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Research Grant Application

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Project Title Trashland Adventures: Reimagining Postindustrial Detroit in Underground Music and Radical Politics, 1967-2013

Signed [Signature]

Date 02-01-2022

Supporting Materials and Instructions:

- ~ The proposal should include a brief project summary, a curriculum vitae, and citations to collections to be consulted at the Bentley Historical Library.
- ~ Two letters of recommendation should be sent directly to the Bentley Historical Library, from individuals who are familiar with the applicant's scholarly work.
- ~ Applications may be submitted via email to bentley-fellowships@umich.edu as one attachment or by surface mail to:

Research Fellowships
Bentley Historical Library
1150 Beal Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2113
USA

My dissertation, *Trashland Adventures: Reimagining Postindustrial Detroit in Underground Music and Radical Politics, 1967-2013*, explores the political and cultural movements that saw opportunity in Detroit during the decades following the city's infamous urban rebellion. Through an exploration of punk, techno, and anarchist subcultures, this work will bring into closer conversation the subfields of cultural history, urban history, and popular music studies to provide a genealogy of contemporary social movements and refute narratives suggesting that the 1980s were the nadir of leftist activism and of Detroit. By looking at the city's music history across genres alongside its history of political radicalism, I hope to demonstrate that people involved in music scenes and political activism used Detroit's postindustrial space to create what one scholar has called "otherwise possibilities"—the "infinite alternatives" to conditions structured by racism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism.¹ These possibilities can be seen in music and political protest as well as in the zines created and published by musicians, fans, artists, and activists. I argue these zines reveal punks, anarchists, and techno futurists as "organic intellectuals" who rethought the postindustrial city and created lived alternatives to the status quo.

In both popular narratives and the subfield of urban history, Detroit is portrayed as a symbol of failure. Historians have used Detroit to study the flaws of the U.S. real estate market, labor unions, and industrialization. My dissertation will refute this jaundiced narrative, arguing that rather than dismiss Detroit, city dwellers should look to its history of radical art and politics for ways to resist neoliberal disinvestment and reclaim the right to dignified life in the city. Historians combining urban and cultural history have demonstrated various ways the imagination has shaped the city. My work will join this conversation by showing how Detroiters creatively resisted predatory practices of capital and the state by reimagining their city's urban and economic crises. Through an examination of punk, techno, and anarchist subcultures, my dissertation will demonstrate that this imaginative

¹ Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

project was multiracial. Though some of their efforts had ambiguous results, including contributing to rising property values and gentrification, these dreamers laid plans for postindustrial futures that continue to inspire a contemporary generation of Detroit artists and activists. Scholars and activists have argued that Detroit is a “canary in the coalmine” for other cities, as the state of Michigan, Detroit’s civic leaders, and corporations have taken advantage of the city’s low-income, majority-Black population to experiment with neoliberal reforms that erode democracy and basic human rights.² Current urban residents facing such threats have much to learn from the generations of Detroiters who have been fighting this battle for decades.

The utopian dreams of postindustrial artists and activists can be seen in musical production and political protest as well as in the zines they created and published, which comprise my primary source base. As part of my research, I intend to document zines from Detroit’s underground music and political scenes, many of which are held in the private collections of zine-makers, musicians, and fans and have not been publicly archived. Using the open-source platform Omeka, I plan to create a digital archive of these little-seen publications to accompany my dissertation that will make them more widely accessible. In addition to these zines, my archival research will rely heavily on materials housed at University of Michigan libraries, including the Bentley and the Labadie Collection. The Bentley’s collections hold a variety of personal papers of figures who are important to the story of the mash-up of music and radical politics in postindustrial Detroit. Counterculture icon John Sinclair is the most famous example. Journalist Dan Sicko’s pioneering work on techno, which insisted the new genre be seen as part of a Black tradition, drew upon and furthered the arguments that Sinclair made about rock and roll. Harvey Ovshinsky’s papers will also be a treasure for me as I document the *Fifth Estate’s* transition from an underground newspaper into an explicitly anarchist publication,

² Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2017), 3.

guided by editor Peter Werbe, which helped foster a broader anarchist community in the city during the 1970s. This community included Fredy Perlman, the publisher of the periodical *Black & Red* as well as the radical press of the same name. Perlman and Werbe are two of the most important anarchist intellectuals of the late twentieth century and their work helps situate Detroit as a crucial nexus in the birth of contemporary social movements. Though most of the zines I am documenting have not entered “official” archives, the Bentley houses an exception with its collection of Jerry “Vile” Peterson’s papers. During the late 1970s, Peterson created a punk zine called *White Noise* before his more well-known humor magazine *Orbit*. This zine and his papers will help me bridge the gap between the underground press of the 1960s and the blossoming of Detroit-based zines that coincided with the 1980s hardcore punk scene. The Bentley additionally has an extensive archive of the *Detroit Metro Times*, which has since the early 1980s covered arts and culture in Detroit as the city’s “alternative” newspaper and is more likely to hold official press coverage of my research subjects than the city’s other newspapers. In engaging these sources, I hope to demonstrate that Black and white Detroiters imagined different postindustrial possibilities through art and activism in the late twentieth century and in doing so remade their city.

