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Woodstock and Altamont Were Not Counterculture:
Capitalism Within the Music Industry

Thesis in History

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Abstract

Woodstock Ventures capitalized on the idea of Woodstock's euphoric effect and created misconceptions about the music festival to ensure future generations would associate it positively, which has led future music festivals to try to recapture Woodstock's essence. To question Woodstock's legend, I mainly utilize archival sources and other supporting texts such as books and other news articles, as well as interviewing staff at the Bethel Woods Center for the Art. To gain an understanding of the evolution of music festivals, I attended the music festival Camp Flog Gnaw, which highlighted that the over-commodification of music festivals obstructs the experience and community that music organically promotes. If Woodstock were a charity event, then the festival would have been in line with the counterculture's ideology; however, since the tickets originally had a price tag, that signifies that it is not totally in line with a culture against capitalism. Instead, Woodstock Ventures should have taken more inspiration from Monterey Pop '67 if they wanted Woodstock to be a part of the 1960s counterculture. I argue that Altamont and Woodstock appeared to be counterculture from an outside perspective, but at their core, the two concerts were capitalistic ventures for commodifying the euphoric feeling found at Woodstock.

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Introduction

After World War II, the United States emerged with a thriving economy and a new view on foreign affairs influenced by Cold War ideology. The domino theory suggested that if one country fell to communism, another would; therefore, the United States took on the role of world police to ensure that this theory would not happen. While the United States had stakes outside its borders, dramatic changes occurred domestically. The Civil Rights Movement, Anti-War protests, and Women's Liberation movements in the United States advocated for new societal norms. The hippies marked 1967 the 'Summer of Love,' with Monterey Pop occurring that May. Amongst this chaos, for three days in August of 1969, a group of like-minded individuals gathered in honor of peace, love, and music, of course, at Woodstock's music festival. In December of 1969, the Rolling Stones decided to hold their own one-day festival that would emulate Woodstock. Hence, Altamont's nickname is Woodstock of the West. In this essay, I argue that: Altamont and Woodstock appeared to be counterculture from an outside perspective, but at their core, the two concerts were capitalistic ventures for commodifying the euphoric feeling found at Woodstock.

Focusing mainly on Woodstock '69 with integrating past, current, and ongoing festivals, I find that the over-commodification of music festivals obstructs the experience and community that music organically promotes. Later in the essay, I describe my experience at the music festival Camp Flog Gnaw, where I find the community that Woodstock's image promotes other music festivals to strive for is lost.

Looking past the niche facade of Woodstock and Altamont might tell more about the counterculture movement of the 1960s. Historically, Woodstock is portrayed as an angelic experience, while Altamont poses the opposite. While some aspects of that stereotype may be true, as this essay will later show, both concerts were not what they appeared to be on the

outside. The hippies of the 1960s counterculture movement embodied anti-war and anti-capitalism while promoting and advocating for maintaining peace. Woodstock and Altamont never formally declared themselves anti-war or anti-capitalist, but the memory of the concerts did. Although Altamont and Woodstock ultimately let people attend for free, both shows endorsed capitalism. They showed that there is a certain standard of how music festivals should be, like Woodstock, and how they should not be, like Altamont. However, the producers behind the festival must figure out the real stakes in hosting such a large-scale event, such as funding, facilities, food, safety, etc. Many music festivals need help balancing how the consumer imagines the festival versus how the festival actually turns out.

The 1960s were revolutionary for the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation, and the Anti-War Movement. In the biography *The Road to Woodstock: From the Man Behind the Legendary Festival* by Micheal Lang and Holly George-Warren, Lang recalls that

We were setting out to create a new paradigm in festival events, while attempting to bring together various factions of the counterculture community. Overall, I envisioned the festival as a gathering of the tribes, a haven for like-minded people, where experimental new lifestyles would be respected and accommodated.¹

However, many people did not want to see any change because they preferred the post-war lifestyle and capitalism. Also, many people still believe today that Woodstock was not the enlightening experience that it claims it was. As Kevin and Laurie Hillstrom write in their book *Woodstock*: “The United States, in fact, contains plenty of people who believe that Woodstock is an accurate symbol of the 1960s *not* because it was so innocent and harmonious and peaceful, but rather because it showcased spectacularly self-indulgent, childish, and irresponsible behavior.”² Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority still believe Woodstock is everything it claimed to be. So, how was Woodstock able to convince the masses that it was an incredible

¹ Michael Lang, and Holly George-Warren. *The Road to Woodstock*. (Ecco, 2010), 53

² Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom. *Woodstock*. (Omnigraphics, Incorporated, 2012), 108

experience? Was history written in this highly positive way to convince future generations to attend concerts and festivals because the music industry saw a money-making opportunity? As this essay demonstrates, Woodstock's image was commoditized to continue the legacy of music festivals. Altamont and Astroworld's bad-boy personas outshined the music. While Camp Flog Gnaw and Burning Man's general associations are still widely unknown, their respective communities speak relatively highly of the festivals.

Historical Context

The book *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's*, by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, highlights and examines American culture during the 1960s and 1970s. The authors define the Sixties as central to recognizing that American life is not as portrayed and that the government does lie to its people. This realization made many Americans question the ethos of their country and their country in general. However, the 1960s is typically associated with how Theodore Roszak defines the counterculture:

But by the 1970s, the 'counterculture' — a term popularized in 1968 by Theodore Roszak—was well on its way to becoming a term referring to all 1960s-era political, social, or cultural dissent, encompassing any action from smoking pot at a rock concert to offing a cop. This casual inflation of the term 'counterculture' into a nebula of signifiers comprehending bong, protest demonstrations, ashrams, and social nudity rears its head at seemingly any Sixties retrospective... Theodore Roszak, for his part, despaired of the neoconservative demonization of the term, lamenting that 'the word 'counterculture' is often defined as little more than an adolescent outburst.'³

Most countries try to maintain a particular international image that reflects an exceptionalist ideal. Therefore, most societies tend to whitewash their history, and the United States is notorious for this. Roszak's definition sums up the counterculture without explaining the complexity of the period. The 1960s was the perfect breeding ground for the music industry to

³ Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle. "Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s' and 70's." (Routledge 2013), 5-6

see the full potential of live performances, specifically festivals. It is because the idea of the culture turned into a commodity with a price tag. Braunstein and Doyle state that,

In fact, the problem with terms like ‘the hippies’ or ‘the counterculture,’ once they become decontextualized, dehistoricized, and converted into assumptive categories, is that they can easily fall into the hands of the wrong people... Since the term ‘hippies’ was used unproblematically at the time primarily by the mainstream news media, it may be safer to consider the ‘hippies’ as an ideological charade adopted temporarily by some ‘counterculturists,’ but then dropped by 1968-69, after which the term persisted as an assumptive signifier to designate a look, a fashion, an attitude, or a lifestyle.⁴

So, by the time Woodstock occurred, the counterculture was already turning away from the ‘hippie’ persona. However, Woodstock is still associated with the stereotypical hippie.

In his book *Music and Capitalism: History of the Present*, Timothy Taylor describes the music industry's evolution with the introduction of capitalism. When discussing the counterculture movement and why it was so vital to the music industry, Taylor states:

And it [counterculture movement] was accompanied by a soundtrack by some of the most memorable and enduring popular musicians of the last century, whose music tastes were decried by those who viewed rock and roll as decadent and threatening, but whose listeners were also endlessly catered to and marketed to by the music industry. The music of the counterculture, rock and roll, produced bountiful profits for the record industry, even as many musicians represented themselves as antiestablishment, or even anticapitalist, just as artists in restricted fields proclaimed their autonomy from the market.⁵

The American counterculture movement had some of the most influential artists in music history.

Many of these legends started their careers at some of the concerts discussed in this paper.

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before the music industry became more influenced by capitalism, or maybe it was just the making of all the different moments. Life in the United States had not been comfortable for a while, so once the citizens finally could relax, more self-care commodities became necessary. Although some may not find rock music relaxing, hearing one's feelings expressed mainstream can give some a euphoric feeling due to finally being listened to and possibly finding a community to connect with. For example, the song

⁴ Braunstein and Doyle, 6, and 11

⁵ Timothy Dean Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present*, (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 41

“Imagine” by John Lennon came out in 1971 and protested the Vietnam War by imagining a more peaceful life. In that sense, the music of the 1960s and ‘70s let people escape into a different world or their emotions.

Monterey Pop 1967

Monterey International Pop Festival, like Woodstock, was a three-day festival held from June 16 to 18, 1967, at the Monterey County Fairgrounds in Monterey, California. According to the Grammy Museum, Alan Pariser approached the two stars from The Mamas & The Papas, Lou Alder and John Phillips, about co-producing The Monterey Pop Festival. So, just like the future festivals Altamont, Astroworld, and Camp Flog Gnaw, the Monterey Pop Festival ‘67 is influenced by performers since they have a brand associated with them. But unlike the other festivals mentioned in this article, the artists who performed at the Monterey Pop “donated their performances to charity, [which] resulted in the ongoing nonprofit good works of the first rock charity...the Monterey International Pop Festival Foundation.”⁶ Ben Sisario wrote the *New York Times* article “Monterey Pop, the Rock Festival That Sparked It All, Returns” as a fifty-year tribute to the festival. In the article, Sisario wrote, “[Monterey Pop] was pivotal in rock’s evolution as a force in the entertainment business and the culture at large. It served as the blueprint for the explosion of rock festivals that culminated in Woodstock.”⁷ So Sisario suggested that Monterey Pop showed people an interest in music festivals, which laid the foundation for Woodstock and Altamont to become the entities they did. Jonathan Gold wrote the *Billboard Magazine* article “How Monterey Pop Set the Stage for Festivals to Come” in 2017 and states that what made Monterey Pop so special was that it was a moment in time. Gold

⁶ “Monterey International Pop Festival: Music, Love, and Flowers, 1967.” (Grammy Museum 2017).

⁷ Ben, Sisario, “Monterey Pop, The Rock Festival That Sparked It All Returns,” (NYTimes 2017).

writes, “The people were there for an experience and to listen to great music, but it wasn’t just about the music...it was about all the different things going on, the politics of the moment...it was the precursor to all the other festivals to come.”⁸ One could hear this comment and assume that it is referring to Woodstock. So why have more people heard about or know of Woodstock ‘69 compared to Monterey Pop ‘67?

Monterey Pop ‘67 faced the same prejudices that Woodstock ‘69 and Altamont ‘69 endured. Gold writes, “The local Monterey community was aghast at what the hippie culture brought to their small town, located two hours from San Francisco, which at the time was a major hub for rock music, home to the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company.”⁹ Since all three concerts, Monterey Pop, Woodstock, and Altamont, all occurred in a close period; it makes sense that there is a common ideology, or in this case, the same counterculture ideology, flowing between the three events. Even though all three faced prejudice for those beliefs, the three concerts had very different fates. Altamont has a negative connotation, Woodstock’s is positive, and avid music fans barely recall Monterey Pop. Since Monterey Pop ‘67 had no significant incidents and was a one-time show, could that be why the show is not as remembered as the others? However, this does not explain how it came to be so revolutionary, for how can a festival be both revolutionary and forgettable? Like Woodstock and Altamont created documentaries surrounding the festival, so did Monterey Pop ‘67. The documentary about Monterey Pop came out in 1968 and, according to *Rotten Tomatoes*, made \$1.5k at the box office.¹⁰ Although it is up for debate how much money Alan Pariser, Lou Alder, and John Phillips made from the documentary, there is some sort of profit. So even though Monterey Pop ‘67 had some of the same elements to commodify the music festival industry, the

⁸ Jonathan, Gold, “How Monterey Pop Set the Stage for Festivals to Come,” (Billboard 2017).

⁹ See note 8 above.

¹⁰ “Monterey Pop” (Rotten Tomatoes 1968).

festival is not seen as the golden standard of music festivals, even though one could argue that Monterey Pop '67 set the stage for Woodstock '69. How does Monterey Pop '67 escape association with the commodification of music festivals? Is it because Monterey Pop donated to charity instead of feeding into more capitalistic ideals?

Woodstock

Woodstock took place at Max Yasgur's farm in Bethel, New York, a three-day concert starting on August 15th and ending on August 18th, 1969. Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld were the two original men behind the creation of Woodstock. The two teamed up with John Roberts and Joel Rosenman, the project's investors. It was not easy trying to plan Woodstock. The concert's location changed multiple times, and the creators were ill-prepared for the many people who attended the event. For example, the festival ran out of food, there were not enough portable restrooms, and the weather was less than ideal. When Woodstock kicked the festival out of their town, the team scabbled to find a location. Luckily, they came across Max's farm, and he agreed. More importantly, however, there was barely enough time to prepare the stage, and the gates and ticket booths were never fully set up. Woodstock Ventures announced that the concert would be free since there was not enough time to set up the gates and ticket booths. In the 1990s, there was an attempt to recreate Woodstock. The recreation of Woodstock used the same name but did not embody the same energy as the original concert. One of my coworkers attended Woodstock '99 and said it was a "wild s**t show."

Woodstock is sometimes called the gold standard of what a music festival or concert should aspire to be. In part because of the documentary released about a year after the event, a phrase associated with the festival is 'three days of love and peace.' Many people have the

understanding that no violence occurred and no one died at Woodstock. On the surface, that sounds amazing. Of course, all concerts should strive to have no violence, death, or injuries, but is that necessarily possible? Furthermore, is it true that no one died at Woodstock? Or is that just what the festival's creators want everyone to believe so they can continue to capitalize on the idea of Woodstock?

