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**Strange Days:
The American Media
Debates The Doors, 1966-1971**

Maximillian F. Grascher

Introduction

Throughout the course of American history, there have been several prominent social and political revolutions carried out by citizens dissatisfied with the existing American institutions run by the government and its civil servants. Of these revolutions, Vietnam War and civil rights protest among youth in the 1960s was of the most influential, shaping American society in the decades to come. With US involvement in Vietnam escalating and the call for African-American civil rights becoming more insistent by the year, thousands of America's youth took to the streets to protest the country's foreign and domestic policies and to challenge the US government, much to the anger of America's older generations. Artists played a critical role in the unrest, including musicians who encouraged a reformation of American society's established norms through revolution.

Of these many talents, one of the most unique was the rock band The Doors. Founded in Venice, California, in 1965, the band was made up of four individuals in their early twenties, all from various social backgrounds: lead singer Jim Morrison, keyboardist Ray Manzarek, guitarist Robbie Krieger, and drummer John Densmore. Like many musicians in the 1960s, The Doors stressed the need for change in government policies and the social values they upheld, but they did so in a way that was very *unlike* other popular acts: through a newfound brand of music labeled acid rock—due to its connection with hallucinogenic drugs—serving as role models to protesting youth most particularly through their live performances.

Because they were so unique, The Doors were frequently covered by a wide variety of popular American media sources that never failed to mention Jim Morrison as the face of the group that was a powerful representation of the anti-establishment, free-

spirited, drug-using youth of 1960s America. From the formation of the band up to the point of Morrison's death, publications such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, run by seasoned executives of the older generations and emblematic of the corporate establishment, carried stories that, aside from a few live performance reviews, routinely criticized the band's politically rebellious albums and performances. This is mainly attributed to the perception of The Doors as a threat to public stability and safety in the eyes of older or more conservative Americans who were uninvolved in the protest of fragile contemporary issues. In contrast to the coverage by these newspaper publications, national magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Life* reported on The Doors in a favorable light from the time of the band's founding to the coverage of Morrison's death, revealing their closer identification to the American youth's political ideologies and the important effect rock and roll had on such contemporary changes of the time. Once Morrison died, however, newspaper publications such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* portrayed the singer and his band as inspirational poets and performers that played an influential role in public youth protest of the 1960s pertaining to the issues of the Vietnam War and civil rights. Such a positive shift in portrayal can be attributed to Morrison and The Doors no longer posing a threat to the order US government officials and traditional newspaper journalists believed in as a method to control the functions of American society.

Often in historical coverage of the 1960s, scholars tend to classify rock and roll as a minor element involved in popular protest pertaining to broader political issues. My analysis of media attention to The Doors, however, reveals why it was the exact opposite in 1960s America: Jim Morrison and his group personified the cultural changes of their

era and played an important role in inspiring social and political change among America's youth, most notoriously through live performances. The evolution of the band and the militant protest movements it encouraged are reflected by the media through the initial rise of The Doors in California, their sharp decline on the American music scene, and finally their return to rock and roll stardom, followed by the death of Jim Morrison.

Part I. The Origin of The Doors

In August 1964, the US Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution at the request of President Lyndon B. Johnson, establishing an increased US troop presence in Vietnam in order to maintain "international peace and security" in the region.¹ Jim Morrison was the eldest son of a decorated naval commander, Admiral George Morrison, present at the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin in which the American government declared North Vietnamese forces had fired on a US fleet, resulting in the resolution, provoking the Johnson Administration to send more troops to Vietnam.² A year later, when Jim Morrison graduated from UCLA, not much had changed. The number of troops being sent to Southeast Asia was only increasing. However, for many young, white, middle-class Americans, escaping the military draft that would be imposed by the US government was far from difficult.

While a small portion of American men fled to Canada, others were able to avoid military service if they were enrolled as students or had family connections through powerful figures in American politics. As is the case in many military conflicts, racial

¹ John Robert Greene, *America in the Sixties* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 124.

² Jerry Hopkins and Daniel Sugerman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1980), 50.

minorities were more heavily enlisted through the military draft, as many low-income African Americans and Latino Americans had limited educational options and little social mobility. Political connections able to help young men of draft age to escape combat were foreign to most who were not white.

Jim Morrison was not one of these minorities, allowing him to spend his young adult life on the beach of Venice, California, where he would work on poetry while tripping on LSD, eventually providing the inspiration for The Doors and their rise to stardom. Growing up in a military family, Morrison was accustomed to a sense of white superiority; there were very few African-American admirals in the US Navy, a position in which his father excelled. Morrison, his mother, and two younger siblings were often forced to relocate around the United States. Morrison spent time growing up in California, Texas, Virginia, and Florida, all areas in which whites were especially elevated above the large presence of minorities economically, and in turn by social class. After briefly attending Florida State University (located near his family's home),³ he decided to leave his father's military roots behind and transfer to the University of California Los Angeles, where he would major in a field that was about as far away from US military service as one could get: film studies.⁴ While attending UCLA's film school, he met Ray Manzarek, a talented musician who was inspired by Morrison after reading some of the poetry he had written.⁵ Originating in his early college days, Morrison voiced opinions that were quite contrary to the norms of society, specifically pertaining to the world's political issues. For his final project at UCLA, Jim was given the task of making

³ Stephen Davis, *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

a film of his own. It was quite out of the ordinary, characterized by “porn, drugs, television, Nazis, sex, music, and irony.”⁶ Morrison’s film was one that represented elements of complete chaos in the eyes of established societal norms. Although many of his classmates and professors viewed the film as a disgrace, Ray Manzarek would later applaud the artistic ability of Morrison’s film.⁷

Shortly after graduating—despite the subpar “D” grade he received on his final film project—⁸Morrison told Manzarek of his desire to travel to New York City to meet filmmaker Jonas Mekas and create poetic alternative films.⁹ This, however, was not his destiny, as he found it difficult to leave the drug-indulgent environment of Venice Beach he enjoyed so much. Despite his father being a decorated Naval admiral, a military career was not in Morrison’s cards either; he easily avoided the draft like so many recent college graduates by telling his recruitment officer he often engaged in homosexual activities.¹⁰ Morrison rarely spoke to his parents at this time, especially about his postgraduate plans, much to the dismay of his Navy-disciplined father. Instead, Morrison roamed Venice Beach without direction, a characteristic of the emerging hippie movement in California that accompanied hallucinogenic drug use, through the chemically engineered acid LSD made famous by psychologist Timothy Leary.¹¹ Unlike the upper classes, youth within the counterculture rejected the use of alcohol and nicotine. In their eyes, those substances hindered the mind. In contrast, marijuana and LSD were thought to enhance the senses and make one more aware of the natural environment.¹² This concept fit perfectly into

⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hopkins and Sugerman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, 52.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 76.

¹¹ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 144.

¹² Ibid.

Jim Morrison's synchronization with the constantly evolving American world around him. Morrison would often walk along the beach in Venice while hallucinating on LSD to experience his heightened world. Coincidentally, fellow UCLA film student Ray Manzarek was on the beach one of these days in the summer of 1965. He caught up with Morrison, who told him he had recently written some songs while tripping on LSD, and asked Morrison to sing a few of them. Hesitant at first, Jim sang near-finished versions of eventual tracks "Moonlight Drive"¹³ and "My Eyes Have Seen You."¹⁴ Ray was impressed and proposed that they start a band. Morrison had the same idea and suggested they call the group "The Doors," inspired by Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*.¹⁵ When Jim wrote to his father telling him he was starting up a rock and roll band as the lead singer, Admiral Morrison replied to him stating that he should focus on a career that could have a positive impact on American society, notifying his son that he had no musical talent.¹⁶ Little did he know, a new chapter in rock and roll had just been born.

