intended to general reader who favors Green Day and not only listen to the music but also focus on the song lyric.

Keyword: media, social unrest, Marxists literary theory, lyric, American society.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

*American Idiot* is an album composed by Green Day in 2004 and it contains thirteen numbers of songs. This album won multi-platinum in Grammy Awards, chart topper around the world and this album is the best reviewed album of their career. The album is not just a compilation of a song but in this album, the songs are connected to each other like telling the listener a story.

One of the songs which is really well-known is the song entitled “*American Idiot*” and this song is highly political for some listener. The writer will focus in the song lyric in this paper because the lyric contains high value of politics and socials. Not only using a strong word, the song also has an implied political value which the song writer wants to deliver in this final paper. According to the writer, this song is not just political but it is also about social. The writer sees how Green Day criticize the society is controlled by the government and media.

The writer will analyze how the song lyric criticizes the society way of life in the “*American Idiot*” song lyric. This paper also intends to figure out not only the lyric focusing on strong words to criticize the government, but also it figures out how the lyric implies moral values in it to change how the society is shaped.

The writer used library research as the research method to show and describe the social condition. In this paper, the writer adopts a Marxist theory of literary concept. The writer thinks that this theory can enrich the data in this project because

Marxism includes society, economy and politics. Using this theory, the writer intends to show the reader how author of the lyric see the society.

This paper is intended for reader specifically for those who favors Green Day. It is expected for those who enjoy the band is not just listen to the music but also focus on the song lyric.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 “ AMERICAN IDIOT” SONG LYRIC**

Don't wanna be an American idiot  
Don't want a nation under the new mania  
And can you hear the sound of hysteria?  
The subliminal mind fuck America (Stanza 1)

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alienation  
Where everything isn't meant to be okay  
Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow  
For that's enough to argue (Stanza 2)

Well maybe I'm the faggot America  
I'm not a part of a redneck agenda  
Now everybody do the propaganda  
And sing along to the age of paranoia (Stanza 3)

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alienation  
Where everything isn't meant to be okay  
Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow  
For that's enough to argue (Stanza 4)

Don't want to be an American idiot  
One nation controlled by the media  
Information age of hysteria  
It's calling out to idiot America (Stanza 5)

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alienation  
Where everything isn't meant to be okay  
Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow  
For that's enough to argue (Stanza 6)

## 2.2 THE SOCIAL UNREST BEHIND “AMERICAN IDIOT”

According to Study.com article's written by Deborah Teasley, social unrest is a condition caused by dissatisfaction and it could lead to unconventional and violent forms of behavior that can change the society. Social unrest could lead to riot, demonstration or strike. All of those acts, could lead the society into the state called crowd mentality which means people who easily influenced by the people around them.

*American Idiot* song lyric is an expression of dissatisfaction by Billie Joel Armstrong towards the media and government in United States of America. He does not like how the government and media covering the 9/11 tragedy and Iraq war news. Billie Joel Armstrong stated in New Public Radio article written by Marina Chavez entitled “Billie Joel Armstrong, From Green Day To Broadway”:

"In the beginning, right after 9/11 and watching the sort of tanks going into Iraq and these embedded journalists going in live, it felt like a cross between war and reality television."

The 9/11 tragedy and war which happened at Iraq is broadcasted by the media live at television at that time. Billie Joel Armstrong felt that the media made the Iraq war and 9/11 tragedy is just a reality show in television.

Billie's statement is proved to be right by another article by Vox.com entitled “ The history of American protest music, from “Yankee Doodle” to Kendrick Lamar” written by Bridget Henwood which said:

“it seemed like the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq by then-President George W. Bush would give protest music a serious revival.”

In the statement, it can be seen that the terrorist attack and invasion of Iraq, not only Green Day, but many bands and artists started to make a song based on what is going on in their society.

Both of the statement show us about the 9/11 tragedy and Iraq war. The first statement is shows the invasion of Iraq and how the media make it like a regular show in television. The second one is how the terrorist attack and the invasion of Iraq affected musician. Many bands and artist responded to the tragedy and invasion by making a protest-themed music.