Although Woodstock is associated with the counterculture movement, whether or not this is entirely true is questionable. As mentioned before, Woodstock never fully declared itself anti-war, which, when compared with Alex Traub's *New York Times* article "Bobbi Ercoline, Whose Hug Became a Symbol of Woodstock, Dies at 73," one can find interesting implications.¹¹ In the article, Traub discusses the famous picture of Bobbi and Nick Ercoline embracing a hug during the early morning of the festival's last day. The famous picture became the cover album for the soundtrack accompanying the documentary. However, Traub writes that the fuller image of the photograph reveals the couple's friend, Jim 'Corky' Corcoran, sleeping. The significance of the sleeping Jim Corcoran is that he had just returned from duty with the Marines serving in Vietnam (Traub). Interestingly, the original album cover did not include the sleeping veteran; eventually, the album cover included the enlarged photograph. However, it is still odd to have originally not included the veteran on the album cover when one could argue there is more symbolism in including the veteran. Having a veteran attend a festival promoting peace with a couple embracing their love speaks more about the counterculture values than just a couple embracing each other. The decision to leave out Jim Corcoran on the original album cover highlights Woodstock Venture's desire to preserve the angelic memory associated with Woodstock. Furthering the idea that people seek a particular image of Woodstock is that not

¹¹ Alex Traub, "Bobbi Ercoline, Whose Hug Became a Symbol of Woodstock, Dies at 73," (NYTimes 2023).

many people are aware of this incident. Although the Jim Corcoran situation could be considered minor compared to other misfortunes during the weekend, it also highlights the extent to which people forget many negative details about the iconic festival.

Police at Woodstock

Something's Happening Here: A Sixties Odyssey From Brooklyn to Woodstock is a book about Mark Berger's experience of the 1960s, in which he describes his time at Woodstock in great detail. Berger volunteered at Woodstock; therefore, he went a few days earlier to help set up. He helped with the bad trip tent and other festival tasks. In the chapter "Heads Up," Berger describes the Tuesday before the festival started. Berger recounts an interaction with Wavy Gravy, a hippie activist who attended Woodstock and the leader of the Hog Farm, a hippie commune. Berger's interaction with Gravy sheds light on Wavy Gravy's understanding of how the concert would work. Berger recalls Gravy saying, "We had three conditions –One, no cops inside the site, we take care of our own. Two, people gonna get hungry, so write us a check and we'll go to New York City and stock up on food and equipment and three, don't pay us. This'll only work if we do it for love."¹² Wavy Gravy's exclamation leads one to believe that there were no cops at Woodstock. However, *The New York Times* article by Barnard L. Collier, "300,000 at Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud," reported on August 17, 1969, writes that "...A 200-man 'peace-security force,' consisting of off-duty policemen from a number of communities as well as state troopers, off-duty state correction officers and Sullivan County Sheriff's deputies,"¹³ were at the event. In *The Road to Woodstock*, Michael Lang confirms that "...around 350 [police] think this is a great way to earn some extra money and spend a day in the country.

¹² Mark Berger, *Something's Happening Here: A Sixties Odyssey from Brocklyn to Woodstock*, (Excelsior Editions 2019), 170.

¹³ Barnard L. Collier, "300,000 At Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud," (NYTimes 1969).

Lee takes down their sizes for their ‘uniforms,’ which will be bell-bottom jeans and a red T-shirt with peace on the front and our dove and guitar logo on the back, a windbreaker and a pith helmet.”¹⁴ It is safe to assume that there were police at Woodstock because Kevin and Laurie Collier Hillstrom also wrote about the police at Woodstock.

Kevin and Laurie Collier Hillstrom’s book *Woodstock* is very descriptive about the making of the festival and how the three-day concert changed the American music culture forever. They state that:

The organizers...carefully selected 350 New York police officers to provide security for the three-day festival during their off-duty hours. The officers would be unarmed and wear ‘Peace Service Corps’ uniforms consisting of jeans and red t-shirts with PEACE on the front and Woodstock’s dove and guitar logo on the back.¹⁵

They also say, “New York’s police commissioner threatened to fire any officers who worked the concert,”¹⁶ but some police officers still attended. Wavy Gravy’s remark of not having police present at Woodstock becomes even more astonishing when presented with information regarding the Woodstock Ventures hiring process for all the staff the festival would need. When interviewing for the head of security with Wes Pomeroy, who served during the Johnson administration as deputy director of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration LEAA, Michael Lang informed Wes that:

Woodstock would be open to everyone. If you could not afford a ticket, there would be a free stage, as well as a sound system to allow you to hear the band on the main stage. There would be free camping and free kitchens. We would have fences and gates to the main concert area, but I believed that if we offered a fair admission price for all that the festival offered, most people would respect the gates and buy a ticket.¹⁷

This interaction shows that Woodstock Ventures knew they would need someone with a law enforcement background, indicating a police presence at the festival. So, there were cops at Woodstock; however, one has to question how many police officers were there.

¹⁴ Lang and George-Warren, 137.

¹⁵ Hillstrom and Hillstrom, 48.

¹⁶ See note 15 above.

¹⁷ Lang and George-Warren, 72.

Why is there so much confusion about Woodstock's security? Could it be that festival promoters do not see security as a promoting factor in consumers' reasoning for purchasing tickets to music festivals? One would think that people attending these shows would want to know about the security involved because they are paying money to attend, so ensuring no one sneaks in for free would be a reassuring feeling. However, this scenario may not apply to Woodstock '69 or Altamont. Another apparent reason why people want to know about security is so they feel safe while attending, and knowing that there are hundreds of people there to help is more reassuring than not knowing how many people are there to help.

Analyzing Wavy Gravy's statement, "This'll only work if we do it for love,"¹⁸ one may take away another understanding of how security would work at Woodstock. Wavy Gravy assumes that people will care for each other, which he was right about. Although the act of people coming together and caring for one another does fit the counterculture aesthetic, realistically, for a concert, it is not practical to rely solely on the community to care for one another. Society needs some sort of structure to function correctly. Although living in an almost anarchist society for three days mainly worked at Woodstock, it did not at Altamont. Even though coming together fits the counterculture aesthetic, I do not believe that not providing proper amenities for basic human needs fits the counterculture aesthetic. I consider security, food, medical care, bathrooms, and other amenities basic human needs.

Medical: Poor Planning & Misconceptions of Deaths & Births at Woodstock

Woodstock Ventures knew they would need a medical site on the field when organizing the festival. However, the crew decided, or perhaps because of all the chaos surrounding securing

¹⁸ Berger, 170.

a location, that obtaining a medical plan could wait. Michael Lang describes in *The Road to Woodstock* that:

In those last few weeks before the festival, we were also scrambling to get our medical operation set up... Completely sympathetic to our cause, [Bill Abruzzi] signed on and began designing a medical plan. Based on our audience estimates at the time, he recruited six doctors, thirty-six nurses, and eighteen medical assistants at a cost of close to \$16,000.¹⁹

As time passed and the number of people attending the festival increased, Michael Lang realized that the medical crew needed additional staff. Although, according to Michael Lang, most of the cases were people who hurt their feet on broken debris around the festival grounds, some needed to be transported by helicopter to the nearby Sullivan County hospitals. On Saturday, there would be the addition of around twenty doctors and fifty nurses.²⁰

The Kittannig, Pennsylvania *Simpson's Leader-Times* published the article "Woodstock: Leaving 3 Dead, Tons of Trash" on August 19, 1969, and the article does not mention the spirit of Woodstock. Instead, the paper reports that three attendees died and 5,000 were injured; 400 injuries were related to bad LSD trips. *Simpson's Leader-Times* reports that one person got struck by a car on Monday, one got run over by a tractor while sleeping in a field on Saturday, and one 'apparently' had an overdose of heroin on Sunday.²¹ *The Daily Herald* for Provo, Utah, ran the article, "Thousands Leave Overcrowded Woodstock Music and Art Fair," on August 18, 1969, the last day of the concert. *The Daily Herald* reported, "Two young men died and scores of persons were injured during the festival... Three thousand people were treated for assorted injuries during the fair. Four hundred suffered unfavorable reactions to drugs, including three young men in critical condition in a hospital."²² Understandably, these two news reports have different death tolls because *The Daily Herald* article came out of the press on the day of the death. However, within a day, it appears there were an additional 2,000 injuries, while the August

¹⁹ Lang and George-Warren, 151.

²⁰ Lang and George-Warren, 202.

²¹ "Woodstock: Leaving 3 Dead, Tons of Trash," (*Simpson's Leader-Times* 1969).

²² "Thousands Leave Overcrowded Woodstock Music and Art Fair," (*The Daily Herald* 1969).

18th shows, especially Jimi Hendrix's performance, had the lowest attendance rate. *The New York Times* article by Barnard L. Collier, "300,000 at Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud," reported on August 17, 1969, "Today, thousands of fans, evidently discouraged by the weather and the press of the crowds, began leaving the festival site, which has turned into a giant mud puddle."²³ So, while 2,000 people may have gotten injured on the final day of Woodstock, it would appear unlikely due to the amount left due to weather and crowd conditions. However, Collier also writes, "During the first 24 hours of the fair, festival medical officers said that a thousand people had been treated at first-aid stations for various ailments, including exposure and a few accident cases."²⁴ So, in that light, it is possible that in the remaining eleven hours of the festival that spilled into August 18th, an additional 2,000 people got injured. Despite the confusion on how many people got hurt at Woodstock, no one even remembers that anyone died, let alone that three people died.

In *Woodstock*, Kevin and Laurie Hillstrom describe how "Three people died during the course of the weekend—one from a burst appendix, one from a heroin overdose, and one who was run over by a tractor while sleeping next to a road."²⁵ In comparison, Kevin and Laurie Hillstrom state that someone died from a burst appendix, while the *Simpson's Leader-Times* reported a car accident. Not only is there confusion on how many people were injured, but also there is confusion on how many people, if any, died, along with the confusion about how the third person passed. *Times Magazine* published the article "The People Who Were Born and Died at The Woodstock Festival" on August 9, 2019, in which Currie Engel writes there were two deaths, 742 drug overdoses, and two births.²⁶ In addition, Dr. William Abruzzi, a physician at

²³ Collier 1969.

²⁴ See note 23 above.

²⁵ Hillstrom and Hillstrom, 72.

²⁶ Currie Engel, "The People Who Were Born and Died at The Woodstock Festival" (Times 2019).

Woodstock, states that four miscarriages occurred during the festival.²⁷ However, according to the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts website, there is no record of any deaths, miscarriages, or injuries, but they confirm that no one gave birth on the actual field grounds.²⁸ In a later section titled “My Experience at Bethel Woods,” I go into further detail surrounding the misconceptions that Bethel Woods portrays. It is also strange that in Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren’s book, *The Road to Woodstock*, Michael Lang describes the three incidents.

Why is there so much different reporting of the deaths at Woodstock when Michael Lang, the leading promoter of the festival, has set the story straight? Why does the Bethel Woods website not match what Michael Lang stated in his book? Why is it that only Woodstock gets to have a good reputation even though concert attendees passed away? In contrast, other concerts become branded and, therefore, remembered by the tragedies that occurred. Should not all lives lost at a show be remembered, especially if those concerts are historically significant? Leaving out those who died at famous festivals is an easy way to ensure that the good parts of the festival stick in the minds of consumers so that when there is another festival or merchandise released surrounding the original event, more people are willing to purchase again. Woodstock made itself a commodity by only selling the good parts of the festival while erasing the history of the tragic details of the event.

The Aesthetic of Woodstock

Typically, most concertgoers who attended Woodstock describe Woodstock as a life-changing experience full of love and peace. However, in High Point, North Carolina’s *The High Point Enterprise*, Robert Marks wrote “The Lesson of Woodstock” on August 31, 1969.

²⁷ “Thousands Leave Overcrowded Woodstock Music and Art Fair.”

²⁸ “Woodstock & the 1960s,” (Bethel Woods Center for the Arts).

Marks believed that Woodstock taught people to be less judgmental towards others and listen to what the youth was saying. Marks writes, “It is a spirit of the realization of people as persons, here and there, and over yonder, now, everywhere, people becoming persons, breaking down into individuals who have thoughts and dreams and ambitions interesting to meet and know, if only for a short while,”²⁹ meaning that we need to realize people are just beings trying their best to get through life. While Jackie Ross wrote in her article “Spirit of Woodstock Marks 1969,” December 27, 1969, for the *Hartford Courant* in Connecticut, that:

Woodstock was an immediate concern for the welfare of the person next to you and the Vietnam protest was Woodstock for the people further away... The concern young people had been expressing for the poor, the uneducated, [and] the discriminated against had a handle... [which is] the spirit of Woodstock.³⁰

It is clear that Woodstock started to gain its angelic aura relatively soon after the three-day weekend ended. However, Mark Hosenball poses a different interpretation of Woodstock ‘69. Hosenball attended Woodstock when he was seventeen and wrote the article “I Was At Woodstock. And I Hated It” in 2009. In the article, Hosenball poses the question, “Is the fact that such a large crowd didn’t become violent and start killing each other (albeit serenaded by sometimes brilliant musical performances) Woodstock’s principal legacy?”³¹ Although Hosenball did not stay the entire weekend for fear of being trapped at Woodstock, it is striking that an attendee is questioning Woodstock's legacy. Furthermore, his fear of being trapped at Woodstock insinuates that this event was not necessarily as peaceful as pictured.

Anticipation of the Festival and How Those Attending Will Behave

Most news reports of Woodstock have comments similar to the one made by Dr. William Abruzzi, one of the volunteer doctors, who shares during the festival, “The one thing I’ve got to

²⁹ Robert Marks, “The Lesson of Woodstock,” (The High Point Enterprise 1969).

³⁰ Jackie Ross, “The Spirit of Woodstock Marks 1969,” (Hartford Courant 1969).

³¹ Mark Hosenball, “I Was At Woodstock. And I Hated It,” (Newsweek 2009).

say, though...is that I have yet to see any injury that has been the result of a fight. To my knowledge there has been no violence whatsoever, which is remarkable for a crowd of this size. These people are really beautiful.”³² From Dr. Abruzzi’s statement, one can infer that before and during the festival, the general public worried that chaos would erupt, hence why the location of Woodstock moved less than a month before the festival started. On July 9, 1969, Bill Kovach’s *New York Times* article “Woodstock’s a Stage, but Many Don’t Care for the Show” describes how the town of Woodstock felt about the music festival and the type of people who would be inclined to participate in it. For a few years, Woodstock, New York residents grew frustrated with the “...young people who advertise their rebellion against local customs with long hair and sometimes bizarre costumes” and became unwelcoming by arresting newcomers.³³ Kovach heard from a bank lawyer that “if the people could see the checks we process from these so-called hippies, they’d realize these people have more money than a lot of us.”³⁴ So, although the hippies loved the town and had plenty of money to treat it right, the people of Woodstock could not look past the surface. One could also argue that the city of Woodstock expressed class resentment towards the hippies by not allowing them to use the town based on superficial judgments. Within a week of this article's publication, the music festival would have to move its location due to the town no longer wanting the concert held there. Max Yasgur looked past the facade of Woodstock Ventures and the group of kids, the show’s intended audience. Surrounding the ordeal of getting the agreement settled for using Max’s farm, Joel Roseman stated, “Max wanted to make sure he got that fifty thousand [dollars] before some other dairy farmer did.”³⁵ Lang went on to give his impressions of Max, which are that Max never asked for more money after the fifty thousand

³² “Thousands Leave Overcrowded Woodstock Music and Art Fair.”