¹³ See Chuck Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over: The Stories Behind Every Song* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000), 53-54, 55-56. "Moonlight Drive" and "My Eyes Have Seen You" were the first songs Jim Morrison created for the band. Living on a Venice rooftop in 1965 after graduating from UCLA, Morrison spent his nights observing the beach in front of him, with the moon reflecting on the calm Venice water as cars drove by on the busy street below, sparking his inspiration for the former, a mystical love song in which he talks about swimming to the moon with his love, hence the line "let's swim out tonight, love."

"My Eyes Have Seen You" is similarly laced with the theme of love, but carries a more sinister mood to it. The song describes the observations made by a peeping tom lusting for the girl he is spying on. The lines, "my eyes have seen you, turn and stare, fix your hair, move upstairs," portray the spying man as intrigued by the beautiful woman he watches, yet also tell the listener he can't have access to her. Deemed not lively enough to spark intrigue from a live crowd, the two tracks were put on the backburner by the band until they had gained fame through the hits on their first album. This may explain why the two songs have messages of love, yet also carry sinister moods, appearing on *Strange Days*, a much darker album that represented the beginnings of violent outbreaks on American streets.

¹⁴ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 77.

¹⁵ Hopkins and Sugerman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, 70.

¹⁶ Tom DiCillo, *The Doors: When You're Strange*, Film, directed by Tom DiCillo (2009; Los Angeles: Rhino Entertainment, 2010), Documentary.

Originally, The Doors were made up of Ray Manzarek, Jim Morrison, and Ray's two brothers. However, being the central organizer of the newly formed band, Manzarek wanted to add a skilled drummer who shared his view of creating a new musical style. As Stephen Davis discusses in his work *Jim Morrison: Life, Death, Legend*, Manzarek was greatly influenced by the movement known as "transcendental meditation," a form of spiritual relaxation that served as an alternative to psychedelic euphoria for many involved in the Los Angeles music scene.¹⁷ It was in a meditation class Manzarek attended that he met John Densmore, who would soon become the drummer for The Doors. Despite his interest in transcendental meditation, Densmore also shared an interest in LSD, though not to the extent Morrison did. It was also around this time that Morrison met his long-time on-and-off girlfriend, Pamela Courson. Courson, who was from Weed, California, was also the child of a member of the US Navy, creating an instant connection between the two.¹⁸ She was deeply interested in the California drug culture like Morrison, frequently using heroin. Courson continued to play a critical part of Morrison's life from the point they met until the moment he died, often watching The Doors record their hits in the studio or watching backstage as Morrison put on his classic shows characterized by chaos and rebellion.

Although the band had recorded a demo tape with its current members in the Manzarek garage, none of the major record companies in Los Angeles would listen to it.¹⁹ Most record companies at the time were interested in music that teenagers would identify with. The Beach Boys had released their 1963 album *Surfer Girl*, which painted

¹⁷ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 80.

¹⁸ Hopkins and Sugerman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, 68.

¹⁹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 85.

California as a hotspot for chasing beauties, driving nice cars, and hitting the beach.²⁰ Other acts such as The Beatles released early work that served as an anthem to the youth pursuit of girls and love.²¹ Although musicians such as Bob Dylan introduced new iterations of folk music that preached a more political message, and by 1967 even The Beach Boys and The Beatles were releasing music that advocated political change through a closing of the gap between the rich and poor,²² The Doors' music was still not identifiable enough with youthful American audiences to attract attention from the bigger record companies. Morrison's music and lyrics were too poetic for mainstream audiences, and The Doors needed a hit that resonated with youth culture to get the band a wider audience—and the attention of the recording industry. This prompted Ray's two brothers to leave The Doors; like John Densmore, the two questioned if the way in which Morrison worked as an artist could lead to success.

Densmore brought his friend, guitarist Robby Krieger, to audition for the band. Just as Manzarek had met Densmore, Densmore had met Krieger in a meditation class, although Robby had upper-class swagger, driving a nice car and paying for most things with a credit card, a rarity for someone in his twenties during that time.²³ Like Morrison, Krieger was unlikely to be drafted to Vietnam: he was white, wealthy, and educated. The two got along great when Densmore introduced Krieger to LSD. After this turn on, Robby Krieger mastered the synchronization of psychedelic euphoria with rock and roll. When Jim Morrison heard Krieger's distinctive slides throughout the band's rehearsal of

²⁰ Greene, *American in the Sixties*, 153.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²² *Ibid.*, 155.

²³ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 85.

“Moonlight Drive,” he became mesmerized by the guitarist’s incredible ability to create a unique, mind-changing musical experience. He insisted Krieger use these neck slides on *every* one of The Doors’ songs.²⁴

After moving to Krieger’s house to continue practicing, The Doors were stuck in limbo and needed to record more. Morrison took charge and demanded that everyone write a song they could record. When they returned to rehearsal, Robby Krieger presented them with what would put The Doors on the national map, “Light My Fire.” With it, The Doors now had a possible key to the Los Angeles music scene.²⁵ After distributing their demo tape to all major record companies in the LA area, The Doors got their first break through Columbia Records, the same company that represented the major acts of Bob Dylan and The Byrds. Columbia president Billy James gave the band their shot, signing them to a six-month deal that said if they created something worthwhile, one of Columbia’s producers would work with them to create an album that generated some revenue. It also provided the band with state-of-the-art equipment that enhanced the sound of Ray Manzarek’s organ and Robby Krieger’s psychedelic riffs.²⁶

The tracks “Soul Kitchen” and “The Crystal Ship” soon followed, although these tunes were not lively enough to grasp the attention of a youth audience on the radio or in a club.²⁷ California clubs favored bands made up of conventional musical roles: lead

²⁴ Ibid., 86.

²⁵ Ibid., 88-89.

²⁶ Ibid., 91-92.

²⁷ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music’s Over*, 27-28. “Soul Kitchen” was a track written by Morrison to pay tribute to a diner called Olivia’s in which the singer ate his only meals in 1965. At the time, Morrison’s diet consisted mainly of LSD, resulting in his ragged, starved appearance. The tune is remarkably similar to a Kim Fowley song called “The Trip,” which represents the psychedelic state of mind on the Sunset Strip in 1965. Morrison’s use of a trippy bass line in accordance with his lyrics about his favorite diner portrays his overwhelming love of acid as his main source of fuel needed to create music and lyrics that portrayed the LA youth scene of the time. “The Crystal Ship” is another Morrison song that creates a dreamy scene for its audience. A standout line from the song reads “when we get back, I’ll drop a

singer, guitarist, drummer, and bass player. To owners, bands with these personnel had greater presence on stage and could draw a crowd. Although The Doors auditioned a handful of bassists, none of them seemed to fit in with the band's culture. After flunking an audition at a club, Ray Manzarek discovered that the provided organ had a keyboard bass that could be played by the left hand as the right played the melody. Now The Doors needed no bass player; Manzarek would fill that role, a decision that distinguished the band's sound from any other of the era. While none of the members could afford the high-end piece of equipment, Robby Krieger's father wrote his son a check for it, showcasing the way in which white America's wealth played a role in kickstarting a band as rebellious and anti-adult as The Doors.²⁸

Any band that wanted to make it in Los Angeles needed to establish themselves in the downtown club scene. Now that they had their bass player, The Doors began playing regularly on the Sunset Strip, the main downtown hotspot for the city's youth to catch the newest bands and figures that would potentially carry on the spirit of youth rebellion. They began playing at an average club called the London Fog, in which they gathered a local following. As the band played at different clubs and private parties around the Los Angeles area, their fan base grew, making them a regular name in LA. This occurred simultaneously with the development of tunes such as "The End," "When the Music's Over," and "The Alabama Song (Whisky Bar)."²⁹ "Light My Fire" and "Break On

line," referring to Morrison's frequent use of LSD to achieve the feelings of euphoria many young Americans on the Sunset Strip eventually involved in the "Summer of Love" sought.

