

In the 9th grade, my history teacher brought in a boombox and a stack of photocopied pages. On it were the lyrics to “American Pie” by Don McLean. I had heard the song ever since I was a kid... my dad was a huge fan and I knew it by heart before he passed. He began the class by talking about the hidden meaning of lyrics and the value of song and poetry... and activism. We began breaking down the hidden meanings of the lyrics in that class, unveiling bits of history, impressions, injustices, and the lasting effects of historical moments hinted at in the song. I had known this song since I was a kid, knew the lyrics, yet I had never LEARNED the lyrics and what they meant. My ignorance wasn't an outlier; it was the norm: never so evident as Madonna's bastardization of the song, mutilating the relevance of the lyrics.

As I grew older, I got exposed to the hard, aggressive rock of Rage Against the Machine. For some of you, this will come as no surprise. My ears are burning with “Tommy's going off on RATM again.” Well, it was a defining moment in my life that's stayed with me past my early years into late adulthood. I got enthralled with the passion and aggression of the music and lyrics. It swept me up. Now, did I always know what the hell they were speaking for? Absolutely not! I was a kid. The lyrics and meaning stayed with me as I learned to appreciate the points made, the inspiration behind the songs, and the hidden meanings. It was like decoding and finding a treasure map to a hidden gem. Did I always agree with the messages in the songs? Absolutely not. I'm a peaceful, non-activist, and anti-communist. But did it influence my learning and form ME as a life-long learner? What do you think?

History within the discipline of Social Studies is an investigation, a reveal, into the moment we live in. Each reality is built on the one before. The ignorance of that leads us to make the mistakes those before us learned from... doomed to repeat avoidable catastrophies and to be better citizens participating in the global society. Or, at the bare minimum, keep from producing mindless, humiliating, bastardized remixes of valuable cultural songs.