Bibliography

- Black & Red*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
The Metro Times, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Ovshinsky, Harvey, “Harvey Kurek Ovshinsky papers,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Sicko, Dan, “Dan Sicko papers,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Sinclair, John, et al., “John and Leni Sinclair papers,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Vile, Jerry. St. Mary, Rob, “Jerry Peterson ‘Jerry Vile’ Collection,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

JACQUI SAHAGIAN

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Education

- Ph.D. U.S. History, University of Virginia, 2019-present (expected 2025)
 Examination fields: 20th Century U.S. Cultural History, Black Diaspora History, Pop Music History
 Advisor: Dr. Kevin Gaines
- M.A. U.S. History, University of Virginia, 2021
 Thesis: “Reading the Seventies in *Creem* Magazine”
- M.A. Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, 2018
 Thesis: “The Same Old Blues Crap: Selling the Blues at Fat Possum Records”
 Advisor: Dr. Adam Gussow
- B.A. English and Creative Writing, University of Michigan, 2013
 Thesis: “Hooked”, a collection of short fiction
 Honors: *magna cum laude*

Awards and Fellowships

- 2021 Scholar’s Lab Praxis Program Fellowship in the Digital Humanities, University of Virginia Library
- 2021 Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Summer Research Grant, University of Virginia
- 2021 Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Council Research Grant, University of Virginia
- 2020 Virginia Humanities South Atlantic Studies Fellow
- 2018 Lucille and Motee Daniels Prize for Best Thesis, University of Mississippi
- 2017-2018 Graduate Writing Fellowship, Department of Writing and Rhetoric, University of Mississippi

- 2017 Lucille and Motee Daniels Prize for Best First-Year Paper, University of Mississippi
- 2017 Southern Foodways Alliance Oral History Fellowship
- 2013 Hopwood Award in Undergraduate Creative Nonfiction, University of Michigan
- 2012 Hopwood Award in Undergraduate Fiction, University of Michigan
- 2012 Roy W. Cowden Fellowship, University of Michigan
- 2012 Jeffrey L. Weisberg Memorial Prize in Poetry, University of Michigan

Selected Presentations and Conferences

- 2022 “Soul Music of the Suburbs’: Embracing the Deindustrialized City in Detroit Hardcore,” American Political History Institute, Boston University, Boston, MA
- 2018 “The Same Old Blues Crap: Framing the Blues from Race Records to Fat Possum,” Mississippi Historical Society, Jackson, MS
- 2018 “The Same Old Blues Crap: Fat Possum Records’ Matthew Johnson and the Selling of the Contemporary Blues,” Southern Music Symposium, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
- 2017 “The Same Old Blues Crap: Fat Possum Records’ Matthew Johnson and the Selling of the Contemporary Blues,” International Conference on the Blues, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS
- 2017 “R.L. Burnside’s Blues and the Marketing of Southern Black Masculinity at Fat Possum Records,” Sarah ISOM Center Student Gender Conference, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS

Selected Publications

- 2021 UVa Scholar’s Lab Blog, “Zine-Making as Critical DH Pedagogy,” “The Romantics Didn’t Want Me to Code”
- 2020 Encyclopedia Virginia, “Virginia State Song”
- 2019 Mississippi Encyclopedia Online, selected entries

- 2018 Living Blues No. 253, profiles of Robert Kimbrough Sr. and Trenton Ayers
- 2017 Living Blues No. 251, “Blues News” on Ann Arbor Blues Festival
- 2017 Living Blues No. 250, profile of Lee Williams, “Clarksdale’s Next Generation of Blues”

Teaching

Teaching Assistant with Sections

- Spring 2021 AAS 1020: Introduction to African American and African Studies, University of Virginia, Dr. Ashon Crawley
- January term 2021 HIST/RELG 2559: Whiteness: The History of a Racial Category, University of Virginia, Dr. Andrew Kahrl and Dr. Jalane Schmidt
- Fall 2020 AAS 1010: Introduction to African American and African Studies, University of Virginia, Dr. Kwame Otu

Teaching Assistant without Sections/Grader

- Spring 2022 AAS 2500: Music, Politics & Social Movements, University of Virginia, Dr. Kevin Gaines
- Spring 2017 SST 102: Introduction to Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, Dr. Adam Gussow and Dr. Catarina Passidomo
- Fall 2016 SST 101: Introduction to Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, Dr. Darren Grem and Dr. Jodi Skipper

Workshops

- July 2017 Southern Foodways Alliance Oral History workshop, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Work

- Summer 2020 Editorial Assistant, *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, Charlottesville, VA
- 2017 Editorial Assistant, *Living Blues* magazine, Oxford, MS
- 2014-2016 Freelance writer, *No Country for New Nashville*, Nashville, TN

Service

- 2016-2019 Docent, Burns Belfry Museum and Multicultural Center, Oxford, MS