²⁸ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 94.

²⁹ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 37-39. "The End" is especially important in understanding the band's and more specifically Morrison's early views on America's domestic issues. With rioting and militant action increasing among youth anti-war and civil rights groups that questioned government policies, the fabrics of American society showed their first signs of decay. In order to portray this decay, Morrison wrote "The End" depicting the narrative of the Greek tragedy of Oedipus, who unknowingly murders his father and marries his mother. First in live performances and later when The

Through (To the Other Side)” were already established tunes that inspired audiences to seek an alternative state of mind in harmony with a culture of love, something The Beach Boys had done to initially get noticed.³⁰ It would not be long before the band did make their way into what was debatably the strip’s biggest club, the Whisky A Go Go, further providing the quartet with greater exposure to the world of performing and the music industry.

After the London Fog had closed for financial reasons, Jim Morrison began interacting with a young woman by the name of Ronnie Haran, responsible for booking and promoting bands at the Whisky. She convinced her boss to hire them as a weekly staple after they performed well at an audition set.³¹ It was the start of The Doors representing the culture American youth embraced during the 1960s: complete freedom of action paired with rebellion and a disregard for authority. Stephen Davis states in his

Doors would record their first record, Morrison screamed the lyrics, “Father? Yes, son. I want to kill you. Mother? I want to...fuck you!” to climax the song. As Oedipus learns the truth of his reality in the tragedy, he gauges his own eyes out and his life is forever ruined. Morrison’s LSD-inspired take on this story served to many in his audience as a metaphor for what he viewed as an American social order that would collapse in the coming years, with young Americans engaging in shocking acts (often inspired by the singer in concert) that cause its collapse, similar to the way Oedipus’ actions cause his own downfall. “When the Music’s Over” served a similar purpose in the band’s many live performances. Morrison’s lyric, “well the music is your special friend, dance on fire as it intends,” represented his belief that America’s existing social structures were on the verge of collapse. He encouraged his audience to use the band’s tunes in sync with his actions to rebel like they were “dancing on fire.” There would be nothing peaceful about their protest (“dance”) on American streets, but it was necessary in order to push for change in American domestic and foreign policy.

³⁰ See *Ibid.*, 26, 30-31. Both “Break On Through (To the Other Side)” and “Light My Fire” represented the side of The Doors’ early music that channeled into the “Summer of Love” in California and the experiencing of alternate perceptions of the world, unlike “The End.” Morrison wrote the former as his experience with a girlfriend who used psychedelics to experience alternative senses and perceptions, hence the lyric “she gets high!” throughout the course of the track. “Light My Fire” portrays a similar scene of love between a man and a woman in which they find each other spiritually through psychedelic drug use, but is slower-paced compared to “Break on Through (To the Other Side).” Morrison yelping, “you know that I would be a liar, if I was to say to you, girl, we couldn’t get much higher,” represents the achieved state of intimacy with the aid of LSD. It should be noted that while both tracks reference drug use, The Doors never blatantly refer to using drugs in either song, something Morrison and Manzarek stressed, explaining that singing “higher” in their songs could mean the use of anything to achieve a state of heightened senses and perceptions of the world.

³¹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 111-112.

work that “a new generation of kids began jamming the intersection of Sunset and Clark on weekend evenings, spilling into the streets, blocking traffic, trying to get to see The Doors.”³² The Doors were the ideal band for California’s youth to express feelings of euphoria and love in combination with protest and rebellion.

Despite their growing popularity on the LA music scene, nothing was happening with Columbia, prompting the band to leave the label yet continue playing on the strip.³³ By the summer of 1966, The Doors had been performing at the Whisky A Go Go for three months. As the band performed one night, the president of Elektra Records in New York, Jac Holzman, walked into the Whisky. He represented Love, at the time the biggest band playing regularly at the venue. After they played their set, he was convinced by Love to spend several nights at the club watching The Doors. Although at first not intrigued, on the fifth night The Doors performed “The Alabama Song (Whisky Bar),” originally a Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht German opera song, leaving Holzman stunned with the band’s ability to warp such a different genre into rock. He immediately called Love’s producer, Paul Rothchild, and told him to get on a plane to Los Angeles.³⁴ After witnessing a set at the Whisky, Elektra Records offered the band five thousand dollars for three albums and a five percent royalty.³⁵ After consulting multiple sources, Ray Manzarek accepted the offer. The Doors began recording their first album in Los Angeles a month later.

³² Ibid., 120.

³³ Ibid., 105-106.

³⁴ Ibid., 126-127.

³⁵ Ibid., 129.

As their first album, titled *The Doors*, was released in early 1967, the record's hit singles released in the spring of 1967 coincided perfectly with the "Summer of Love" and heightening tensions both in Southeast Asia and at home concerning the Civil Rights Movement. "Light My Fire," "Break On Through (To the Other Side)," and "The Crystal Ship" sent The Doors popularity soaring among America's youth.³⁶ They were tunes that represented sexual awakening accompanied by an expansion of the senses and mind, with traces of widespread rebellion against mainstream society, a society Morrison believed was on the brink of collapse and chaos. Like the youth their music was tailored to, all members of The Doors were using LSD, marijuana, and other recreational drugs. Jim Morrison spent a majority of his time tripping on acid, helping him cope with The Doors' rise. Morrison allegedly took LSD daily and even managed to get his hands on a huge stash of extremely potent acid concocted by the biggest LSD producer in California.³⁷ He and The Doors transferred this psychedelic state of mind into a unique brand of rock and roll, at a time when youth in the United States began to strongly oppose figures of authority.

Such opposition to authority translated to young Americans of all backgrounds. While the "Summer of Love" took place in well-off cities and suburbs of white America, there was also chaos sprouting in poor economic regions of the country and college campuses, a chaos Morrison revealed frequently in live performances and in the band's second studio album. Riots in poor African-American urban neighborhoods ran rampant. One of the most infamous occurred in July 1967, when authorities raided five illegal nightclubs in Detroit. African Americans responded by setting fire to the city. Although

³⁶ Ibid., 174.

³⁷ Ibid., 87.

at first hesitant, President Johnson dispatched over 4,700 federal troops to the city; they proved highly ineffective, however, as those sent carried unloaded weapons. After the rioting was finally put down, 43 Americans were dead, only one being a military casualty, and over 7,200 arrested.³⁸ American air strikes on the North Vietnamese also escalated during this period, angering the many Americans that opposed the war.

Beginning in 1966, Pamela Courson revealed how Morrison was having awful nightmares about the bombings, stating how it would burn through his flesh and the Vietnamese people around him. Morrison watched the bloodshed televised on every major American news station.³⁹ President Johnson simultaneously ordered Operation Ranch Hand into effect, which called for US aircrafts to dump chemical herbicides on the jungle terrain, with the intention of limiting the cover North Vietnamese and Vietcong sought in the jungle.⁴⁰ Despite the thousands of pounds of chemicals dropped, the tactic barely made a difference in destroying the mass amounts of vegetation present. In addition, US planes dropped the chemicals on their own troops, not realizing its physically harmful effects until troops starting exhibiting symptoms weeks later.⁴¹

As early as October 1967, traditional American media sources, run by adults unfamiliar with youth counterculture and the rebellion it embraced, could already be seen characterizing The Doors as a negative influence on American youth, encouraging drug use and social protest. *Los Angeles Times* journalist Jeffrey C. Alexander wrote in an article dating back to this time period that The Doors were “the world’s first and most

³⁸ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 82-83.