The media is also criticized by Billie Joel Armstrong. It can be inferred from the lyric, media broadcasting about the Iraq War every time news segment came out on the television at that time. Billie stated the war that happen in Iraq is like a reality show. He also says that the media already changes the way of American society think. The news cycles on the media is successfully brainwashed the nation. It is stated on the article in Vox.com entitled “The History of American Protest Music, from “Yankee Doodle” to Kendrick Lamar” that states:

“This isn’t for lack of trying, though. Bands like Green Day and Bright Eyes satirized the direction the US took post-9/11 and in the Iraq War. The title track of Green Day’s 2004 album *American Idiot* took aim at the war in Iraq, with singer Billie Joe Armstrong specifically targeting the 24-hour news cycle and how constant coverage and media “propaganda” brainwashed the nation into believing whatever they saw on TV.”

The news says that using the 9/11 tragedy and Iraq war, the government and the media changes society’s way of thinking. The media makes the society believe in

what they watch on the news without actually knowing the truth behind it. Green Day is the one in 2004 made an entire thirteen songs based on the events that happen after the 9/11 tragedy.

The media has made American society change their way of life to easily believing what they saw on the television. The government also play a role that the news what they saw on the television, to become very convincing. As [geekstinkbreath.net](http://geekstinkbreath.net) said:

“The title of the song is referring to the author's opinion that these days politicians and the media are telling us what to do, what to buy, what to believe in. We are constantly being subliminally mind-fucked by commercials, campaigns and reality TV. They turn us into idiots with no individuality.” (GeekStinkBreath. American Idiot song meaning)

The statement above shows the author of the song, which is Billie Joel Armstrong, about his opinion about the politicians and media controlled the society.

Billie Joel Armstrong, as the writer of *American Idiot* song lyric, felt that he need to say something to change the way his society way of life. He, in American Long-Form with an article written by Maureen Taghon entitled *How Green Day Impacted the way People View Politics and the Media*, said that “I made *American idiot* to give people a reason to think for themselves.”

## 2.3 THE CONCEPT OF MARXISM

Marxism is an ideology based on Karl Marx's concept. Marxism is made from topic such as economy, society and politics. In the twentieth-century Marxist literary theory become phenomenon. Marxist approaches textual analysis study the relationship between a text and society. Marxist literary theory is developed from Marx's philosophy.

“A Marxist critic may begin such an analysis by showing how an author's text reflects his or her ideology through an examination of the fictional world's characters, settings, society, or any other aspect of the text. From this starting point, the critic may then launch an investigation into that particular author's social class and its effects on the author's society. Or the critic may choose to begin textual analysis by examining the history and the culture of the times reflected in the text and then investigate how the author either correctly or incorrectly pictures this historical period.” (Bressler. 1994:221)

In the quotation, it is implicitly shown that the lyricist way of think can be seen by examining the song lyric. The examination can begin from the social background of the author and the society or examining the author situation by the time author made the text. The Marxist approach in literary analysis expected to show the author ideology by analyzing the author work's.

“Whatever method the critic chose to use, a Marxist approach seeks to expose the dominant class, to demonstrate how the bourgeoisie's ideology controls and oppresses the working class, and to highlight the elements of society most affected by such oppression. Such an analysis, hopes the Marxist critic, will lead to action, social change, revolution, and the rise of socialism.” (Bressler, 1994:221)

In Marxism, the dominant class is called the bourgeoisie and proletariat is for the lower or worker class. Marxist criticism shows how the bourgeoisie controls and

oppresses the lower class and that result expected can makes a movement in the society.

Marxist literary theory is related to economic, social, and political system. While social unrest comes from individual or group of people who are not satisfied towards the major class. It is because how the major class controls and oppresses the class below them. Based on the article above, Billie Joel Armstrong is an individual who is not satisfied with the media and government because they change the way of American society way of life after the 9/11 tragedy and Iraq war.

### **3. METHOD**

In this paper, the writer uses library research to collect the data. According to Mary W. George, library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point.” (2008:6). The writer uses books, news and any internet sources to collect the data to this paper. Marxist literary theory is used as an approach in this paper to analyze the social unrest in the song lyric. The writer chose Marxist literary theory because it can show the reader the social unrest within the song lyric. To analyze the song lyric, the writer chose textual analysis. It means that the writer will be focused on text to understand what the lyric is trying to tell.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Social unrest comes from the individual or group of people who are not satisfied with the major class or the class which have a power to control the lower class. They depict the social unrest with a rally or demonstration and even worse, a riot. Another act which can express the social unrest is through a literature such as poem, short story or novel. Sometimes, music is also a good medium to express a feeling or thought. Song lyric in the music is another development of a poem. The lyric adds the musical instrument so the listener can get more meaning from the song lyric.