³³ Bill Kovach, “Woodstock’s a Stage, but Many Don’t Care for the Show,” (NYTimes 1969).

³⁴ See note 33 above.

³⁵ Lang and George-Warren, 121.

because he just wanted to be paid for his land and that Max just wanted to give them a fair chance at putting their dream together. Michael Lang recalls:

Ken Van Loan, head of the Bethel Businessmen's Association, told the press: 'This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to Sullivan County. It's a shot in the arm to the town economy. The festival will boost money spent in Bethel for lodging, food, and auto maintenance.' He later estimated that we'd spent \$200,000 in Bethel within the first ten days of our residency.³⁶ Once the town of Bethel started to see the monetary benefits of having the hippies in their city, all the concerns about the facade of hippies faded away.

Not only would the festival contribute to the town's economy by purchasing and using commodities, but the festival would also offer job opportunities for the locals. Along with hiring staff to fill medical and security roles, Michael Lang stated, "We needed seventy parking lot attendants, three hundred workers for the food concessions, and two hundred people to pick up garbage around the site each day."³⁷ The job opportunities and extra goods purchased put a better taste of the participants in the townspeople's mouths. Michael Lang describes that "The more money we spent, the better we were treated by the community."³⁸ However, some of the attendees of Woodstock did not have the same respect for the town of Bethel as Bethel grew to have for the people of the counterculture movement.

Misconceptions of How the Attendees Behaved

The people of Woodstock wanted to keep their beloved town safe from the hippies and their rebellious ways. Collier notes, "Local farmers around the site complained to the police that corn and vegetables had been stripped in their fields by foragers."³⁹ So one can conclude that the concertgoers stole food from wherever they could due to the lack of food at the festival. The townspeople of Woodstock were right to have their doubts. Although it is unlikely that

³⁶ Lang and George-Warren, 125.

³⁷ Lang and George-Warren, 151.

³⁸ See note 37 above.

³⁹ Collier 1969.

Woodstock had enough food for 300,000 people, memory serves that no one went hungry. When organizing the festival, Michael Lang writes that:

They'd order enough food for 150,000 to 200,000 people, but we had to front them the \$75,000 to cover the cost of food, supplies, and wages. They would reimburse Woodstock Ventures with their concession income, then we'd split profits fifty-fifty. None of us liked this arrangement, but we were pretty much stuck.⁴⁰

So, the festival organizers underestimated the food required, short of around 100,000 people.

Nevertheless, even though Woodstock had a food shortage, Collier also writes that one commune passed out free food, so why did concertgoers decide to steal when there were other options?

One would expect to hear that the attendees at Altamont stole food, but hearing that Woodstock attendees stole food is shocking. Especially when, at the same time, there were various reports of people sharing food with strangers. Although it is unlikely that there was enough food at Woodstock, people were willing to share what they had. Even though theft was somewhat common within the counterculture movement, the memory of Woodstock does not reflect that, unlike Altamont. Since Woodstock's memory preserves protecting its image, most people who do not study history do not associate the hippies who attended Woodstock with the negative sides of the counterculture movement, such as the theft of farmers' food. Again, the promoters could erase the bad parts of the event by focusing on and promoting the euphoric feeling that the festival created.

How People Who Attended Woodstock Felt

On August 25, 1969, *The New York Times* published "Woodstock: Like It Was in Words of Participants at Musical Fair" by Don Hogan Charles. The article aimed to have an open discussion with six attendees regarding the events that occurred at Woodstock. Don Hogan Charles talked to the attendees regarding the politics surrounding Woodstock. Dan shared,

⁴⁰ Lang and George-Warren, 138.

"Woodstock was just like government and politics and laws just didn't exist."⁴¹ From this statement, one can conclude that Woodstock served as escapism for the youth who grew frustrated and tired of domestic and foreign affairs. So, is Woodstock only remembered as this peaceful experience because it was a form of escapism for the events occurring in the world?

Charles poses some questions regarding the subject of drug usage at the festival. One attendee, Steve, shares his opinion on whether or not drugs were necessary for the festival, "I'm saying that it wouldn't have been as peaceful, if they had no drugs at all up there."⁴² While another attendee, Dan, shares, "There was a little [peer] pressure. We went up with someone who was perfectly straight. That person wanted to smoke, but just to experiment. But then with everybody around him smoking, he was just forced to continue whether he wanted to or not."⁴³ So Steve suggests that if Woodstock had no drugs, the festival might have had a similar fate to Altamont. While Dan is suggesting that the drug culture taking place at Woodstock was less beneficial than Steve would suggest. In a community that appears to be accepting of others, one would think that peer pressure would not happen because accepting means someone takes something or someone for what they are and understands that not everyone has the same ideologies or traits that make them unique. While anyone can fall under peer pressure no matter the situation, it is odd that people feel the need to influence others to do things they may not be comfortable with within a community that claims to love so much.

In *The Road to Woodstock*, Michael Lang describes an incident in the stars and their guest's private area, where they could relax and enjoy the show. Lang states,

Somebody immediately began putting acid into a huge vat of punch. A few moments later they were caught in the act and ten gallons of punch was poured out on the ground, but not before

⁴¹ Don Hogan Charles, "Woodstock: Like It Was in Words of Participants at Musical Fair," (NYTimes 1969).

⁴² See note 41 above.

⁴³ See note 41 above.

some of it had gone into the bloodstreams of people unsuspectingly drinking what had been poured into paper cups.⁴⁴ This would not be the only incident Lang describes in the book about food and beverages spiking with LSD. Before *Ten Years After* was set to perform, there was an announcement not to eat or drink anything that was not in a sealed container because people were getting unsuspectingly high and having bad trips. There was also an announcement that there was rancid acid going around.

When organizing the festival, the promoters knew that substances would be present. There was no going around that fact, so Lang instructed the security forces to look the other way as long as there was no violence. The festival also knew that traffic would cause some issues, not to the extent that occurred, but the team created a traffic plan. However, Michael Lang reveals, "When the state police tossed our plan, they set up a roadblock at the nearest exit off the thruway, where they'd stop any suspicious-looking cars and search them. Eight kids were arrested on various drug charges, some for possession of pipes."⁴⁵ The counterculture had a different outlook on substances, so it is no surprise that some people who attended or attempted to attend the event ended up with drug-related charges.

Charles poses a few questions regarding some fears about Woodstock. The attendee, Bill, says, "I saw one instance where a fight could have broken out very easily. But the people who were going to fight were in a swarm of people, in the midst of 300,000 people all talking about love and happiness. And they couldn't do it."⁴⁶ Although peace and love kept this fight from happening, according to Joel Haycock, who wrote the chapter "Gimme Shelter: Woodstock and Altamont" in the book *The Rock History Reader* by Theo Cateforis, "There were beatings; hundreds took bad acid; at one point at least 75,000 people screamed 'Jump' to some kid on top

⁴⁴ Lang and George-Warren, 210.

⁴⁵ Lang and George-Warren, 161.

⁴⁶ Charles 1969.

of a 300-foot scaffolding.”⁴⁷ If there were beatings at Woodstock, why is it always reported that there was no violence? If Woodstock was so peaceful, why are 75,000 people telling a kid to jump from 300 feet up in the air?

Contradictions and Misconceptions Surrounding Woodstock’s Monetary Values

In an interview, Michael Lang, the co-creator of Woodstock, expressed very odd mannerisms while describing how Woodstock came to be. Michael Lang states in the video how he went to various concerts before Woodstock to see what they did wrong and why violence was occurring at music festivals. Although Lang says in neither the interview nor his book what festivals he attended, he does share in *The Road to Woodstock* that in 1968, inspired by Monterey Pop, he and Ric O’Barry wanted to host Florida’s first music festival. The Miami Pop Festival ‘68 was undoubtedly not to the scale of Woodstock. The festival was a two-day show spanning Saturday and Sunday with tickets that cost five dollars. There were also vendor booths for rent that sold various psychedelic goods. The festival ran smoothly for the most part; however, a riot almost broke out due to the audience wanting the music turned back on. Michael Lang had paused the music due to the torrential rain. Lang also witnessed a fight over money. John Ek, the head security of the festival, assumed that the festival would go bankrupt, so he wanted his money before any cash left the site, while the Brink guard did not want to deal with Ek. Lang recalls, “They were yelling at each other, with me in the middle; then both sides went for their guns.”⁴⁸ Luckily, Lang dissolved the issue without escalating it more; however, it is ironic that capitalistic greed brought violence at one of Lang’s festivals.

⁴⁷ Theo Cateforis and Joel Haycock, “26 Gimme Shelter: Woodstock and Altamont,” *The Rock History Reader*, (Routledge 2019), 138.

⁴⁸ Lang and George-Warren, 31.

In the interview, when explaining how Woodstock came to be free with the inadequate amount of time to put the gates up, Lang states, “fortunately or unfortunately,”⁴⁹ which seems odd, especially since he is looking away from the camera and playing with his hands as he says it. If Michael Lang wanted to embody the whole counterculture vibe, having the concert for free would be fortunate. Michael Lang’s comment becomes even more peculiar when compared to his co-creator Artie Kornfeld’s comment in the article “Cost and Impact of Woodstock Festival: \$1.3-Million Yearning ” in *The Edwardsville Intelligencer* in Illinois on September 15, 1969. The report acknowledges the 1.3 million dollars worth of debt the concert generated and states that the two promoters, John Roberts and Joel Rosenman, plan to pay off the debt.⁵⁰ However, Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld are described as not that concerned about paying back the debt, with Kornfeld commenting, “The purpose of the festival was to provide ‘a groovy meeting of the tribes, a part of the revolution’ and not to make money.”⁵¹ Therefore, one can infer that Artie Kornfeld is claiming that the concert's purpose was to serve as a place for people of the counterculture movement to gather and listen to music, regardless of making a profit. Although the masterminds behind Woodstock did not intend to lose 1.3 million dollars, one can conclude that Woodstock was never about the money because the counterculture movement is anti-capitalist. From that, one can infer that the creators and promoters of the concert never intended to make money; therefore, how can it be unfortunate that the gates never got finished, so the concert became free?

⁴⁹ Guardian Music, “Woodstock 40 Years on: Michael Lang on the World’s Most Famous Music Festival,” (YouTube 2011), 00:02:13.

⁵⁰ “Cost and Impact of Woodstock Festival: \$1.3-Million Yearning,” (Edwardsville Intelligencer 1969).

⁵¹ See note 50 above.

However, Michael Lang's and Artie Kornfeld's comments become more contradictory because, on August 27, 1969, *The New York Times* published "State Investigating Handling of Tickets At Woodstock Fair." The paper states:

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair is being investigated by the state because of 'hundreds of complaints' from ticket holders who did not get in to see the musical performances...The festival's promoters were asked about refunds while the fair was in progress...and pointed out that the tickets specified that refunds would be granted only if the show were canceled.⁵²

Less than a month later, Artie Kornfeld would claim that the concert was never about money, so why not give the people who did not get to see the show their refund? At that point, they are in so much debt, so does it really matter to give the money back to the people who did not get to experience the show even though they paid to? Although it is questionable whether Woodstock Ventures got to keep the money or had to pay back debt collectors, the documentary *Woodstock* that came out the following year still provided some income. So, although Woodstock Ventures, also known as Artie Kornfeld, Michael Lang, John Roberts, and Joel Rosenman, did not have the money to pay back the people who purchased a ticket, there are different options they could have tried to raise some cash. Woodstock Ventures could have used the counterculture movement to its advantage by making it into a charity show, where either audience donations or a portion of the ticket sales go towards charity, as per the model festival: Monterey Pop '67. Typically, performers donate their time, and sometimes money, towards the charity's cause. Although in Woodstock's scenario, donating a portion of the ticket sales to charity would have caused more grief for Woodstock Ventures, it is still surprising that no one thought to collect donations during the festival's organization. Another option Woodstock Ventures could have taken to raise funding was adding more investors.

However, Woodstock Ventures went with the most apparent revenue for creating money for the festival through ticket sales. So, when Woodstock Ventures realized they needed more

⁵² "State Investigating Handling of Tickets at Woodstock Fair," (NYTimes 1969).

income, they sold tickets before the show started. According to the *Simpson's Leader-Times* article "Woodstock: Leaving 3 Dead, Tons of Trash" reports, "An estimated 150,000 persons bought tickets in advance."⁵³ Suppose 150,000 people bought tickets in advance and, according to Bethel Woods, almost 500,000 people showed up. In that case, it does not seem fair that people who did not even experience peace, love, and music still had to pay while the majority got the experience for free. The counterculture movement, at its core, supports equality.

Although the equality advocated during this time is based on more important issues of racial and gender equality, it should not dilute the fact that Woodstock should have either been free for everyone or complimentary to no one to fit the true counterculture ideology. With the profits from the tickets sold, that money should have gone back to the people who did not get to see the show but purchased a ticket. Woodstock had many complications while in the planning and setting up process, so it does not seem fair to take those complications out on people who were prepared and bought a ticket ahead of time.

Nevertheless, putting together a festival is expensive. Michael Lang quotes Artie Kornfeld as stating, "I ran an ad with a coupon in it, for people to buy tickets in advance. We were running out of money and the ad took in over a million dollars."⁵⁴ Woodstock Ventures acknowledged early in organizing the festival that they needed additional funds quickly. It is likely that since Woodstock Ventures had to claim bankruptcy to pay for it, they simply did not have the funds to pay back the ticket holders. However, the morality and equitability of the situation for people who purchased a ticket yet did not get to see the concert is left for one to consider. Although it would be hard to verify if ticket holders claiming they did not get to enter the festival are telling the truth because it is unclear how many attendees came, the principle of

⁵³ "Woodstock: Leaving 3 Dead, Tons of Trash."