³⁹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 159.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

famous psychedelic musicians” and “the prototype of the ‘acid group.’”⁴² When Alexander interviewed the band and mentioned that drugs was a common point of reference in their songs, Morrison and Manzarek’s responses characterized the spirit of the second half of the decade. Morrison quickly denied specific reference to drug use asking Alexander to “name one song that mentions dope. About drugs or anything else, I think everybody should do what they want, that’s all.”⁴³ Manzarek then noted that “whatever the individual has to do to get those inner feelings out is great. Drink, smoke, meditate, any one of a million things.”⁴⁴ Although the American media and politicians might have automatically assumed their music was about mind-expanding experiences, The Doors themselves did not publicly endorse drug use as part of their music. Although a lyric in “Break on Through (To the Other Side)” has Morrison screaming “she gets high!” multiple times, and in “Light My Fire” he calmly sings “if I was to say to you, girl we couldn’t get much higher,” Morrison and Manzarek did not want drugs to be the band’s primary characterization. If their music helped achieve a state of enlightenment for the American public with the accompaniment of hallucinogenic drugs, the band would not protest it. To Morrison, Manzarek, Krieger, and Densmore, the more important aspect of their music was to encourage their audience to call for change in American foreign and domestic policy through meaningful action. Traditional American media publications, politicians, and the older generations did not understand this approach. In their view, living properly was about abstaining from drugs, getting a proper education,

⁴² Jeffrey C. Alexander, “‘Psychedelic’ Handle for Doors,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1967.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

dressing conservatively and working on Wall Street; there was no place for drug use, long hair, and following bands across the country in communal camp sites.

As the band's second studio album, *Strange Days*, began production in May 1967, the band's popularity continued to grow. The Doors returned to the Whisky A Go that month to perform a series of shows with The Byrds, who had been an inspiration for each and every member of the quartet. Unexpectedly, The Byrds cancelled at the last minute, making The Doors the center of attention. *Los Angeles Times* writer Pete Johnson, in attendance at the band's May 18, 1967 show, reported that The Doors' music "is consistently spirited but sometimes too raw for comfort and the symbolism of their lyrics frequently borders on tastelessness."⁴⁵ Although his article at times compliments the band's unique sound, it also is critical of the band's performance and the messages they conveyed, like reviews in many traditional American newspapers. Johnson disliked the fact that their lyrics encouraged youth to question America's existing social order, characterizing them as "tasteless."⁴⁶ Their music was not a straightforward tonic of "proper" American societal values, like the pop music of artists such as Tony Bennett or Doris Day. They were not clean-cut young men in suits like the early Beatles, nor quiet folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. The Doors, in particular Jim Morrison, were considered the extreme in terms of inciting social rebellion through the medium of rock and roll performance. Although other lead singers like Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones brought a similar chaos and energy to his band's concerts, neither he nor any other counterculture musician incited crowds to riot against the American government and

⁴⁵ Pete Johnson, "Door Rattle Hinges at Whisky-a-GoGo," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1967.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

police like Morrison did, making The Doors particularly unique and threatening to journalists like Johnson.

Such combatant action would not reach a wider American youth audience until The Doors left California and ventured to other areas of the country associated with widespread protest concerning the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement. Student populations in cities on the east coast, more intellectually lively and politically progressive because of their academic atmospheres, looked past California's "Summer of Love" and took action through militant anti-war protests on college campuses or sit-ins of university or government buildings. New Haven, Connecticut, home to prominent Ivy League school Yale University, was of the first to take part in this type of action, providing The Doors with the perfect environment to use their performance to provoke militant action against the police officers that enforced the policies of the US government. Such an influence would be seen when the band played their most controversial show to date at the city's New Haven Arena in December of 1967, only a taste of what was to come from Morrison in the future.

Part II. New Haven & Clashes with Authority

Jim Morrison and The Doors' prominent battle with American authority and the older generations began when the band started touring outside of Los Angeles and giving performances in places that exposed them to a wider national audience. This propelled their fame to a higher level and served as the initial point in which figures of authority would classify them as a band representative of protest against government policy in Southeast Asia and on American soil, especially after witnessing Jim Morrison's

rebellious actions. The first of these actions came on one of the most popular American variety shows of the era and later in concert in New Haven, Connecticut.

As “Light My Fire” continued to climb the Billboard charts, eventually hitting number one and staying there for three weeks, the song landed The Doors a gig on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, popular among the American public. However, this performance would be nothing like that of The Beatles, four Liverpudlians with bowl cuts and polished suits, several years prior. Rather, The Doors would take the Sunset Strip to live television, something Ed Sullivan was not prepared for. Sullivan represented everything The Doors and the counterculture were not: clean cut, professional, wealthy, middle-aged. While Sullivan featured what would become some of the most relevant musical acts in the anti-authority movement on his show, he was able to force bands like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to perform the way he wanted, censored for his “proper” American viewers. Jim Morrison’s similar English counterpart of a lead singer, Mick Jagger, known for his jubilant movements on stage and crazy antics like Morrison, was forced to recede into his shell.⁴⁷ Only Bob Dylan had refused to submit to this censorship, walking off the show in 1963, to the great approval of the counterculture community.⁴⁸ When Sullivan’s producer walked into The Doors’ dressing room, he strolled over to Morrison and told him that he wanted the singer to change the lyric “girl we couldn’t get much higher” in “Light My Fire” to “girl we couldn’t get much better,” because the

⁴⁷ See Stephen Davis, *Old Gods Almost Dead: The 40-Year Odyssey of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 186. When The Rolling Stones made their fourth appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1967, Sullivan told Mick Jagger to change the lyric “let’s spend the night together” in the song of the same name to “let’s spend some time together,” which the singer complied with.

⁴⁸ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 153.

former signified drug use. Ray Manzarek assured the producer the band would play the song the way Ed Sullivan wanted it.⁴⁹

Morrison, however, was unpredictable and disliked when people told him what to do and how to act, much like the generation he represented on his records and live performances. He was an advocate of free speech, a constitutional right frequently the focus of antagonism between young activists and the US government and police officers in the 1960s. When The Doors did take the stage, Morrison said “higher” two times, infuriating Sullivan and his producer. When the producer notified the band after their performance that, if Morrison had not said “higher” they would have been on six more times, Morrison famously replied: “Hey, man, so what? We just *did* Ed Sullivan.”⁵⁰

This point in the band’s history may be regarded as the first public protest staged by the four, but more specifically Morrison. Although only a taste of the rebellion against authority that would feature in New Haven, Connecticut, a few months later, Morrison did what youth across the country had begun to do to assure their voices would be heard. As early as 1965, teenagers had begun to protest the government’s actions. In Des Moines, Iowa, high school and college students took it upon themselves to wear black armbands to class in support of peace talks in Southeast Asia as well as to honor fallen American troops. School administrators feared disruption, suspending several of the students when they carried through with their plan.⁵¹ American youth started to fight back, not just through drug use, but public action. On the Ed Sullivan Show, Morrison

⁴⁹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 203.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵¹ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 76.

challenged the social hierarchy that Ed Sullivan and other powerful adults believed they controlled by escalating protest through action and refusing to change the original lyrics.

A few months after The Doors played their first and last show on Ed Sullivan, they traveled to New Haven, Connecticut, to play in front of a sold-out crowd of teenagers and young adults. Many in the audience were Yale University students and members of SDS, who in the week prior to the show clashed with police officers after they attempted to break up an anti-Vietnam War protest.⁵² The Doors entered the major concert scene just as student militancy had begun to establish its foundation in the protest against Vietnam and for civil rights. Several months prior to the show, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Benjamin Spock, and Carl Oglesby conducted a news conference to establish Vietnam Summer, a protest movement designed to incorporate a broad range of constituents, from teenagers to college students to liberals to more seasoned leftists, into the peaceful antiwar movement.⁵³ In reality, it opened the door for more radical aspects of anti-war activism.

Before the show kicked off that December night in 1967, Morrison met a woman from a nearby Connecticut university and took her backstage to a shower stall. A New Haven Police Department officer, not knowing this was the lead singer of the show's headlining band, told Morrison and the student to get out of the backstage area. An exchanging of words led the cop to pull out a can of mace and spray Morrison in the eyes, causing him to scream. After the police force realized it was Morrison who had been sprayed, the officer apologized and, instead of arresting Morrison, he let the show

⁵² Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 213-214.