Analysis of the “American Idiot” is considered to contain the social unrest expressed by the song writer, Billie Joel Armstrong. Marxist literary theory is adopted to analyze the social unrest within the song lyric.

The first stanza of the song lyric tells us about how the writer does not want to be fooled by the “new mania.” The author of the song tells how his society is brainwashed by the new person who leads his country by picturing how his society changes into a state which is not normal.

Don't wanna be an American idiot.  
Don't want a nation under the new mania  
And can you hear the sound of hysteria?  
The subliminal mind fuck America. (Stanza 1, line 1 to 4)

In the first stanza, according to the background of the author at the time he wrote the song lyric, “the new mania” can possibly refer to the person who will lead United States of America in 2004. The candidate was George W. Bush from the Republican Party and John Kerry from Democratic Party. George W. Bush’s name was already popular because he was the person who made the Department of Homeland Security and re-worked the military of United States. The creation of the department was because the 9/11 tragedy which happened in New York. All those events made George W. Bush became the strong candidate who would win the election. The word “mania”, according to *Oxford Dictionary*, can also mean madness or insanity. It possibly means that Billie Joel Armstrong did not want an insane person lead his country.

The first two lines above show the author of the song how he felt about the government. According to the article with entitled “Billie Joel Armstrong, From Greed Day to Broadway”, the song was written to express Billie Joel Armstrong’s anger about the George W. Bush Presidency. These lines may contain the social unrest which shows how an individual felt about what the major class does to the minor class.

In the next stanza, the lyric tells how the condition at that time. The country’s condition was in the anxious state. It is because all the alienation which happened led to the uneasy or uncomfortable feeling. It is shown in the second stanza of the song, line one to three.

Welcome to a new kind of tension  
All across the alienation  
Where everything isn't meant to be okay (Stanza 2, line 5 to 7)

The “tension” which meant Billie Joel Armstrong is the anxiety and pressured feelings which happened in the United States of America when he wrote the song lyric. It is the pressure which the majority give to the lower class. In Marxist's point of view, this condition is called the alienation. After all the tragedy which already happened, the society feels anxious and scared seeing the war and tragedy.

In the same stanza, the author of the song tells about how the television or the media shows the society that there will be a better state in the future. But he also states that he does not want to follow. It is obvious that the writer does not believe about what they see in the television or the media.

Television dreams of tomorrow  
We're not the ones who're meant to follow (Stanza 2, line 8 to 9)

The line above means that what the society see in the television is a proof that their country is safe. In the other hand, the author does not believe in what they see in the television. According to Billie Joel Armstrong, when he wrote the song lyric, he did not believe the media because he believed that what the society saw in the television or media is controlled by the government. Billie also stated that the media was propaganda medium. That is the reason why he does not want to follow or believe in the information which media showed at that time.

Line eight to nine show how the author's respond to what Billie Joel Armstrong see in television. According to the article entitled "How Green Day Impacted the way People View Politics and the Media", these lines shows another type of social unrest which we have to understand about what we saw before take the information although the information is seems convincing. The line five to seven is possibly the reason why the author disagrees with the "dreams" which the television showed.

In the following lines, the author of the song tells where his position was in the current society and how he saw the society. In the second line, the author tells us that he was not going to follow. In the next lines, he tells us that the society already does the "propaganda."

Well maybe I'm the faggot America  
I'm not a part of a redneck agenda (Stanza 3, line 11 to 12)

This line tells us where is Billie Joel Armstrong is position when his country is in the anxious and pressured state. He states himself as "faggot America." According to *Oxford Dictionary*, "faggot" means a male homosexual. In another point of view, "faggot" is used to insult someone, especially men, whose their masculinity is not as idyllic as the actual men have. "Redneck" in the second line means are people who live in the southern region of United States of America. They usually stereotyped as a low working class and uneducated people. It is obvious that Billie Joel Armstrong chooses to be a homosexual which have less masculinity rather than follow what the

rednecks going to do. “Redneck” possibly means how Billie Joel Armstrong see George W. Bush because George W. Bush live at Texas which is in southern America.

In line eleven to twelve, the author of the song shows us how he unsatisfied with the government by mentioning himself as a male homosexual by not following and believing the government. In the article by Maureen Taghon in American Long-Form website, the band mentions their opinion about how they see the society even though they get criticized about it. This relation between the song lyric lines with the article may show how Billie Joel Armstrong feels toward the government.