⁵⁴ Lang and George-Warren, 106.

returning payment holds because the actual participant of the counterculture movement would not lie about something so petty. In a utopian world, like one that many members of the counterculture imagine, there would be no need for lying, meaning that people's words have value and validity due to the honest and nurturing environment.

Altamont

In contrast, Altamont was a one-day concert held on December 6th, 1969, in Tracy, California, hosted by The Rolling Stones. Altamont faced some of the same issues as Woodstock, such as the concert's location moving at the last minute. At the Altamont Speedway, an hour away from San Francisco, Altamont found its final home. Altamont was an attempt to recreate Woodstock, hence its nickname: Woodstock of the West. However, the origins of the nickname are untraceable. It appears everyone assumed Altamont would be like Woodstock and widely accepted the nickname. However, The Rolling Stones did not intend for Altamont to be as 'pure' as Woodstock appeared to be.

Instead, the Rolling Stones wanted to play on the 'devil' aesthetic and go for the darker counterculture. In *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, "If Anything, Blame Woodstock The Rolling Stones: Altamont, December 6, 1969," Norma Coates writes that:

This is also the period during which a satanic dimension was accorded to the Rolling Stones by the media, aided by the group itself. Always the 'bad boys of rock,' compared to the Beatles, they took this persona further...they seemed to have made a mythical pact with the devil, a perception reinforced by the release of *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (1967), their recording of 'Sympathy for the Devil' and Jagger's compositions for two Kenneth Anger films, *Invocation Of My Demon Brother* (1969) and *Lucifer Rising* (1970-80)...Never shy of controversy, the group ran with it too, as one of its public personae, thus moving rock into a hitherto unexplored, deeper, and darker dimensions with-until Altamont--no great complaints from the media.⁵⁵

The Rolling Stones wanted to be on the edgier side, which plays into the counterculture aesthetic by rebelling against the social norms of how people dressed and what type of music they listened

⁵⁵ Ian Inglis and Norma Coates, *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place, and Time*, (Routledge 2006), 61.

to. Therefore, Altamont presented an edgier aesthetic, best exemplified by hiring the Hell's Angels to act as security guards. In his book *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present*,

Taylor aims

...to add to the small but now fast-growing number of works that have appeared in the twenty-first century on capitalism in an effort to restore it as an important, and, I would say, the most important, site of cultural analysis...but, while it has been commonplace for decades to describe popular music as a commodity or to write against the music industry, most studies simply assume a capitalist mode of production and the commodity status of popular music, or conflate capitalism with money, instead of viewing it as a social form that profoundly shapes not only production and consumption but also social relations and perceptions.⁵⁶

Taylor quotes Alina Wheeler when describing the importance of brand identity. "Brand identity fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation, and makes big ideas and meaning accessible. Brand identity takes disparate elements and unifies them into whole systems."⁵⁷ Since The Rolling Stones have the bad-boy persona, they showcased that persona at Altamont; whether that decision was subconscious or conscious is up for debate based on how the festival turned out. As

Timothy Taylor points out:

...brand value can be calculated by asking whether the brand provides good value for money and whether there is a reason to buy one brand over another; hardly scientific measurement, but this is the kind of argumentation that is the norm in this literature...comparing value in this way is more difficult for cultural commodities, which enjoy widely variable amounts of promotion and promotion expenditures.⁵⁸

The organization surrounding Altamont could be successful hypothetically if actual security were present at the event and fewer Hell's Angels. That is not to say no Hell's Angels, but a number of the group that symbolizes and generates the bad-boy persona enough. Reasons for not wanting the Hell's Angels as security guards are highlighted more clearly in the following paragraphs; however, fueling them full of beer combined with their vicious nature is enough reason not to have them act as security.

⁵⁶ Taylor, 15-16.

⁵⁷ Taylor, 56.

⁵⁸ Taylor, 61.

Four people lost their lives while attending Altamont. Two people died due to a car crash, one person drowned, and the Hells Angels killed one person. Robert A. Wright wrote *The New York Times* article “200,000 Attend Coast Rock Fete. Free Concert Causes Huge Jam Near San Francisco” a day after Altamont took place. Still, the article is not what one would suspect because Wright reported, “The crowd, considering its size, was well behaved. The police made few arrests. A total of 75 Oakland policemen and hired security guards seemed to enter into the spirit of the affair.”⁵⁹ Robert A. Wright’s most significant concern in the article was the traffic the concert caused. He even cites Dr. Richard Fine, a volunteer doctor at the show, stating that “His [Dr. Fine’s] emergency medical tent had no severe injuries to treat.”⁶⁰ How could the medical tent have no severe injuries, but four people died? Why was the violence not reported?

The article “The Rolling Stones Disaster at Altamont: Let It Bleed” appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine on January 21st, 1970, about a month after the concert, and offered multiple first-hand accounts of the terrible death of Meredith Hunter, who was an eighteen-year-old attendee at Altamont with his girlfriend. Rumors surrounding Hunter’s death state that he had a gun, so the Hell’s Angels stabbed him to death. Unfortunately, I am unsure if the Hell’s Angels that were personally responsible for Hunter’s death faced any legal consequences. It would make for an interesting area to research, considering that there could have been racial implications behind Hunter’s death since he was African American. The article also shares quotes from Mick Taylor and Keith Richards, who were members of The Rolling Stones. Mick Taylor says:

The Hell’s Angels had a lot to do with it [the violence and chaos]. The people that were working with us getting the concert together thought it would be a good idea to have them as a security force. But I got the impression that because they were using it as an excuse. They’re just very, very violent people...I had expected a nice sort of peaceful concert. I didn’t expect anything like

⁵⁹ Robert A. Wright, “200,000 Attend Coast Rock Fete: Free Concert Causes Huge Jam Near San Francisco,” (NYTimes 1969).

⁶⁰ See note 59 above.

that in San Francisco because they are so used to having nice things there. That's where free concerts started, and I thought a society like San Francisco could have done much better.⁶¹ Mick Taylor then states, "We were on the road when it was being organized, we weren't involved at all. We would have liked to have been. Perhaps the only thing we needed security for was the Hell's Angels."⁶² This statement contradicts Taylor's previous statement that the hired creators for Altamont suggested that they should hire the Hell's Angels to be their security. He states they were uninvolved, yet they knew the promoters wanted to hire the Hells Angels. This proves that they were involved to some extent, especially with their role in staffing the event. What is left to question is: How active were The Rolling Stones in the creation of Altamont?

In the "Let It Bleed" article, there is a list of the things that the promoters did incorrectly at Altamont. The list demonstrated many, if not all, tragedies that could have never happened if things had been different. The summarized list in the "Let It Bleed" article would read as having a popular band that rarely comes to America hold a free concert; hence, one should expect a large turnout. Changing the location days before the show without reviewing the site of the concert, not notifying surrounding neighbors of the event, lacking proper facilities for attendees and the bands, placing the stage in a bad location with inadequate sound equipment, and hiring the Hell's Angels.⁶³ *Rolling Stone* magazine seemed to take the overall negative attitude towards Altamont as the public did; the magazine stated that "Altamont was the product of diabolical egotism, hype, ineptitude, money manipulation, and, at base, a fundamental lack of concern for humanity."⁶⁴ So why would the local newspaper cover this event up when *Rolling Stone* magazine would list everything wrong with it?

⁶¹ "Let It Bleed," (Rolling Stone 1970), 20.

⁶² See note 61 above.

⁶³ See note 61 above.

⁶⁴ See note 61 above.

In *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, Norma Coates contradicts the “Let It Bleed” article and helps to compare Woodstock and Altamont. The *Rolling Stones* article shifts the blame onto whoever was responsible for hiring The Hell’s Angels, which appeared to be everyone involved. There were also pledges instead of full members at Altamont. Coates writes, “It was suggested [in the “Let It Bleed” article] that the problems emanated from the fact that Hell’s Angels’ pledges were on duty that day, while their leaders were at a district meeting.”⁶⁵ To add fuel to the fire, in exchange for acting as security guards, the Hell’s Angels’ form of payment was in beer.⁶⁶ However, The Rolling Stones would not accept responsibility for hiring them. It is reasonably possible they were not involved, but would they not want to be somewhat engaged to a certain extent? Most artists want to have some sort of aesthetic they want to present at their concert that correlates with the album they are touring for or opt for an overall aesthetic that their music and band cater to. Regardless if The Rolling Stones were or were not involved in the making of Altamont, all creators should be involved in their shows. Alternatively, at least they should hire a credible crew who knows what they are doing so that the creators do not have to do any extra work to make the concert enjoyable for everyone. Coates also mentions that the “Let It Bleed” article:

...deserves scrutiny because of its role in turning Altamont into mythology, its arrogant moralizing and its placing the entire blame for the Altamont debacle on Jagger, the Rolling Stones, and their associates, and none on the magazine itself...In fact, the article is quite remarkable for the collective amnesia about the crucial role played by the rock media in the Altamont debacle.⁶⁷

Here, Coates points to the fact that the media changed the perception of Altamont. However, The Rolling Stones’ participation level is still under investigation because The Rolling Stones often

⁶⁵ Inglis and Coates, 67.

⁶⁶ Inglis and Coates, 65.

⁶⁷ See note 66 above.

contradict themselves. However, the documentaries filmed during both music festivals solidified the connotations between the respective festivals.

Realization of the Value of Music Festivals

As Norma Coates notes in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, “Woodstock was the exception to the festival rule, not the norm.”⁶⁸ Music festivals should be transparent and should be about the music. The promoters behind the concerts are trying to retain positive and relevant correlations to the shows so they will continuously have more people attend in the future to continue to profit from the art performed.

In the book *Woodstock*, Kevin and Laurie Hillstrom shed light that:

Prior to Woodstock, rock and roll musicians supported themselves primarily through record sales. Concerts were not big money makers. Instead, they were seen by bands and managers alike as promotional events designed to raise public interest in a new record or album. The 400,000-strong audience at Woodstock, though, provided clear evidence of something that earlier concert events like the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival had suggested: concerts could generate a lot of money themselves.⁶⁹

Monterey Pop Festival has many similarities to Woodstock and was even part of the inspiration behind Woodstock. Yet what sets Monterey Pop ‘67 aside from Woodstock and Altamont is that Monterey Pop was a charity event. Meanwhile, Woodstock became a free concert at the last minute, and Altamont was just a free concert to conclude The Rolling Stones’ tour. Since all three shows, Monterey Pop, Woodstock, and Altamont, all occurred in a close period, it makes sense that there is a common ideology, or in this case, the same ideology, flowing between the three events. Even though all three faced prejudice for those beliefs, the three concerts had very different fates. Altamont has a negative connotation, Woodstock’s positive, and avid music fans barely recall Monterey Pop. Since Monterey Pop ‘67 had no significant incidents and was a

⁶⁸ Inglis and Coates, 60.

⁶⁹ Hillstrom and Hillstrom, 100.

one-time show, could that be why the show is not as remembered as the others? However, this does not explain how it came to be so revolutionary, for how can a festival be both revolutionary and forgettable? I suspect that because Monterey Pop was for charity, the music industry did not care to see the full potential of what festivals could be for making money.

Woodstock and Altamont became profitable through the documentaries filmed during the concerts. Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower's book *Countercultures and Popular Music* details how the documentaries helped Woodstock and Altamont. They explain that the documentary about Woodstock helped bridge the profit gap once the concert switched to being a non-profit.⁷⁰ Therefore, one can conclude that The Rolling Stones intended to document Altamont because they knew that the film would generate the money they spent on the concert, hence, being able to advertise the event as free. Overall, the documentaries help reinforce Woodstock and Altamont's associated memories while generating revenue to compensate for the money spent on the circumstances.

Julie Wright contributed the chapter "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly '60s: The Opposing Gazes of Woodstock and Gimme Shelter" in the book *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*. At the beginning of the chapter, Julie Wright describes the picture painted for both Woodstock and Altamont in the beginning scenes of their respective documentaries. Julie Wright writes, "Woodstock, however, quickly became eulogized, as the pinnacle of the hippie movement, while Altamont became known as the event that 'put the nail in the coffin of the sixties.'" ⁷¹ The documentary about Woodstock plays on "...The environment as idyllic, peaceful, and agrarian, something the film continues to promote throughout." ⁷² The Altamont

⁷⁰ Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower, *CounterCultures and Popular Music*, (Routledge 2014).

⁷¹ Julie Wright, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly '60s: The Opposing Gazes of Woodstock and Gimme Shelter," *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop* (Routledge 2013), 71.

⁷² Julie Wright, 74.

documentary portrays "...A sense of speed (rather than stationary contemplation), claustrophobia, and a desolate man-made environment...quite simply, there is nothing grand or beautiful about this environment."⁷³ Therefore, the documentaries portrayed the concerts with the associated affiliations of the angel or devil, helping solidify those ideas about the festivals. Both documentaries came out within a year of each concert, so those associations and news of what happened at each festival were still in the people's minds watching the documentaries.

Consumer Society

As Bill Osgerby, the author of *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America*, argues, "As the middle class strove to adapt and reconfigure itself to the changing social and economic imperatives of the post-war world, it generated a range of new and forward-looking cultural identities geared around consumer desire and the practices of commodity consumption."⁷⁴ While Osgerby's main focuses are on masculinity, youth culture, and consumption habits, it is undeniable that Woodstock and Altamont are forms of consumption. Osgerby offers his views on the counterculture movement by utilizing a quote from Thomas Frank. Osgerby writes:

Indeed, rather than representing the antithesis of the consumer society, the counterculture can itself be seen as a developmental phase in the evolution of the new, consumption-oriented petite bourgeoisie. As Thomas Frank explains [in his book *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*], rather than representing the nemesis of advanced capitalism, 'the counter-culture may be more accurately understood as a stage in the development of the values of the American middle class, a colorful installment in the twentieth century drama of consumer subjectivity.'⁷⁵

Although this statement is contradictory because the counterculture movement claims to be anti-capitalist, it offers an interesting perspective. The consumer lifestyle created the

⁷³ Julie Wright, 75.