⁵³ Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 182.

begin. As the band dove into “Backdoor Man,” Morrison began telling what had happened earlier that night in the shower stall. His monologue fit perfectly into the song, written as a metaphor for a sexually aggressive man who penetrates his lover from behind, granting the man a sense of superiority. He referred to the cop that had maced him as “a little blue man in a little blue cap” who “brought out this little black can of somethin’ . . . then he sprayed it in my eyes.”⁵⁴ As Morrison sung to his audience regarding his status as a “true” man, he simultaneously compared the officer who maced him as the complete opposite. The officer was “little” and needed mace to gain control. Morrison took the opportunity in front of the youthful crowd of militant student war protestors to demoralize an agent of the US government’s domestic order. It was not just the singer speaking out against authority and using his theatrics to create chaos in concert as Mick Jagger often did; he openly incited the already hostile crowd to defy the order that the NHPD was enforcing.

The lights suddenly went on, to the band’s confusion. The policemen entered the stage and Morrison, along with multiple journalists from *Life* (because they had filmed the whole incident), were arrested. Morrison alleged later that he was beaten by two officers and then thrown into a squad car. He was arrested for “breaching the peace.”⁵⁵ The *New York Times* featured an article the next day in which it stated that after Morrison’s arrest, “several scuffles broke out between the police and the crowd.”⁵⁶ Because the show was put on to raise money for a New Haven college scholarship fund,

⁵⁴ James Riordan and Jerry Prochnicky, *Break on Through: The Life and Death of Jim Morrison* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁵⁶ “New Haven Police Close ‘The Doors’: Use of Mace Reported,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1967.

there were students in the crowd ready to fight for an artist who performed to support their educations.⁵⁷ The *New York Times* criticized Morrison and the band, reporting that police had told journalists that “Mr. Morrison was giving an ‘indecent and immoral exhibition’ when he was off the stage.” Arresting Morrison was arguably a violation of his and the three *Life* journalists’ First Amendment rights.⁵⁸ Indeed, J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI working with local police had established tactics to infiltrate activist groups to crush possible threats to the US government and its activities.⁵⁹

Instead of recording and performing as a band that opposed authority, Jim Morrison was now leading the battle by targeting an officer who had confronted him. While their tactics were extreme and of questionable legality, it is understandable why the New Haven Police Department was so ready to shut down the show. Militancy initiated by youth was on the rise. President Johnson’s administration was cracking down on protest, arresting and trying protestors who blocked induction centers, destroyed draft records, burned draft cards, and interfered with the conduct of the war.⁶⁰ Even when war protestors were put on trial, they often used the opportunity to attract publicity to their cause.

The story hit the American media the next morning. *Rolling Stone* dedicated a portion of their January 20, 1968 edition to it. The article concerning the incident stated that policemen “hustled Morrison from the stage and ‘were forced,’ according to the police, to use a kind of tear-gas spray called ‘Mace.’ Mace is the same kind of anti-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 177.

⁶⁰ Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993), 372.

personnel spray used by Oakland police during the October anti-draft demonstrations.”⁶¹

The mention of this connection to Oakland is important in understanding the relationship between the media’s coverage of The Doors and the questioning of government policies pertaining to Vietnam and civil rights, resulting in a war against the government that occurred on American streets. Although *Rolling Stone* rarely criticized the band or Morrison in its issues (because it was a publication run by younger Americans who identified with the many opposition movements of the 1960s and the musicians that tied into them), it still opened the door for other major American media outlets to connect the turmoil of rock and roll concerts with the rebellion of America’s youth against official authority. This meant the creation of a connection between Jim Morrison, a public advocate of physical confrontation against abusive police officers and corrupt government policies pertaining to the Vietnam War, and the same type of chaos that scared police at the October anti-draft demonstrations.

When *Life Magazine*’s Fred Powledge’s account of The Doors’ New Haven incident was published a few months later, Americans outside of the many youth protest movements concerning Vietnam and discrimination of minorities were forced to realize how public youth protest in many forms was changing the United States. Powledge was a primary witness that night in Connecticut and observed Morrison and his three colleagues get cuffed. The article begins with a description of Morrison and Powledge’s perception of the lead singer. Powledge describes Morrison as “moody, temperamental, enchanted in the mind and extremely stoned on something. Once you see him perform, you realize that

⁶¹ “Doors Slammed for Obscene Reasons,” *Rolling Stone*, January 20, 1968, 4.

he also seems dangerous, which, for any poet, may be a contradiction in terms.”⁶²

Although Powledge means no harm to Morrison’s reputation and often talks admiringly about the performer, it is descriptions like this that further confirmed Morrison’s reputation among the American media as an individual who had no regard for authority, the safety of himself and others, and was an instigator of chaos, just like members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).⁶³

Media coverage describing the extent of The Doors’ live performances gave J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI additional reason to increase security at events like concerts and other youth gatherings. Rather than dealing with the cases of drugs, prostitution rings, and other serious crimes, Hoover transformed the Bureau into a force that focused specifically on Americans inciting violent rebellion on the streets of the United States. Anything or anyone suspected of having a left-wing agenda was immediately targeted.⁶⁴ While there were no bullets piercing the flesh of college students (yet); media coverage of The Doors from politically mainstream publications exposed American society to what they did not want to see. Powledge would later note that the music of The Doors was “marvelously effective in reflecting what’s going on in our society.”⁶⁵ Powledge

⁶² Fred Powledge, “Wicked Go The Doors – An Adult’s Education by the Kings of Acid Rock,” *Life Magazine*, April 12, 1968.

⁶³ See DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 158. The SNCC increased its militant actions after the murder of Navy veteran and member Samuel Young in January 1966, who was shot by a white man at a gas station in Alabama after he was confronted for using the “Whites Only” bathroom. SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael and fellow members issued a public statement denouncing US involvement in Vietnam and the predominant use of African Americans minorities on the ground, claiming that the treatment of African Americans on American streets was no different than violence perpetrated against Vietnamese civilians by American troops. Because of this heightening in militant actions, the SNCC would change its name to the Student National Coordinating Committee in 1969, taking “nonviolent” out of the title.

⁶⁴ Friedman, *Crime and Punishment*, 271.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

recognized The Doors' ability through their music and performances to expose the chaos created by young Americans ready to change how American society functioned.

Powledge, 33, did not realize the true societal evolution America was undergoing until he attended The Doors concert in New Haven. His daughter, only 9 years old, was witnessing America's social revolution for the first time that night as well: "She stood there, in the midst of it all, the cops and teenagers swirling around her...Her little girl face was angry, her fists were clenched, her eyes pinched but still seeing everything that was happening. And understanding it. She was seeing it live this time."⁶⁶ A majority of people in the United States had never witnessed youth protest in the streets. They had only seen it on television, reported by the professionals on major news stations. When any event is reported through a secondary source, there is the possibility certain facts slip through the cracks. Even as a little girl, too young to understand everything that was going on in America at the time, Powledge's daughter could sense something unjust unfolding in front of her eyes. For the first time in their lives, regardless of the fact that they were years apart in age, Powledge and his daughter were forced to see America for what it really was at the time. It did not matter how young or old one was; he or she would not be able to avoid the civil war between the generations that consumed America daily. New Haven exposed the American public to all that was going on in the establishment of 1960s America and, more generally, the world. Powledge's *Life* article exposed America to the disruption that occurred when youth faced police. Popular knowledge of domestic events was no longer a one-way street, and it was clear that rock and roll would have a role to play in exposing the changes society was experiencing.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The Ed Sullivan and New Haven incidents occurred almost simultaneously with the release of The Doors' second studio album, *Strange Days*. Biographer Stephen Davis describes the album as the "Doors' singular masterpiece, their only truly great album, and an accurate depiction of warped 1967, when the generations ground against each other."⁶⁷ Critics at *Rolling Stone* remarked that the album was a great display of musicianship and felt as though "Jimi Hendrix and The Who seem practically primitive next to The Doors."⁶⁸ Rather than capturing many of the emotions that accompanied the "Summer of Love" and the free, psychedelic spirit it embodied, like Hendrix and The Who, lyrics on tracks such as "When the Music's Over" and "Strange Days" appeared much darker, more poetic, and served as a metaphor for the problems boiling over on American streets between the young and those in charge.⁶⁹ A social war of the young versus those in uniform, whether that meant US soldiers or policemen on home soil, was unfolding.