Now everybody do the propaganda  
And sing along to the age of paranoia (Stanza 3, line 13 to14)

In the following lines, Billie Joel Armstrong tells us how his society already believes the propaganda which they see in the media. The “propaganda” which Billie Joel Armstrong means is the one which his society watch in their television or any other mass media about the war and terrorism at that time. The media successfully spread out the propaganda and affected the society. The line “And sing along to the age of paranoia” is the proof that the society is affected by the propaganda. “The age of paranoia” which Billie Joel Armstrong means is the current state of United States of America in year between 2001 and 2004. Many events happened between those years such as 9/11 attack, the Iraq war and how the media covered most of the news with propaganda-style kind of news.

The twenty first line of the song has the same writing but in the fifth stanza, the author mentions the media. He states that he does not want to be controlled by the media. He also tells that the news or information which media shows to the society made his country in the state of hysteria.

Don't want to be an American idiot.  
One nation controlled by the media (Stanza 5, line 21 to 22)

Billie Joel Armstrong as the writer stated again in the lyric which he wrote that he did not want to be an idiotic American. An idiotic American in his perspectives is the one who easily takes the information from the media without knowing if the information is true or not. The first and second line possibly mean that he wants to tell his society, and in the second time that do not be a person who easily believe what they saw in the television or any other media. It is also showing the social unrest which Billie Joel Armstrong felt because the media is taking control his society.

Information age of hysteria  
It's calling out to idiot America (Stanza 5, line 23 to 24)

In the line above, Billie Joel Armstrong tells how the information is made the society in the state of panic or hysteria. According to the Billie Joel Armstrong's society situation, it is because the information which is shown by the media. The information is about the war and terrorism which made the society frightened of their country's

situation. Those situations eventually make the side of idiotic American come up again.

The line twenty two of the song shows us about the “nation” which possibly means the society, controlled by the media. The article written by Bridgett Henwood in vox.com mentions how the media brainwashed the society through the news which they showed. Besides that, in the line twenty three, Billie Joel Armstrong the information made the society turn into the panic state. The society turn into the panic state but they did not know what the actually happen so in the line twenty four Billie Joel Armstrong stated that the situation is calling out the “idiot America”.

In the lyric, Billie Joel Armstrong also show how the social class works in the American society by the time he wrote the lyric. Billie shows how the bourgeoisie ideology control the working class because the bourgeoisie class have a power to oppress the working/lower class. The government and the media shows how bourgeoisie ideology which they has, could control the viewers or the society as the lower/working class.

The government and the media as the class who has the power successfully spread the “propaganda” by using news in television. The media give the viewers news about Iraq war, terrorism and the 9/11 tragedy which lead the society into the state of panic or paranoia. Billie Joel as the person who is not form the government and media, need to say something about what happen in his society. The *American*

*Idiot* song lyric which he wrote, shown the bourgeoisie's ideology that the government has can control the society and it can lead the lower/working class into the state of panic or paranoia.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

“American Idiot” written by Billie Joel Armstrong is one of the most popular songs Green Day ever made. Billie Joel Armstrong was inspired by the 2004 presidency election, Iraq War, the 9/11 terrorist attack and the media that covered the news which mostly was about the war and the tragedy. All the events depicted in this song caused the United States of America in the state of panic and anxiety because the society easily fell to what they saw on the media. The song also shows Billie Joel Armstrong's unrest state toward his society caused by the events which happened.

` In the song lyric, Billie Joel Armstrong describes the social unrest by using some terms to show his response toward the government and media. Billie uses “new mania” as he describes the government, which can lead his nation in the state of panic and anxiety. It is because the pressured feelings that came from the majority which caused the alienation. Billie also believes that the media is controlled by the government. Media often shows the war and the tragedy which happened at that time. Billie Joel Armstrong uses “propaganda” as the term to describe what the media did. The media also shows that their country is safe, but Billie Joel did not easily believe to what he saw in television. Information which media showed is a power to control

the society. The war and terrorism makes the society frightened, so the media shows some hope to the society without searching further about the information. Billie Joel Armstrong also uses “faggot” to describe himself because he is different from his society; he is not going to follow and take a part in his society’s current state.

“American Idiot” song lyric was written by Billie Joel Armstrong to express his unrest feeling toward his society in 2004. He wrote the song because he was angry and thinks that he needs to say something about the current state. Billie also manages the society’s way of thinking about the politics and media. The lyric is offensive because it uses some strong words, it also shows what Billie Joel Armstrong means behind the terms which how he loves his country.

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