⁷⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America*, (Berg 2006), 14.

⁷⁵ Osgerby, 185.

counterculture movement, and although people of the counterculture movement claimed to be anti-capitalists, there is always a commodity that can turn into a product. In this case, the product sold is music festivals. As Kevin and Laurie Collier Hillstrom mentioned before Woodstock, music festivals promoted albums and not a form of making money. Woodstock created the idea that music festivals would be profitable, although Monterey Pop '67 set the scene for Woodstock to expand. As Andrea Jain details throughout her book *In Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality*, she emphasizes the idea that anything can be turned into a commodity by stating that “There are plentiful instances where entrepreneurs and consumers frame spiritual commodities as effective ways to escape from the stress of everyday modern life without changing one’s complicity in neoliberal capitalism.”⁷⁶ Further exemplifying Jain’s idea of commodification, my later section describing my experience at Camp Flog Gnaw highlights the high level of consumerism at festivals today.

Jon Pareles, later a music critic, attended Woodstock with his brother. In 2019, Pareles shared his experience with *The New York Times* in the article “Woodstock’s Contradictions, 50 Years Later.” Pareles writes:

At every festival that I’ve attended since Woodstock- Bonnaroo, Reading, Coachella, Electric Zoo, Rock in Rio, even the first Lollapalooza (which did hint at a new outsider community)- the audience has been treated more like consumers than crusaders...But one of Woodstock’s main lessons was one of the most obvious ones: People like free stuff.⁷⁷

So, as Jon Pareles suggests, music festivals have capitalized on the idea of music bringing people together to have this euphoric experience. However, the concept of music bringing people together to have this euphoric experience has yet to happen since Woodstock. Altamont attempted to recreate Woodstock less than four months later, and the show had a vibe opposite from Woodstock's.

⁷⁶ Andrea R. Jain, *Peace, Love, Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality*, (Oxford University Press 2020), 50.

⁷⁷ Jon Pareles, “Woodstock’s Contradictions, 50 Years Later,” (NYTimes 2019)

In *Peace Love Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality*, Andrea Jain “...explores how spiritual industries, corporations, entrepreneurs, and consumers embody and transmit a neoliberal mode of governance; hence I use the category *neoliberal spirituality*, which I argue epitomizes a crucial node in global neoliberal capitalism.”⁷⁸ Jain’s thesis is that

the texts of neoliberal spirituality embody a tension between the values of the dominant neoliberal capitalist order and values antagonistic to it through, for example, *intelligent consumption*, *creative capitalism*, or *conscious capitalism*. Although they gesture toward wanting to resolve the real devastating social and environmental conditions that neoliberal capitalist structures create and perpetuate, they put the burden for resolving those conditions on individual consumers, as opposed to supporting collective dissent and radical policy changes. In other words, spiritual consumers, entrepreneurs, corporations, and industries struggle against the dominant culture, yet their modes of resistance are gestural.⁷⁹

Although Andrea Jain is using yoga to explain the dynamics of spirituality and capitalism, there is still a lot to be gained from her work because music is a form of spirituality for some people, as the fact that the counterculture movement founded its movement based on peace and love, which in turn, so did Woodstock. As Jon Pareles pointed out, festivals have a spiritual dynamic to them. People gather together to listen to artists; typically, these festivals have a mission statement. Therefore, people gather with a common ideology and experience this euphoric event.

According to Harvard Online, neoliberalism “is a term for the political and economic policies associated with unrestrained free market global capitalism.”⁸⁰ The video goes on to explain that “proponents of neoliberalism see free markets and free trade as a foundation for human flourishing, creating the most favorable conditions for individual liberties, job growth, technological innovation, and transnational collaborations that promote peace and global prosperity.”⁸¹ If one were to apply this concept to the rise in popularity of music festivals, they would see a connection between the two. Jain describes neoliberal capitalism as “...what is

⁷⁸ Jain, 6.

⁷⁹ Jain, 8.

⁸⁰ Harvard Online, “Pros and Cons of Neoliberalism,” (YouTube 2018), 00:00:07.

⁸¹ Harvard Online, 00:00:30.

possible socially, economically, and politically around the world.”⁸² She continues that “Neoliberalism is the governing rationality upon which the economic policies of late capitalism stand, an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are owned by individuals or corporations, and profits fund their operations.”⁸³ So, although the typical standard of capitalism is through the consumption and exchange of physical things, it can also be through avenues of consumption that do not require physical items. Music festivals offer the opportunity for people with commonalities to gather and listen to music, which can release a sense of togetherness that unleashes a sense of empowerment. Festivals such as Monterey Pop 1967, Woodstock 1969, and Altamont 1969 offered the attendees a space to gather against all the political, social, and economic turmoil in the United States. Andrea Jain details that:

“...as much as consumers are not in control over their own conditions, they struggle to convince themselves that, through spiritual and wellness consumption, they are in fact in control. The burden of healing rests solely on individual consumers and their purchasing activities, and the industry’s neoliberal discourses of self-care and personal growth help consumers avert their eyes from disturbing and at times violent power dynamics playing out in yoga classes, mindfulness manuals, festivals, and retreats.”⁸⁴

As Jain is alluding to, consumers are looking for a way to escape the harsh realities of life.

Seeing the opportunity this escapism consumerism presented, the music industry capitalized on the idea of festivals. It started to drag out the emphasis on the euphoric feeling that would be the reward for attending, aside from hearing live music. However, over time, this reward would become oversold. Woodstock would sell the idea that “It was the place where art and commerce could coexist, where opposing ideas could coexist, where our humanity would come first and our differences would just add color.”⁸⁵

⁸² Jain, 31.

⁸³ Jain, 34.

⁸⁴ Jain, 104-105.

⁸⁵ Lang and George-Warren, 98.

My Experience at Bethel Woods Center for Arts

There is misinformation about the festival's occurrence on the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts website. So, to clear up the confusion, I reached out to see if I could set up an interview with one of the historians at Bethel Woods—however, the person I contacted to see if it was possible stated that all the historians could not answer the questions I sent. Therefore, I decided to take a tour of the museum that sits on the original land that the festival took place on. Since Bethel Woods is on the property where Woodstock '69 occurred, it is considered a nonprofit organization. However, it is unclear if Bethel Woods profits from the concerts held there, which would make for more interesting research. If Bethel Woods does receive a profit from the shows on the grounds, then the center would indeed be exploiting Woodstock's image. I should not have been surprised by the museum and how the center would run itself, yet somehow, I was unprepared for my adventure at Bethel Woods. A security breach occurred when my family and I arrived at the museum. Therefore, the staff pushed our tour time back an hour; however, the museum does not offer enough exhibits to spend longer than an hour or two.

Before attending the tour, I got the chance to look around the building, which had a room with some information and interactive experiences so that people touring could get the feeling that some of the participants had what it was like at Woodstock. In this room, I got the chance to talk to some of the employees and gain their understanding of the music festival. One of the employees I spoke to just informed me of the information on the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts website. She said it was amazing that no one got injured or died during the event.

Nevertheless, when I attended the tour with the guide, John, who attended Woodstock '69, he stated that two people died at the festival. I did have to remind him about the tractor incident, but he told the group that a person passed away from overdosing and hitting their head

on a rock. While I did appreciate the tour guide being honest, I am confused as to why there is confusion among Bethel Woods Center for the Arts employees. Why are all the employees not on the same page about what happened during the three-day festival? However, the employees not having the same information is not the only thing I found off-putting while conducting my research there.

I was also disappointed by the level of consumerism the center has put together. The guided tour ends at the gift shop, which offers the classic cliché hippie attire and a book that will set one back one hundred and fifty dollars. Although the book does have Michael Lang's signature, who is deceased, so the price somewhat makes sense, it is surprising to find that the price tag with such a high number is associated with the values of the counterculture. The tour is honestly not worth the price. Since I bought my tickets in advance, I only had to pay \$19 instead of the \$21.69 if I were to have brought them in person. Additional five-dollar visit add-ons to enhance the experience, such as the Docent and AR tours. Unfortunately, Bethel Woods does not go into detail on those, and since there was a concert the night I toured, they did not offer some of the experiences outside. Instead of attending the museum, one should consider watching a documentary on the 1960s counterculture movement, popular culture, and Woodstock. If one were to watch the two documentary types listed, that person would receive as much or more information than touring Bethel Woods Center for the Arts. The center is playing on the idea of Woodstock. The website shows that guests will have a restaurant or cafe to purchase lunch; however, I recommend just bringing it from home because the price is not worth it, and a meal from home would be more enjoyable.

Although the tour of Woodstock at the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts is not the best tour or museum, there is some information that the tour shared that I have yet to hear. The tour

guide informed the group that Woodstock attendees were mainly male and that Woodstock Venture intended to have food sales from the start. The tour guide, John, also emphasized that the festival was not as muddy as believed. According to him, only a handful of people were covered in mud, while most stayed out.

Evolution of Music Festivals

In the article “What is Burning Man and What is the Purpose? A Primer,” *Reno Gazette-Journal* writes, “Burning Man resembles a festival, but the event can better be described as a countercultural arts event spanning about nine days. Burning Man is a surreal dusty and quirky party in the desert of northwestern Nevada.”⁸⁶ Tens of thousands of people attend the event every year, starting in the 1990s, as a place for people to gather under a ten-principle mission statement to express themselves and reject “corporatism and capitalism.”⁸⁷ The festival’s location is a makeshift city in the middle of the desert called Black Rock City due to its harsh environment. Since the location is remote, the festival builds multiple commodities to ensure safety and festival quality.

However, as Jim Dobson highlights in the *Forbes* article “Burning Man Diaries: An Insider Report from the Muddy Chaos of 2023,” Burning Man 2023 is not what most goers signed up for. Dobson writes:

Nearly 75,000 attendees at this year’s Burning Man event were trapped in a major storm in the Nevada desert. With severe flooding, organizers were forced to restrict all traffic in and out of the event, and attendees were urged to shelter in place and conserve food, water, and other supplies.⁸⁸ While most attendees expect some discomfort from the climate, being trapped in mud is another thing. Attendees had mixed reactions to staying a few more days on the event’s grounds. Some

⁸⁶ “What Is Burning Man and What Is the Purpose? A Primer,” (*Reno Gazette-Journal* 2022).

⁸⁷ See note 86 above.

⁸⁸ Jim Dobson, “Burning Man Diaries: An Insider Report from the Muddy Chaos of 2023,” (*Forbes* 2023).

were annoyed and ultimately tried to escape by abandoning their things and walking to civilization, which goes against one of the ten principles that ‘burners’ follow. While other attendees simply enjoyed the mud. Finn-Olaf Jones and Jack Healy write in *The New York Times* article “Burning Man’s Muddy Aftermath: A Desert Full of ‘Moop,” which describes the state requiring the event to ensure the space is left clean. Jones and Healy write that “...volunteer crews spend three weeks after the festival collecting trash and raking the ruts and hillocks out of the dirt to smooth and restore the alkali playa. They drew maps showing the dirtiest spots, and crawl on all fours to pluck sequins and plastic scraps from the barren ground.”⁸⁹ In the past, people have been notorious for leaving behind items that still have usage. However, in the Burning Man of 2023, people left an astonishing amount of belongings covered in mud, including a few cars and vans.

Burning Man 2023’s only tragedy would not be the mud and waste left behind. The *Reno Gazette-Journal* published the article “Burning Man: Drugs Suspected in Man’s Death at Nevada Festival, Medical Examiner Says” by Siobhan McAndrew on September 5, 2023. The report states that according to the medical examiner, “The Washoe County Regional Medical Examiner’s Office released more information Tuesday on the Death of Leon Reece, 32, at Burning Man. Reece, of Truckee, died Sept. 1 at the event. The cause and manner of death are pending investigation, but drug intoxication is suspected.”⁹⁰ As of September 23, 2023, there is no update on the actual cause of the death of Leon Reece.

⁸⁹ Finn-Olaf Jones and Jack Healy, “Burning Man’s Muddy Aftermath: A Desert Full of ‘Moop,’” (NYTimes 2023).

⁹⁰ Siobhan McAndrew, “Burning Man: Drugs Suspected in Man’s Death at Nevada Festival, Medical Examiner Says,” (Reno Gazette-Journal 2023).

Despite all that went wrong at Burning Man 2023, some attendees still had an enjoyable time. In *The Inertia* article “Burning Man 2023 Was Only Bad If You Couldn’t Adapt to Nature” by Steve Andrews, Andrews writes,

The week presented many unexpected curveballs; but those of us who rolled with it had an amazing time. Most people I spoke with embraced the rain and change of plans, and those who didn’t and discarded the advice to stay put ended up paying by being stuck in the mud far longer than if they’d simply waited it out.⁹¹

So, while some attendees focused on the negative aspects, such as being stuck in the mud, others just enjoyed themselves despite everything else because there was nothing else to do. One could argue that rolling with the punches gave the attendees a better opportunity to bond with each other. One could also say that the festival’s true intentions were reached by having a better chance to connect. While others could argue that it is weird and gross and question someone’s sanity for wanting to attend such an event. I say to each their own.

Travis Scott’s music festival, Astroworld, broke the news that during the festival on November 5, 2021, ten people lost their lives and left numerous people with injuries. Guilia Heyward writes in her *New York Times* article “Astroworld Victims Include High Schooler and College Students” that 50,000 people attended the show in Houston, Texas; however, the show started to turn towards chaos as Travis Scott encouraged the audience to be rowdy.⁹²

Since Astroworld is in the ‘new’ music world, compared to Woodstock and Altamont, it developed into an already marketized and profitable environment, therefore indicating that the concert developed as a way to make a profit. The Astroworld 2021 festival was not Travis Scott’s first music festival either. The first Astroworld festival was in 2018. However, even in 2018, people who attended Astroworld complained that Travis Scott provoked the crowd to riot. One is left to question why people are still willing to pay for these festivals, knowing that the conditions

⁹¹ Steve Andrews, “Burning Man 2023 Was Only Bad If You Couldn’t Adapt to Nature,” (*Inertia* 2023).