With the Ed Sullivan and New Haven performances, The Doors had established themselves as catalysts for America's social war. They were no longer tied to the Sunset Strip where shows in clubs only reached a particular youth audience. They were now on a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁶⁸ "Strange Days: The Doors," *Rolling Stone*, November 23, 1967, 18.

⁶⁹ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 44-46, 56-57. "Strange Days," given the same name as the album it headlines, represents Morrison's realization that he and The Doors as well as his fellow youth in California needed to recognize that the "Summer of Love" was not all that was going on as 1967 wound down; violence on American streets and Vietnamese jungles could not be ignored. Morrison's famous lyrics on the track state, "Strange days have found us, strange days have tracked us down, they're going to destroy us." The lyrics create a feeling of disillusion and chaos for their listeners. The counterculture can no longer be solely characterized as LSD-induced, tree-hugging hippies. Times are beginning to change, and the militant protest on American streets that represent Morrison's "strange days" means the destruction of existing American social principles.

"When the Music's Over" served a similar purpose in the band's many live performances. Morrison's lyric, "well the music is your special friend, dance on fire as it intends," represented his belief that America's existing social structures were on the verge of collapse. He encouraged his audience to use the band's tunes in sync with his actions to rebel like they were "dancing on fire." There would be nothing peaceful about their protest ("dance") on American streets, but it was necessary in order to push for change in American domestic and foreign policy.

national scene that exposed America's youth—as well as youth's opponents—to what they stood for as a band. The “Summer of Love” was over, and unrest on American streets was on the rise. Jim Morrison's rebellious antics on stage were now more relevant than ever, serving as a major influence for protestors that aimed to act more radically when opposing Vietnam or calling for civil rights. Morrison's actions now clearly separated The Doors from other musicians that recorded and performed on the platform of questioning the international and domestic policies of the US government and how such policies were carried out. This move towards radicalism would be seen in the band's third album, and even more so in their performances to come.

Part III. *Waiting for the Sun* & the Splitting of the Counterculture

After playing multiple shows around the country, some popularly enjoyed and others not as much (due to Jim Morrison's drunken antics), The Doors began writing their third studio album. A lot of this pressure fell on Morrison, who resorted to drinking binges that would last days on end.⁷⁰ Eventually released in September 1968, *Waiting for the Sun* related far more explicitly to youth opposition movements regarding Vietnam and civil rights. The year 1968 was a year of turmoil around not just the United States, but in most areas of the world. US involvement in Vietnam increased tenfold, and American youth were beginning to resort to more drastic measures to express their discontent. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated that year; both men were in the public spotlight because of their commitments to peace and civil rights. It is here that we begin to see a major split in the multiple youth movements of the era, in

⁷⁰ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 224.

particular SDS and SNCC. The agendas of each group split the popular fight against authority into several different paths.

The first single to be released under the new album was “The Unknown Soldier,” a direct reference to the Vietnam War and the terrible slaughter of American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians. In January 1968, The Doors shot a promo clip for their new song. The video contained flashes of Vietcong bodies, civilian huts on fire as a result of American action, gunshots all around. Morrison is then riddled with bullets and blood can be seen flooding out of his mouth.⁷¹ Many people—especially the middle-aged executives that ran television—viewed the video as too graphic to show on the national scale, so it was only shown on certain stations in Boston and San Francisco.⁷² Within the same month, Americans had no choice but to witness the atrocities of the Vietnam War, as images were flashed across news stations of dead American, North Vietnamese, and Vietcong soldiers in addition to Vietnamese civilians as a result of the Tet Offensive of January 1968. Over the course of the offensive, North Vietnamese troops and Vietcong guerillas nearly overtook all of South Vietnam, only to be narrowly forced back to the jungles at the battle’s end. The offensive signified to the American public that the Vietnam War would be very difficult to win, and mainstream public opinion shifted away from support for the war.⁷³

No one in the US *wanted* to bear witness to innocent civilians being murdered or hundreds of thousands of young American men returning to the United States in caskets draped in the American flag. Unfortunately, as *Life’s* Fred Powledge and his daughter

⁷¹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 230.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 161.

discovered that night in New Haven, there was no avoiding the reality of America's situation abroad and at home. The Doors wanted to force the image news stations had only just begun to broadcast of the reality that was Southeast Asia in the face of the American public and those who controlled its mainstream ideas and principles. They were not just another rock and roll band that would create music for the sake of creating it; they took it upon themselves to convey realities that the American government refused to acknowledge. While most politicians of the time would deny it, America was fighting a war it was losing, expressed in the lyrics of The Doors' new single: "Breakfast where the news is read, television children fed, unborn living, living dead, bullet strikes the helmet's head." The line paints a picture of Americans waking up in the morning and switching on their television sets to witness Vietnam, something that had never been a possibility in World War II or Korea. For the first time, US journalists were on the ground in Vietnam, reporting what they witnessed live. "Unborn living, living dead" is a representation of the small gap between the American children still safe in the comforts of their homes and the American teenagers drafted to Vietnam. The children are alive, yet are sheltered from the violence and danger of the world. They witness war and its atrocities, but they do not understand it. The young American men who are old enough to realize who they are and live in the manner they choose are stripped of this freedom by being sent to Southeast Asia to fight a war waged by Washington's politicians. Although hundreds of thousands will be sent, few will be remembered, hence the title "The Unknown Soldier."

The Doors' political motivation behind *Waiting for the Sun* is further realized in their track "Summer's Almost Gone." Written by Morrison in the winter after the New

Haven arrest,⁷⁴ the song confirms the fact that The Doors and America's rebellious youth were no longer wallowing in the "Summer of Love." There was no time left for inaction, or trying to escape from the country's negative realities through drug use and sexual freedom. War in Vietnam was escalating, signifying unrest was only going to increase on America's streets. The lyric that resonates most to this fact is when Morrison exclaims, "where will we be, when the summer's gone?" as if he realized the United States was about to burst into chaos but was not sure when or how its bubble would burst. The New Haven show foreshadowed the unrest, but this was only the beginning of one of the most chaotic years in American history. Despite the album's many critics, The Doors' *Waiting for the Sun* was a commercial success and reached number one on the charts, staying on top for almost two months.⁷⁵ Just as The Doors' first studio album in 1967 had been released during a period characterized by peace, *Waiting for the Sun*'s content coincided perfectly with the split between peaceful and militant anti-war, civil rights, and anti-establishment movements.

Of the many youth groups that took hostile action toward police and government institutions in 1968 after news of the Tet Offensive broke, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was one of the most prominent. Originally founded in 1960 for the purpose of providing America's youth with a base for reforming the country's existing political environment through non-violent measures,⁷⁶ by 1968 many of SDS's members had chosen to adopt radical measures in order to sanction change. As the "Summer of Love" was upon America, the SDS created MOBE: the National Mobilization Committee

⁷⁴ Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 65.

⁷⁵ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 268.

⁷⁶ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 104.