⁹² Guilia Heyward, “Astroworld Victims Include High Schooler and College Students,” (*NYTimes* 2021).

will be less than ideal. If people knew going into purchasing tickets that there had been serious complaints about the show in previous years, why did they decide to attend it? On June 29, 2023, Jason Nguyen et al. wrote for *Click2Houston*, “Grand Jury Declines to Indict 6, Including Rapper Travis Scott, in Deadly Astroworld Festival Crowd Crash.” The article quotes Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg in stating that a grand jury found that “...no crime did occur, that no single individual was criminally responsible...in our narrow review, our investigators and prosecutors gave it everything they had to ensure that the grand jury could reach the truth of the matter.”⁹³ That leaves one to question who is responsible for the death of ten individuals, the youngest of them being only nine years old.

Astroworld is relatively similar to Altamont. Famous artists put the festivals together and wanted to play on the ‘bad boy’ aesthetic. As stated, Altamont played on the ‘bad boy’ aesthetic by hiring the Hell’s Angels to act as security guards and paying them with beer. Meanwhile, Travis Scott encouraged his fans to rage at the show. In the *Complex* article “‘There Were People All Around Me Screaming’ Firsthand Accounts of the Astroworld Tragedy” Andree Gee writes that:

Multiple Astroworld attendees suggest the event didn’t have adequate security to stop the nonpayers, and had too little medical personnel to handle the surge of people who suffered breathing issues and were trampled...There was a mix of people who were excitedly moshing and dancing to Travis’ set and others who were in the state of panic but couldn’t move or breathe with all the bodies stacked on top of them.⁹⁴

As this quote shows, Astroworld and Altamont lacked the proper security to ensure everyone attending the event had a safe and enjoyable time. Instead of focusing on the branding of the festivals and the artists by associating themselves with the ‘bad boy’ aesthetic, the festival's producers should focus on ensuring the event causes little to no harm. Although there might be

⁹³ Jason Nguyen, et al., “Grand Jury Declines to Indict 6, Including Rapper Travis Scott, in Deadly Astroworld Festival Crowd Crash,” (*Click2Houston* 2023).

⁹⁴ Andrea Gee “‘There Were People All Around Me Screaming’ Firsthand Accounts of Astroworld Tragedy,” (*Complex* 2021).

some thrill associated with the ‘bad boy’ aesthetic, one has to question if the rush is genuinely worth it since it can lead to people getting hurt or losing their lives.

Planning for My Festival Experience

To better understand the appeal of a music festival, especially one that lasts longer than a day, I decided to attend a music festival. After looking into music festivals for nearly two years and having celebrated all my significant life accomplishments by attending a concert, I needed to have the experience for myself to fully understand the appeal and why the industry has become so capitalized. The festival I specifically chose to attend is Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival (CFG). This particular festival is already interesting because before announcing the line-up, the festival completely sold out. This could be for multiple reasons, such as the fact that Tyler, the Creator, the man behind the making of the festival, did not hold his festival from 2020 to 2022 due to the Coronavirus. Tyler, the Creator, has also become more mainstream compared to previous years with his 2019 album *Igor*, compared to the first festival Tyler held back in 2012, a few months after his first studio album came out. I wanted to attend this festival precisely because I saw Tyler, the Creator, perform in 2019 at Madison Square Garden, and I thoroughly enjoyed the concert. I attended Tyler’s performance on September 11, 2019, the night his album *Igor* hit platinum. So, the show had fantastic energy because everyone felt like celebrating Tyler’s accomplishments. It felt like Tyler put his whole heart and soul into his performance that night.

Therefore, my rationale when purchasing the tickets without a line-up was that since I had already seen him perform, I felt confident that I would at least enjoy one of the performances. I am also a fan of many other artists he collaborates with, so I looked into the previous years’ line-ups to guess who may return. With all my research and theorizing on who

may perform, I decided to roll the dice and finally give a music festival a chance. My studying and theorizing worked out because a few names I hoped for appeared on the list, and I got two of the three headliners. However, I wonder if Tyler's performance at Camp Flog Gnaw will differ from my experience at Madison Square Garden in 2019. Camp Flog Gnaw is also the first show I have attended since the COVID-19 outbreak, so I am curious to see if the music industry changed the experience to ensure people's safety.

On August 18, 2023, a livestream slowly depicted the revealing of the Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival line-up. On the side of the Golf Wang store in Los Angeles, California, one of Tyler's clothing brands, a painter painted a mural showcasing the festival's line-up. Interestingly, the line-up was released two months after the tickets went on sale on June 2nd. However, this is not the first time Camp Flog Gnaw has sold out on the first day of ticket sales. In the Forbes article "Camp Flog Gnaw: The Business Behind Tyler The Creator's Immersive Music Festival," Julian Mitchell writes that the festival in 2018 "[sold] out of tickets in just 40 minutes, this year's festival attracted a richly diverse audience of enthusiastic fans from all walks of life, mirrored by a curated lineup of promising and prominent artists across genres."⁹⁵

As stated, Tyler the Creator started his music festival in 2012, the following year of his first studio album. When Tyler began his career, he represented more of the bad boy aesthetic, such as The Rolling Stones or Travis Scott. Tyler the Creator joined the music scene by joining Odd Future around 2008. Eventually, the group split so those involved could focus on their personal careers. Tyler the Creator's first studio album was produced during Tyler's time with Odd Future and is said to have helped to launch Odd Future's popularity. *Goblin* has vulgar lyrics, giving the listener a dark and horror-filled experience. The album was so foul, in fact, in

⁹⁵ Julian Mitchell "Camp Flog Gnaw: The Business Behind Tyler The Creator's Immersive Music Festival," (Forbes 2018).

2015, the United Kingdom decided to ban Tyler the Creator from the UK. However, as Ryan Brace points out in *The Michigan Daily* article “Tyler, the Creator Doesn’t Care What You Think about His Evolution,” “Tyler’s main objective on his early solo work, including his debut mixtape *Bastard* (2009) and his first studio album *Goblin* (2011), seemed to be to ruffle as many feathers as possible.”⁹⁶ Just as The Rolling Stones wanted to ruffle feathers by hiring the Hell’s Angels, Tyler the Creator wanted to get his name out there, and needless to say, he was successful. In his music video for the song “Yonkers” in his debut album, Tyler is seen eating a cockroach, which people reacted to by either sharing or talking about the video. As time progressed, Tyler started to show other sides of himself through his music and television show. When Tyler released the album *Flower Boy* in 2017, he expressed a completely different side of himself. Instead of staying in ‘horrorcore,’ it appears that *Flower Boy* was Tyler’s way of accepting himself and how far he has come to be the person he is now. Although Tyler’s previous albums have lyrics that are homophobic, *Flower Boy* has many references to coming out of the closet, and depending on how one views the storyline, the songs on the album tell a story of Tyler falling in love with a boy just to learn to accept himself and how the situation ends. However, Tyler, the Creator, did not become mainstream until his album *Igor* in 2019, debuting at number one.

So, although Tyler started with the ‘horrorcore,’ today, he is not associated with that genre as much. I like to view Tyler’s music evolution as a piece in time for how many people feel as they learn and grow from situations. Although I do not condone the more graphic and offensive lyrics, I view that era of Tyler as the anger, immaturity, and, dare I say, silliness that drives us to become who we are due to all the confusion and just trying to find our place in the

⁹⁶ Ryan Brace, “Tyler, the Creator Doesn’t Care What You Think About His Evolution,” (*Michigan Daily* 2021).

world. The newer era of Tyler is the version of all of us who have finally accepted ourselves with all our quirks because to find happiness, we must be comfortable with ourselves. I admire Tyler for his 'I don't care' attitude because I need to implement that attitude a bit more in my life. However, it will be interesting to see if Tyler fits more into his 'horrorcore' personality or the newer version of Tyler at Camp Flog Gnaw 2023.

My Experience and Findings at Camp Flog Gnaw 2023

I feel I should disclose what tickets I purchased because my experience will vary drastically from others. I decided to go with the Super VIP tickets because I could resell the BMX bike the tickets come with, and the tickets came with a private seating area and a private area in front of one of the three stages. After researching, I wanted to ensure I was in the safest place. My parents gifted me the tickets as an early graduation gift since I celebrated all of my significant accomplishments with a concert. Since I am from New Jersey and the festival takes place in California, I decided to go out a few days before the festival so I could go to the Golf Wang store to conduct some interviews, and so I could scope out the scene beforehand. I also hoped to conduct some interviews at the Grammy Museum; however, no one was available to speak on the day I attended, and unfortunately, no one responded to my email.

On the festival's first day, I decided to go around 5:00 p.m. even though the festival technically started at noon. Part of the decision to go later to the festival is because I have some medical conditions that make it hard for me to be in the heat all day, and honestly, I was not super impressed with the earlier lineup. CFG has many rides and games for guests who purchased carnival tickets; unfortunately, the tickets sold out before I entered the queue, so I did not ride or play any games. On the first day of the festival, the notable sets I saw were Kali

Uchis, Tyler the Creator, and The Hillbillies, also known as Baby Keem and Kendrick Lamar. I thought Kali sounded terrific, however, I wish she performed more. Her performance mainly consisted of sitting on a couch and serenading the crowd. The crowd for this show was mellow, which makes sense because the set was casual. Tyler, the Creator, shortly followed Kali Uchis, and his set was my favorite out of all of them. Tyler, like always, gave the crowd all of his energy. Before he started, about four accounts of people in the crowd needed help. As Tyler talked to his fans before he started, he asked for someone to help out the people in the crowds because he did not need a lawsuit, insinuating Travis Scott's festival lawsuit. Tyler also gave his fans a little Ted Talk, thanking them for all their continued support, letting him grow his festival, and inspiring the fans to be whoever they are and not to care what anyone thinks. It is clear from his Ted Talk that Tyler's image behind CFG is to let weirdos be weirdos while listening to music that Tyler specifically curated, which invites the ultimate Tyler the Creator fan to connect with him on another level. Although many people attended the festival, the discourse on social media was that the festival did not have the best line-up compared to previous years. For me, the lineup only had a few names that I could not miss, but most of the artists fell in the category of 'I like some of their songs, but not their whole discography.'

During Tyler's set, he played songs from his catalog, yet he hinted that he would be dropping some new music soon, which was very exciting to hear in person. As soon as the music started, the crowd went wild. Since I had Super VIP tickets, I was supposed to be in a section close to the stage; however, I found out at the festival that the producers behind it decided to combine the Super VIP and VIP sections. The section dedicated to Super VIP and VIP was on the stage's right side; frankly, it was not the best view. Since Kali and Tyler were both performing at the Camp Stage, I could sneak towards the front more, but I still had to watch the performance

from the screen because of the angle, which made it hard to see the artist. The screen on the stage's right side, the section that housed Super VIP and VIP, malfunctioned a few times throughout both Kali and Tyler's performances, which was annoying. I understand that there may be some technical issues during a show, but one reaches a certain level of frustration for it to be a consistent problem throughout the festival. Especially since Kali and Tyler were on my must-see list, I was pretty disappointed that I missed what felt like minutes, but I did not care as much for the disruption in other sets. I also found it odd that they did not put on the screen that Kali came out to perform her part of the iconic Tyler, the Creator song, "See You Again." I had no idea Kali performed until I found a video on TikTok, so in that moment of finding that video, my Super VIP tickets did not feel so super since I missed seeing a moment I had hoped for. One may be questioning how I did not realize Kali was there by her voice, and it is because her voice is that good; you will just have to take my word for it. Nevertheless, being close to the stage was fun until a mosh pit formed before me. Just as fast as the mosh ate and chewed me up, it spit me back out, thankfully. Being 5'3 with weak ankles, I was worried that if I went down, no one might notice, but I held my own. Luckily, I was not in one of the pits that experienced people needing medical attention. I have not found any follow-ups regarding what happened to the people who needed evacuation from the crowds, so hopefully, nothing too serious.

Both Tyler and The Hillbillies went on late, granted the festival does state that times may vary; however, I had to miss the majority of The Hillbillies set because I scheduled an Uber to come during the last twenty minutes. I heard from previous CFG attendees that the walk down the hill is humbling, and traffic gets insane, so schedule time for that in your day. However, I will go into more detail about the transportation options later. Tyler, the Creator's set, was cut short due to him going over the allocated time slot, which is odd considering it is his festival, so as he

states, he should be whatever he wants. Tyler the Creator's set was not the only one cut short. The same thing happened with the third headliner, SZA, on the second night. The audience finished her last song of the night because the CFG team turned off her mic due to the curfew set at 11:00 p.m. Although it was a beautiful moment for the audience and the artist, it was annoying that two of the three headliners were cut short. I felt hesitant about attending SZA's set because she is dating Travis Scott, and rumors were floating around that he may make an appearance; however, the rumors were just rumors. Since I had experienced a Tyler mosh pit, I did not want to discover what a Travis Scott mosh would turn into.

Although I enjoyed the festival, the overall experience was overwhelming and disappointing. The line-up compared to previous years was not as impressive. In 2019, Tyler the Creator had Drake come out as a surprise guest, and the crowd booed him off stage. Therefore, Tyler did not bring out any special guests this year during his performance. The only reason Drake got booed off stage was that the fans thought Frank Ocean, a long-time friend of Tyler the Creator, would perform. Fans in the crowd of the 2023 festival also chanted for Frank Ocean, but Tyler shut it down just as quickly as it started. I hoped Frank would attend and perform, but since he rarely performs and does not put out new music, I did not expect to see him on stage; if anything, I expected to see him in the Super VIP area or going backstage to watch the sets. One of the gimmicks behind the Super VIP ticket was that celebrities hung out in the Super VIP rest area; however, as one might expect, that was not the case.