Against War.⁷⁷ MOBE sponsored many marches, the most famous of which came in Washington, D.C. It was the first time in forty years that federal troops were dispatched to meet a protest by the American public.⁷⁸ On the campuses of prominent American universities, the SDS also acted. Columbia University students took over the president of the University's office, in opposition to the school's aim to knock down minority housing in Harlem and build a new athletic gym.⁷⁹ Aside from its own members, SDS now found a reason to get SNCC involved, a group led by civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael that preached "black power" and denounced sending poor African Americans to Vietnam.⁸⁰

As violence between these increasingly militant groups and police escalated, Jim Morrison and The Doors played their role in this escalation with rebelliously provocative antics through several live performances. After a disappointing performance at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, in which Morrison had failed to display his usual rebelliousness—*Los Angeles Times* reporter Pete Johnson's article the following day described the show as "the most disappointing pop concert at the Bowl since the Jefferson Airplane and an ill-mannered audience made a shambles of the place last summer"—The Doors played a concert in Flushing Meadows, New York, that was described by many as a fantastic show featuring a classic Morrison performance of falling, screaming, and jumping.⁸¹ The lead singer acted in such a rebellious manner that he incited a riot that resulted in a fight between multiple members in the crowd, leading

⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 196.

⁸⁰ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 157-158.

⁸¹ Pete Johnson, "Doors Play at Hollywood Bowl." *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1968.

to a young girl being hit in the head with a chair. Again, Morrison took it an extra step, preaching rebellion through physical confrontation to his crowd, something musicians like Mick Jagger and Pete Townshend never did. As can be seen in Tom DiCillo's documentary *The Doors: When You're Strange* (2009), Morrison was quick to comfort the girl, showing a soft side that was rarely seen in the media's coverage.⁸² This was not the Jim Morrison the American public would recognize through the eyes of American media outlets such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*. After all, an opponent of J. Edgar Hoover could not be portrayed positively by the very press that echoed his law-and-order agenda.

Several months later when the band played a show in Arizona just four days after Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States, Morrison incited another riot. Allegedly, Jim Morrison exclaimed to the crowd that if the president-elect made any mistakes in office they were "going to get him... We're not gonna stand for four more years of this bullshit!"⁸³ This caused many in the audience to rush the stage in response to Morrison's words, forcing cops to push them back and minor chaos to ensue. Again, Morrison preached a political message to a crowd filled with students and anti-war supporters ready to fight those who represented authority. He encouraged his audience to use any opportunity they got to question the decisions made by the nation's politicians in dealing with the increased US troop presence in Vietnam and way the abusive ways they dealt with youth protest over it. Although Nixon was not Johnson, Morrison encouraged his audience to be ready to confront their new president's decisions, as he would most likely be no better than Johnson. The press criticized the band heavily the next day, with

⁸² *The Doors: When You're Strange*, directed by Tom DiCillo.

⁸³ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 292.

publications like that of the *Milwaukee Journal* stating in an article headlined “‘Doors’ Group Stirs Near Riot”: “Arizona state officials Friday blacklisted the Doors, a rock singing group, because its members almost caused a riot with alleged obscene remarks and gestures.”⁸⁴ The band’s reputation had taken a blow after the show in New Haven earlier that year. More press like this helped to confirm the fact that The Doors were a medium in which youth could disregard the rules.

The fact that young Americans were taking to the streets to violently protest the Vietnam War and abuse minorities suffered made The Doors’ concert riots seem more hostile in the eyes of police. It was only a few months after Flushing Meadows and Arizona that the streets of Chicago erupted into violence when the Democratic National Convention was hosted there. A counterculture rocker like Jim Morrison displaying the ambition to directly call out the President of the United States in concert instilled a confidence in his audience, often filled with members of SDS and SNCC, which encouraged open resistance to authority figures through visible action. Freedom of speech was often ignored by police forces and the American government in the 1960s and early 1970s; saying something as edgy as that could have landed Jim Morrison in more trouble than he would have imagined. However, if a barrier was constructed by police officers, members of SDS and SNCC would knock it down. Unfortunately, when American youth flocked to the city in the masses to protest the Vietnam War and the Democratic candidate most associated with its escalation, Vice President Hubert Humphrey,⁸⁵ clashes between policemen, national guardsmen, and protesters resulted in violence never seen

⁸⁴ “Doors Group Stirs Near Riot,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 9, 1968.

⁸⁵ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 175-176.

before on the streets of the United States. Patience for the excuses and fatal decisions of the US government had expired.

While SDS and SNCC both protested against war in Vietnam and the lack of civil rights granted to minorities, they each did so for different reasons. Members of SNCC and police officers confronted each other violently, most notoriously in the black ghettos of Chicago and Cleveland.⁸⁶ While SDS confronted politicians for sending teenagers to their graves (both American and Vietnamese), SNCC's main issue with Vietnam was that the harming of blacks on US soil was in principle the same as the murder of innocent Vietnamese civilians.⁸⁷ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., other civil rights activists, and counterculture figures on the other hand disagreed with violence as a means of achieving equality. This moment in youth rebellion exemplifies why The Doors were part of this split. They were not like Arlo Guthrie, Joanie Baez, or Country Joe and The Fish; they did not use peaceful folk music to protest Vietnam or participate in the Civil Rights Movement. They were the SDS and SNCC of music and performance. Jim Morrison understood that Southeast Asia was now not the only arena for violence involving American troops, and if making a positive change in society meant acting aggressively, protestors would have to take that step. He had the perfect medium on stage with a crowd characterized by young Americans, many of them militant students, to voice his political opinions.

With the split between peaceful hippies and SDS as well as civil rights activists led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and groups such as SNCC concrete in nature, violence

⁸⁶ Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 157.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

on American streets could only escalate. What were once movements unified in creating change through peaceful political and social protest now pitted different ideologies regarding how to bring about change in the United States against one another. In addition to youth protesters clashing with police officers, they would now clash with one another, creating division that stunted the quest for change. For The Doors, this meant an escalation in the reactions youth audiences would exhibit at performances, paving the way for even riskier behavior by Jim Morrison, like that which would follow in Miami, Florida, to the disgust of many journalists in the audience.

Part IV. “Erotic Politicians”

The April 5, 1969 issue of *Rolling Stone* hit the shelves with a picture on the front cover that was a bold political statement: a cop with a baton in hand and protective helmet on head hovering over a young, bloodied up young American. The cover simply read “AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1969.” Violence on the streets of the United States had become unpredictable and uncontrollable. Police officers constantly clashed with anti-war and civil rights protestors. Designating the times as a revolution was an understatement. Fittingly so, the first page of the issue was dedicated to a picture of Jim Morrison, a symbol of American revolution, who had a month before reached his height of rebellion against authority with his performance at a show in Miami, Florida, telling all of America what he meant earlier by labelling The Doors as “erotic politicians.”

The story covering Morrison read, “Uh-oh, I think I exposed myself out there.”⁸⁸ Morrison’s most recent stunt shook an already conflicted nation and even more so all

⁸⁸ John Burks, “Uh-oh, I think I Exposed Myself Out There,” *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1969, 4.

forms of American media. There was not a paper across the United States that did not write of The Doors' latest concert. The Miami incident further confirmed Morrison and The Doors as "erotic politicians." When Morrison first described The Doors as erotic politicians in an interview with *New York Times* journalist Alfred G. Aronowitz back in 1967,⁸⁹ his meaning behind the term pertained to The Doors using their performances on stage through provocative and rebellious actions to influence an audience to take militant action against the many flaws existent within American society and those responsible for them.

The students at the University of Miami had chosen The Doors as their favorite band, the one the school would invite to perform at its spring concert.⁹⁰ A portion of these students belonged to SDS, again presenting Morrison with the perfect opportunity to incite physical confrontation against the police officers guarding the stage. The lead singer took the stage late after engaging in heavy drinking before the show's start. After "Five to One"⁹¹ started playing, he began talking to the crowd as he always did: "the last couple of nights, I met some people who were doing something. They're doing something, and I want to get on that trip. I want to change the world. The first thing we're gonna do is take over the schools!"⁹² Members of SDS and SNCC were in complete

⁸⁹ See Alfred G. Aronowitz, "The Doors Seek Nirvana Vote Here," *New York Times*, November 25, 1967.