Camp Flog Gnaw also had a lot of options for food for various ranges of dietary restrictions and needs; however, food and drinks were ridiculously priced, as one might expect. The only thing on the menu that was a somewhat responsible price were the water bottles they were selling. Unfortunately, the water refill station eventually stopped working correctly, so

people had to purchase water. I believe that water was selling for around five dollars. I had purchased Vitamin Water, water, and nachos for twenty-eight dollars, which was not worth the price. There also needed to be more restrooms for the number of people attending. Multiple people reported others for urinating in the crowds and getting it on others, all because they did not want to lose their spot. The map indicated that there would be six sites for porta potties, and the Super VIP got to use the bathrooms in Dodgers Stadium. Yet, walking around the festival, it was hard to spot the restroom areas, and the Super VIP section closed at 8:45 p.m., about two hours before the festival's scheduled curfew. There was no indication when purchasing the tickets that the area would not be usable for certain times of the day. Part of my reasoning for purchasing the Super VIP tickets was hoping for cleaner bathrooms because porta potties are gross, especially sitting in L.A.'s sun all day. By 5:30 p.m., only two food vendors were open in the Super VIP area.

From talking to people who previously attended CFG, I decided to purchase the Super VIP tickets to ensure I had an area to sit, relax, and eat between sets that I wanted to see because CFG does not have adequate seating. So, finding insufficient food options around the start of prime dinner time was surprising. The two open vendors were a donut stand and one with snack items. I also tried empanadas from a vendor in the VIP section near the Camp stage, but I had to throw them out because they were hands down the worst empanadas I have ever had. Almost everyone I spoke with complained about there not being enough seating. Every seat always had a body in it, so people were forced to sit on the asphalt that had food, beverages, and human waste on it. As with any festival, drug and alcohol consumption took place, and some attendees decided to test their limits. I am unsure if the stage had a fog machine or if all the smoke in the air was from people smoking marijuana. There were also people throwing up in the crowds from only

drinking alcohol on an empty stomach and being in the heat all day. Again, almost everyone I spoke with complained about there being no shade. Since I went around 5 p.m., I did not have to worry about the sun beating down on me, but I did notice that there were no options for shade besides inside the Golf Wang boutique, the locker area, and a little bit in the Super VIP area. Surprisingly, I was cold during the festival. With all the movement and bodies around me, I thought I would stay warm; I should have listened to the people saying it gets frigid at night. I work in the food service industry, so I figured I had footwear down; however, I did not. I wore Vans and saw people wearing heels, so kudos to those attendees and other avid festival-goers because it is not for the faint of heart.

On November 10th, Camp Flog Gnaw released merchandise to be pre-ordered, but they sold out relatively fast, so I decided to wait and see what they had to offer at the festival. Luckily, CFG released another pre-order drop early in the morning on November 11th so that I could purchase my items ahead of time, and I scheduled my pick-up for November 12th at 9:00 a.m. After seeing the lines for the merch booth, I was glad I went with the pre-order option. Some people I spoke to waited in line for four to six hours. There was also a Golf Wang store on the carnival grounds, which, again, the line had at least a two-hour wait. This is odd, considering that when I spoke to the employees at the Golf Wang store on Fairfax, they said the store would be open during the festival. When I arrived to pick up my merch order on the second day of the festival at my scheduled time, security told me to return at 10:00 a.m. So, on the festival's second day, I got to stand in line to grab my merchandise for the festival's opening. I received my order about an hour and a half after my scheduled pick-up time. Although the promoters of the festival marketed the products sold at Camp Flog Gnaw as a festival exclusive, on November 15th, Golf Wang's website put the products for sale. Many attendees complained on Camp Flog Gnaw's

Instagram post promoting the sale. Not only is it disappointing to assume that only you and other attendees will have clothing to remember and bond with over attending, but it is also a slap in the face to all the people who missed out on sets because they were standing in line for hours to purchase the merchandise.

The resale market for merchandise related to CFG '23 started before the festival started with items from the Super VIP and VIP packages. The VIP Package came with a backpack, a metal water bottle, a snow globe, a keychain, a notebook, a hat, and a carabiner. The Super VIP package included a BMX bike, sneakers, a blanket, a fanny pack, a mug, and a pin. After experiencing what Super VIP offered, I realized the package was not worth \$1,495. It would have been worth it if there had been more food options, no closing time, and a private Super VIP stage viewing section like advertised. While waiting in line to enter on the second day of the festival, one of the people I spoke to said that her tickets had never arrived, so she had a whole ordeal trying to get her tickets on the festival's first day. She did not elaborate on the ordeal; however, she had a wristband, so all worked out. I received my tickets three days before my scheduled flight, so I was glad about that because I feared the situation that the girl I spoke with in line experienced.

The festival appeared to have a lot of security; everywhere you turned, you would see someone in a yellow vest, which was a comforting thought, but getting into the festival was too easy breezy. However, some people in yellow vests were custodians or just random individuals working at the festival. The festival had around 1000 lockers available for rent, and I am grateful that I received one because they sold out fairly quickly during the carnival. I say this because after being in a mosh pit, I am glad I did not have things on my person that could have gotten lost in the crowd. Going into the festival, I thought they would open and check bags since many

festivals have a clear bag or no bag policy; however, one just had to walk through a metal scanner, and if the machine did not beep, you were good to go. The festival specified dimensions for bags allowed into the festival, and the bag I bought was slightly larger than the stated dimensions. Still, even then, there was no problem getting through. I spoke to a few security guards to find out their knowledge of the festival, and many, if not all, had no idea about anything. I asked a few where the restrooms were, and they stated they were unsure and directed me to someone else to ask. I saw a total of two police officers in the actual carnival, while there were about a handful directing traffic. I also asked another security guard where the Super VIP section was because it was not clear, and they had no idea that Super VIP had their own section. The same girl who had issues receiving her wristbands informed me that as the festival opened on the first day, security immediately lost the line. People started to rush in, so who knows what actually made it into the festival. I asked two security guards if this was their first time working at this specific festival, and both said yes, but one of them clarified that it was his first time working at any festival. Unfortunately, they shooed me away after they responded, so I did not get to ask the other guards they were with. I also saw a video on TikTok of someone who snuck into the festival wearing a police officer costume, so whether or not this is true is debatable. Still, it leads one to question the security at Camp Flog Gnaw.

Security also could have done a better job of controlling the crowds inside the festival grounds. For example, when entering the VIP area by the Camp stage, the system for getting in was to push your way through the crowd while having your hand with your wristband up. Once one made themselves towards the entrance, they met two security guards with flashlights, and once they flashed you, you were good to go in. One would think that there would have been two separate lines for Super VIP and VIP; however, there were not. Some stage managers tried to

control the crowds by telling them to all take steps back so people had more space; however, once the stage managers left the stage, the group would regroup in their original positions.

For controlling traffic, considering the festival was in L.A., the security guards and police did an okay job. The rideshare situation was a tad confusing because there was little communication about how rideshare drivers should find their passengers. However, since I decided to leave early, I did not have that big of an issue trying to find my rideshare. Others I spoke with said the free shuttle the festival offered took over an hour to get to the designated drop-off location. Security instructed rideshare drivers to circle back if their passengers were not ready. However, the line of cars wrapped around the street trying to get into the designated area, so many drivers tried to avoid following this direction. As mentioned earlier, attendees had to walk up a hill to get to the festival. From the walk from the festival's exit to the rideshare area at the bottom of the hill, there were multiple stands of people selling food and fake merchandise.

During Tyler's set, he took a few moments to thank the crowd and his friends who came for all the support, as well as getting the crowd to thank everyone who put together the festival. He expressed that he was shocked by the number of people who came to him, saying they were so excited about the festival and the distances traveled by people attending. He also talked to the audience, telling them to follow their dreams and not to care what other people think about them. Concluding Tyler's Ted Talk, he said that if anyone tries to tell you that your dreams are too crazy or unachievable, then "f**k 'em." Tyler's Ted Talk truly emphasized Tyler's approach to the music industry. He has a controversial past, yet he did not let what the critics said get to him. Tyler alludes to his resume of accomplishments in his speech, proving that if one works hard and is determined and dedicated to one's passion, then nothing or no one should stop you from achieving your dreams. Since Tyler catered the festival to his music taste, one has to take his

word because the festival has been going on for about ten years, minus the three-year COVID-19 hiatus.

Overall, I enjoyed myself at the festival and refound my passion for music again. Any music I listened to sounded better for a few days after the festival. However, Camp Flog Gnaw did fit the theme of being super consumer-orientated. From the various merchandise stands with four-plus hour lines to Tyler's clothing brand having a boutique and other sponsored pop-up shows, there was always something to buy around every corner. The food prices were steep. Also, the tickets for the actual event cost a pretty penny. For General Admission, ticket prices cost \$335 plus tax. VIP costs \$595 plus tax; as mentioned above, Super VIP costs \$1495 plus tax. For an additional cost of \$150 plus tax, one could receive unlimited carnival games. One could park their car while spending an additional \$60 plus tax.

Honestly, the Super VIP was not worth the price. Although reselling the bikes will cover the cost, it would have been more worth it to go with the VIP tickets. I heard some people complaining that VIP attendees were allowed to use the bathroom in the Super VIP area towards the end of the second night. I do not know if that was the case for the entire festival, but the Super VIP area with the cleaner bathroom was one of the major factors in my decision on what ticket to buy. Knowing that I could have saved some money and had all the same experiences as Super VIP, I am a bit disappointed. The Super VIP should have gotten something else to outweigh the ticket cost. Although the system is classist, one expects to be treated a little special for \$1495. It feels like I just bought a bike for that much, and I am not sure if I can fully justify that because that is one expensive bike.

I also struggled to classify Camp Flog Gnaw into the Woodstock angelic box or the Altamont/Astroworld bad-boy box. Tyler's Ted Talk gives a good impression of Woodstock.

CFG also lists on its website how the festival complies with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The only information I could find about charities or donations that CFG takes part in is that with the purchase of a carnival ticket, there is a one-dollar sustainability fee. To complicate the classification of CFG, after his Ted Talk, during his favorite song, "New Magic Wand," he came out with flame throwers and started dancing with them. There is no better way to describe the energy that he was giving than simply saying he was vibing and having a good time. So, I think CFG would be considered Woodstock-ish to its intended audience. Others may view CFG as a liberal hell with poor music. I say this because of left stereotypes such as creative hair colors, general beliefs, and the fashion attendees wore. Although Tyler portrays Woodstock-like ideals by promoting his fans to encourage their dreams, overall consumerism obstructs the music.

It is odd to consider that Tyler would obstruct the music because, in an interview, "Nardwuar vs. Tyler, The Creator (2023)," with Nardwuar, a journalist who posts content on YouTube, Tyler talks about his passion for music various times throughout the video interview. In the interview, Tyler questions where the music industry is going due to other artists doing interviews that do not relate to nor mention music. He stated that artists need to get back to talking about the music they put so much work and time into producing because he believes if no one discusses music, then people will not value it.⁹⁷ Tyler also states in the interview that the idea behind CFG was to shut down his favorite street, Fairfax, and hold a carnival like the one he attended as a kid, but the city said no. So, during some spare time, while recovering from an injury, Tyler started to make doodles that are now associated with the festival. He and a friend decided why not just have it in a parking lot.⁹⁸ So, unlike Woodstock and Monterey Pop '67,

⁹⁷ Nardwuar Serviette, "Nardwuar vs. Tyler, The Creator (2023)," (YouTube 2023), 00:13:39.

⁹⁸ Serviette, 00:04:00.

Tyler did not create CFG to represent any broader political or social meaning other than being a place for kids to gather and listen to music. When asked about the lineup, Tyler said he selects artists based on a system divided into three groups. The first group is his music taste, the second group is names that people attending will love, and the last group is for the ‘underground kids,’ but all being good taste.⁹⁹ Recognizing that for the festival to make money, there needs to be a selection of must-see art. Hence, people are willing to spend money.

Although I love Tyler the Creator as a performer, I do not see myself attending another Camp Flog Gnaw or any music festival, to be frank. While there, I felt too old to be there. However, I am twenty-two, so well within Tyler’s fan demographic, so that cannot be the reason. After fully digesting the experience, I concluded that I prefer concerts better because it is the performer and their vision for the album. One of my favorite parts about music is the stories that songs in an album build to tell. So I thought that seeing Tyler and Kendrick Lamar, two artists whose storytelling through their albums I love, would be a fantastic experience no matter what. However, there is something more intimate about a concert versus a festival. A festival felt like a sampling of all the best songs out of artists’ discography plus new stuff or stuff artists wanted to highlight specifically. In contrast, a concert feels more like a story unwrapping before you. I also did not care that some artists used autotune during their performances. I cannot stand autotune at shows because if I wanted to listen to the auto-tuned version, I would have listened to the album in my car and given myself a good show. Of course, I understand wanting to provide the best performance possible for the crowd, but maybe tone down the autotune so it is not so distracting from the actual experience.

⁹⁹ Serviette, 00:06:35.

Questioning the Authenticity of Woodstock Fitting into the Counterculture

As Timothy Taylor states in his book *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present*, “The use of music, like other commodities, has become a powerful means of fashioning one’s self in an era of heightened consumption.”¹⁰⁰ Music festivals evolved from a space to gather and listen to music to a capitalized commodity that has micro-commodities inside of it, such as merchandise sales and food and beverage sales. The promoters of the festivals market them as a spiritual awakening that transforms attendees into a higher or newer version of themselves.

Timothy Taylor then goes on to describe that:

Late capitalism in the form of industrial production of commodities for profit was infecting all aspects of the making of music and culture, to the extent that art renounced its own autonomy and took its place among other consumer goods. . . . Art was becoming a commodity like any other, a condition was accepted largely without question, with an important difference— the absence of use value, leaving artworks to be viewed as reified and ineffable. This new form of capitalism in which exchange value had triumphed.¹⁰¹

Art went from being a thing to express oneself to a mass-produced expression of oneself. The making of the consumer society in the 1950s made for the perfect breeding ground for the music industry to begin its foundation in consumption. As technology advanced and the American 1960s culture continued to find new ways to indulge itself in the consumer society, marketization and capitalization started to take over the music industry. Timothy Taylor continues:

While live music in the form of the performers’ labor could be a commodity before recording, the possibility of massive profits from ticket sales wasn’t fully realizable until the growth of cities, the rise of concert halls, the emergence of an apparatus of press and publicity, a transportation infrastructure that made travel easier and more efficient, and, later, the rise of a recording industry that could popularize music in the absence of live performers.¹⁰²

As Taylor points out, the potential for live shows to be fully seen and realized as a commodity was once the world became accessible through transportation and the internet. Although it is remarkable that music can bring so many people together under one common ideology, the music should be talking, not the festival. Music can transform someone’s entire mood in a matter of

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, 4.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 8.

¹⁰² Taylor, 22.

minutes. A person can go from happy, sad, mad, or excited just to hearing certain songs that trigger those reactions out of that individual. Therefore, the live show must capture the artist's message. I found that at CFG, the artists could not fully develop their own identity, and any sense of community that the artists tried to make diminished due to the high level of commodification.

In the book *The Road to Woodstock* by Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren, Michael states:

I knew if Woodstock was to succeed, it had to be authentic from top to bottom. We were setting out to create a new paradigm in festival events, while attempting to bring together various factions of the counterculture community. Overall, I envisioned the festival as a gathering of the tribes, a haven for like-minded people, where experimental new lifestyles would be respected and accommodated. I knew flexibility and adaptability were key to creating this never-before-seen commingling of art and commerce.¹⁰³

In this quote, Michael Lang states that he knew he needed Woodstock to be authentic to the counterculture community. However, the question remains: if he knew that Woodstock required to be genuine, then why would the tickets ever have a price associated with them, or why would food sales be included in the original plan for the concert? Free concerts are possible, especially with good planning. If The Rolling Stones could hold a free show, why could Michael Lang not try to find sponsors for the event? Alternatively, Woodstock could have been a fantastic opportunity to raise money for one or more of the many social issues that the 1960s counterculture faced. It could be that Altamont was able to get the proper funding due to the legacy of Woodstock because the concert coined the nickname Woodstock of the West as the news of the show spread.

When word of the music festival started to spread across the country, there came some backlash from an expected group, the counterculture itself. In *The Road to Woodstock*, Michael Lang recalls that:

¹⁰³ Lang and George-Warren, 52.

The Lower East Side community of activists, radicals, and politicians thought we were trying to rip off the counterculture—at least ideals were co-opted by corporate America in the guise of Woodstock Ventures. All along I tried to make it clear that we were part of the counterculture. That I was trying to marry our common principles with just enough commerce to actually manifest something of the better world we envisioned, that Woodstock was of and for the people, that it was okay for someone willing to bankroll this thing of ours to make a fair profit.¹⁰⁴

At the Yippie Headquarters, Lang continues, “At our meeting, we discovered that the solution for now, ironically, was money. Abbie was asking for a twenty-grand donation to the cause. [Abbie was arguing that] You’re taking from the culture, so you should give back to the culture.”¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, the counterculture quickly points at Woodstock and says it takes from the culture.

One can assume that some in the counterculture recognized early on that there was potential for marketing the culture and its values. Perhaps someone in the counterculture made this recognition about Woodstock, and that is why the counterculture wanted monetary gains.

However, it still does not explain why a culture against capitalism would wish to involve itself more instead of trying to untwine itself from the system.

In another incident, Michael Lang worked late at night in the office for the festival. While listening to WBAI-FM, Lang recalls that DJ Bob Fass stated, “Word on the street says this festival is a rip-off! These promoters don’t care about the people. They just want to make a buck. The music is for the people. It should be free!”¹⁰⁶ Lang called Bob Fass and said:

Listen, do you think we’re here working at three in the morning because we don’t care about people? Do you think something this big can be put together without money? How would you pay for stages and doctors and bands and water and toilets and food and power and the million other things it’s taking to make this happen? *And* do it in a way that gives better than it gets? I’m talking about *fair exchange*. I firmly believe if we’re looking for more than that, the movement is not going anywhere!¹⁰⁷

Lang brings up good points about how the concert needs money to function. Due to the economic climate that the Western world has developed over time, it is no surprise that a large sum of money is needed to fund this project. Michael Lang states:

¹⁰⁴ Lang and George-Warren, 92-93.

¹⁰⁵ Lang and George-Warren, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Lang and George-Warren, 91.

¹⁰⁷ See note 106 above.

To help finance the bookings and our ever-increasing budget, we needed to get ticket sales underway. We hired Keith O'Connor, who'd worked at the Fillmore box office, to run ticketing for John and Joel. He set up a network of ticket outlets at boutiques and head shops, as well as a mail-order operation from the Woodstock Ventures offices uptown. We sold our very first advance tickets for \$6 each. Then we repriced them for \$7 for one day, \$13 for two days, and \$18 for three; we had coded tickets printed that would be difficult to counterfeit...In the first two weeks, we'd sell \$169,338 worth of tickets.¹⁰⁸

However, there are other avenues to raising money, such as donations. Strangely, Woodstock did not try to take any donations for the festival. Wes Pomeroy stated in regards to when the team acknowledged that the concert was going to be free:

I felt like I was letting them down, like somehow I had failed, but I had to be honest: I told John, 'There's not anything we can do about it- I can't protect your money,' and I suggested that if they wanted to, they could set up a couple of places where they encouraged people to donate. I thought that would be pretty effective, because people were feeling grateful. Some people were asking, 'Where do we give our money?' But for some reason, that wasn't carried forward.¹⁰⁹

Why would a festival promoting peace and love not try to exploit people's generosity? Before announcing that the festival would be free, Woodstock Ventures faced financial difficulties; oddly, they would not try to get what is essentially free money through donations. It would not be surprising to hear people of the counterculture donating to a festival, primarily if it evolved to a benefit show, where some proceeds go towards a chosen cause. Another avenue Woodstock Ventures took to gain funding was making the vendors pay a 300 dollar fee for their booths, along with the hope that since the tickets were a fair price, people would respect the gates and pay the fee.

Michael Lang was aware of the value of imagery and understood that the counterculture identified, or was identifiable, by a particular fashion. Lang recalls in *The Road to Woodstock*, when discussing John and Joel's image, that "Apparently, some at Wartoke thought their image as capitalists would detail our credibility with the counterculture—an element critical to our success. Artie also felt their image as straight businessmen would run counter to our

¹⁰⁸ Lang and George-Warren, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Lang and George-Warren, 176-177.

underground credibility.”¹¹⁰ Knowing that John and Joel symbolized the capitalist aspect of the festival, it was essential for them to ensure that their fashion did not hurt their target audience’s opinions and, thus, wallets.

As mentioned previously, Abbie Hoffman raises valid concerns regarding Woodstock Ventures' intentions surrounding the ideals of the counterculture, although these concerns do end in a surprising turn of events. In the book *The Road to Woodstock*, Michael Lang states in regards to crafting Woodstock that “My vision for the festival had evolved into a complex, three-dimensional picture encompassing multiple elements: physical and emotional, spiritual and practical, artistic and commercial.”¹¹¹ However, the keyword that may get skipped in this statement is Woodstock has a commercial aspect. How does that fit the counterculture persona? There is no commercial aspect in the counterculture ideology. The counterculture opposes capitalism. However, at Woodstock, the counterculture and capitalism coexist.

In *The Road to Woodstock*, when describing how he envisioned Woodstock, Michael states:

At Woodstock we would focus our energy on peace, setting aside the onstage discussion of political issues to just groove on what might be possible. It was a chance to see if we could create the kind of world for which we’d been striving throughout the sixties: That would be our political statement—proving that peace and understanding were possible and creating a testament to the value of the counterculture.¹¹²

If Michael Lang wanted Woodstock to be an actual demonstration of the counterculture, there would be no capitalist aspect to it. One is left to question whether Michael Lang saw more potential in the capitalization of the music festival industry or the values of the counterculture itself. If it is the latter, it leads one to question why one would try to market a culture against the industry trying to marketize.

¹¹⁰ Lang and George-Warren, 88.

¹¹¹ Lang and George-Warren, 79.

¹¹² Lang and George-Warren 53.

Conclusion

Woodstock associates itself with being the concert of all concerts. Ask any avid concertgoers what they are trying to embody or experience during the show, and it will most likely have some connotation to Woodstock. How did Woodstock receive this untouchable angelic bubble around it? As mentioned throughout the entire paper, Woodstock and Altamont share many similarities. Nevertheless, only Woodstock gets painted in a positive light, while Altamont is hardly remembered or remembered for its negative aspects. There are also many misconceptions and general confusion regarding the facts of Woodstock. Why can no one agree on how many police were present at Woodstock? There is confusion surrounding how many people died at Woodstock, if any, and no one can seem to agree on how the third person died. There are rumors that it was a drug overdose, a car accident, or an appendix burst. Why do we not celebrate the people who died at Woodstock? One could argue that they truly embody the peace and love of Woodstock because they died embracing those qualities, so we should celebrate them instead of trying to erase them from history.

There is also confusion regarding how many people were injured, how many miscarriages, and if anyone gave birth at Woodstock. There appears to be confusion about the total number of people who showed up. The number ranges from 300,000 to 500,000 people. Although there was a food shortage, people came together to share what they had, and communes helped to provide more food. Nevertheless, some attendees decided to steal from local farmers when there were other free options. Moreover, no one remembers that local farmers got screwed over by the attendees, even though some farmers donated food to Woodstock. Charles' *New York Times* interview of six Woodstock attendees highlights peer pressure from a group of people claiming to love. At times, fights or other violent acts could have happened, but

luckily, they did not. However, is it accurate to say that violence was nonexistent at Woodstock? As interviewee Bill suggests, if a fight could have easily erupted, then violence existed at some level in Woodstock; however, it existed at a minimum.

Popular culture is forever evolving, and the music industry hopped onto the trend of trying to make a profit because anything can make someone money; therefore, it is worth exploiting for a dollar. Bill Osbgery suggests that the post-war era helped the middle class generate new forms of entertainment through consumerism. Thus, capitalism and counterculture connect because modern consumerism is a product of the late 1960s counterculture era. Although counterculture does not claim capitalism, the two appear to be inseparable. As Taylor suggests, through the world's new-found accessibility through transportation and the internet, the potential for live shows was fully seen and realized as a commodity. The creators of Woodstock most likely want the misconceptions and opposing views to stay hidden so they can continue to capitalize on the idea of Woodstock. However, one will never honestly know how Michael Lang and John Roberts felt towards Woodstock, for the two have passed on. Woodstock aimed to fit the counterculture that was popular with the younger generation. However, if Woodstock were indeed a part of the counterculture movement, the tickets would have never had a price tag. Andrea Jain and Timothy Taylor identify that commodities can enter the free market. Although it was a free concert, Woodstock initially intended to be for profit. Woodstock still sold 150,000 tickets, and the creators declined to refund the people who purchased a ticket and did not get to see the show. Although Woodstock Ventures did claim bankruptcy after the festival, they still could have found a way to pay back the people who purchased a ticket and did not get to see the show. If Woodstock was not about the money, why have ticket sales and not give the money back

to the people begging for it? Although there are multiple challenges in addressing this question, it breaks down to not wanting to lose more money.

Michael Lang identifies commerce as an aspect of Woodstock. How does commerce fit into the American 1960's counterculture movement? Both Woodstock and Altamont profited from the documentaries filmed at the festivals. However, advertised as a free concert, Altamont had the potential to embody the counterculture movement vibe more than Woodstock until the violence erupted. Still, Altamont made a profit by filming a documentary about it, so it is still not fully counterculture. The show could have served as a way to promote their latest album, *Let It Bleed*, since that is how concerts worked at the time. Yet Monterey Pop is not associated with the commodification of the music industry as much as Woodstock, even though the festival filmed a documentary and made money from it. Could it be that Monterey Pop escaped being the golden standard of music festivals because it was a nonprofit event? It would appear that some level of consumerism is needed for festivals to achieve high status unless a tragic event is associated with it. The counterculture of the 1960s rejects commercialism, yet Woodstock created the model for future music festivals to follow.

While Woodstock's participants remember the event for peace and love, the festival had many complications. It is impressive that nothing too terrible happened at Woodstock, considering the concert was ill-prepared for the sheer mass amount of people. Large crowds at any show are hard to control, but a group full of rock fans on drugs could have ended differently. Is Woodstock remembered for being so grand because the worst-case scenarios did not happen? Woodstock and Altamont are portrayed too profoundly in the angelic and devil affiliations. Altamont's narrative is pictured to be darker than it actually was.

Furthermore, Woodstock is remembered in a lighter narrative than it actually was. What is still left to question is why the public remembers Woodstock for the good and Altamont for the bad, even though both concerts are relatively similar. Strangely, although Monterey Pop '67 is the founding father of music festivals, it is barely remembered. Comments made by attendees of Monterey Pop could be easily confused with Woodstock '69 because of how similar the two festivals were. Altamont '69 and Astroworld 2021 have many similarities, including the negative aura surrounding both. One is left to wonder if Camp Flog Gnaw and Burning Man will develop strong associations with the festivals. As for now, the respective communities for each festival remain relatively positive towards them. Therefore, one could state that Burning Man falls more in line with Woodstock, while I would say that CFG may fall somewhere between Woodstock and Altamont. More time is needed for CFG to develop its more mainstream approach with Tyler's rising popularity. Right now, the high level of consumerism at CFG obstructs the music. I did not need nor want a BMX bike with my ticket, but if my Super VIP ticket included all the amenities and benefits advertised, my opinion might differ.

At least in the festivals I have studied, the high level of consumerism at CFG is unique. The marketing tactic of using VIP and Super VIP exclusive gifts and perks shows the evolution of capitalism within music festivals. Even though festivals like Miami Pop Festival '68 and Woodstock '69 had booths for vendors to rent, I do not think it would compare to the market level at CFG. Since technology has evolved to let humankind shop from the comfort of their homes, that opened the possibility for festivals to sell their merchandise before the festival even starts. This essay is not to say that music festivals are terrible because capitalism overtook the idea but to make one more aware that not everything will be as advertised because the promoters behind a festival are selling the festival's concept, not selling the consumer a guaranteed good

time. I will stick to concerts because I find it easier to find the community since it is not as obstructed by the commodification of the festival. Although it is unclear whether Bethel Woods continues to profit from the concerts held there, the center still plays on the idea of Woodstock and displays a high level of consumerism. Therefore, this shows that Woodstock and Altamont were not counterculture because their legacies with hidden truths laid the foundation for the over-commodification of music festivals by prompting the euphoric feeling found at Woodstock.

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