⁹⁰ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 316.

⁹¹ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 72-73. Featuring on the band's third studio album, "Five to One" is yet another example of Jim Morrison calling on his listeners to rise up against the older generations that serve as a representation of the US government's flawed domestic and international policies. In the middle of the tune, Morrison sings, "the old get old, and the young get stronger, they got the guns, but we got the numbers, gonna win, yeah, we're takin' over." Morrison's lyrics in the song directly state how American society will be taken over by the young that are rising up on the streets to protest the Vietnam War and civil rights. The old have the power of the military at their hands, yet the young rebels have thousands of more protestors ready to question and combat them. The lyrics of the tune certainly depict Morrison and the band's now complete shift away from love songs that characterized their first album and transformation into a band that preached political messages in the music and on stage.

⁹² Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 320.

agreement with taking over the very institutions they believed were providing them with bogus curriculums created by the adults that disagreed with their protest movements. SDS and SNCC members had already taken over buildings and violently clashed with police officers on Yale University and Columbia University's campuses, with more to follow at Brown University, the University of California, and notoriously Kent State University.

He then can be heard on a recording of the show exclaiming, "I don't think there should be a president man, I think it should be a total democracy. But I'll tell you this man, I wanna have my kicks before the whole shithouse goes up in flames," further evidence of Morrison's lack of faith in the US government and encouragement of his audience to rebel. The singer allegedly followed this by beginning to strip, to the delight of the crowd. Before he could get his boxers off, someone on the band's team reached his hand in and held them up. Soon enough, Morrison was in the crowd leading a crazy dance that all the students were following along to, exemplifying just how influential the lead singer could be to a group of young Americans. After he returned to the stage, the students began to rush it, forcing police officers to use physical means to push them back. The stage began to collapse, and Manzarek, Densmore, and Krieger ran off.⁹³ The show was abruptly stopped and Morrison was arrested. Morrison was officially charged several weeks later with a felony charge of "lewd and lascivious behavior in public by exposing his private parts and by simulating masturbation and oral copulation."⁹⁴ He was also charged with two counts of indecent exposure, two counts of open public profanity, and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Burks, "Uh-oh, I think I Exposed Myself Out There," April 5, 1969.

one count of public intoxication, all misdemeanors.⁹⁵ Most in attendance stated that Morrison did not actually expose himself, but the truth will never be revealed. Regardless, Larry Mahoney, a reporter from the *Miami Herald*, brought it upon himself to create a media and police juggernaut. When *Rolling Stone*'s John Burks asked Mahoney about the information he had brought to public light regarding what he allegedly saw, Mahoney explained that Morrison had “appeared to masturbate in full view of his audience” and he “wasn’t offended at the obscenity,” but what did offend him was that “he [Morrison] was trying to start a riot.”⁹⁶

Most witness accounts contradicted these reports, even though Morrison often did incite riots at live performances. It was another example of a middle-aged reporter and a city’s police force that feared youth action against society’s established structures. Jim Morrison encouraged his audience to bring about changes, if necessary, through physical confrontation, to a society he preached was headed in the wrong direction under the wrong leaders, something older Americans opposed and even feared and rockers like Mick Jagger did not dare to do. Expressing freedom of speech in 1969 America was a very fine line; one never knew when verbal protest would be perceived as breaking the law. Earlier in March, eight anti-war activists were indicted by a federal grand jury for conspiracy and traveling across state bounds to “incite a riot” during their role in the earlier Chicago war protests, which quickly turned violent. Known as the “Chicago Eight,” the indictment was President Nixon’s clear message to the left that its confrontational use of free speech would be suppressed with force.⁹⁷ When Burks

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 246.

interviewed Morrison regarding the incident, Morrison expressed his actions as free speech, stating that he was “just lucky to have found a perfect medium to express myself in. When I sing songs in public, that’s a dramatic act, but not just acting as in theatre, a *social* act, real action.”⁹⁸

Morrison spoke about himself often as an “erotic politician” to the American media, yet this was not an admission of guilt regarding what happened in Miami. It was his way of using the unique opportunity The Doors possessed in concert to convey a message of revolution and social change in America. Morrison used his sexually provocative antics and liveliness on stage to convey these messages. He appealed to the youth masses to take action to strip the country from the hands of corrupt politicians like Richard Nixon and figures of authority like J. Edgar Hoover. American media publications like the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and smaller papers from more conservative areas of the country chose to spin Morrison and The Doors’ performances as negative influences on youth that created violence and disruption in a stable society. Popular figures like Morrison made the jobs of politicians and police much more difficult. Jim Morrison and The Doors were not doing anything illegal or wrong, but rather questioned the actions of those in charge. Like many figures of the era that questioned authority, the response was often the oppression of constitutional rights.

In the wake of The Doors’ Miami show and Morrison’s arrest, venues around the country cancelled and blacklisted the band. Conservative newspaper publications were the first to report this. A March 12 piece from the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* stated: “Pat DiCesare, director of University, said he had been attempting to break the show contract

⁹⁸ Burks, “Uh-oh, I think I Exposed Myself Out There,” April 5, 1969.

since he learned last week of an incident in Miami, Fla., on March 1 when its leader reportedly removed his clothing.”⁹⁹ Later articles from the *Detroit News* headlined “Rock n’ Roll Concert Cancelled”¹⁰⁰ and from the *Dover Times* titled “Cincy Cancels Doors’ Concert”¹⁰¹ told the same story regarding venues in cities across the United States refusing to host The Doors due to the Miami show. Publications like these were not nearly as big as the *New York Times* or *Los Angeles Times*, but the fact that they were covering the band at a very local level depicts how The Doors were being thought of throughout all areas of the United States as a group heavily involved in youth rebellion by the adults that were responsible for writing such pieces. An article from the *Oakland Tribune* later wrote how a district judge refused to grant a court order that would allow The Doors to play at Cincinnati’s Music Hall, due to the Miami incident.¹⁰² It was another example of a US official ruling against Americans not embedded in the mainstream values of society, similar to the FBI conducting illegal wiretaps of politicians and journalists reporting the realities of US involvement in Vietnam after the secret American bombing of Cambodia was revealed to the public.¹⁰³

After Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis cancelled another show for the same reason, the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, a group run by young Americans that supported free speech and the right to protest on American streets, was the first to protest the action, stating in an article from the *St. Louis Dispatch*: “When one city official or even a board acts upon hearsay evidence, the opportunities for error multiply. Certainly

⁹⁹ “Doors Shut, Firm Says,” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, March 12, 1969.

¹⁰⁰ “Rock n’ Roll Concert Cancelled,” *Detroit News*, March 22, 1969.

¹⁰¹ “Cincy Cancels Doors’ Concert,” *Dover Times*, March 11, 1969.

¹⁰² “Court Upholds Rock Group Band,” *Oakland Tribune*, March 26, 1969.

¹⁰³ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 246-247.

performers should be allowed to perform and audiences allowed to watch because these rights are constitutionally guaranteed.”¹⁰⁴ According to law, once a contract is signed, both parties involved must adhere to their sides of the agreement. Although it is legal to nullify a contract if one of the agreeing parties breaks the law, this must first be legally proven before the contract becomes invalid. An ideal the United States has prided itself on since its founding states that the accused are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Often in the case of anti-authority figures of the 1960s, servants of the state or nation failed to take the law into account if the protection of government principles was at stake.

Jim Morrison’s status as a confrontational rebel through his portrayal of an “erotic politician” on stage was heightened to the American public when the July 26, 1969 issue of youth rebellion’s favorite magazine, *Rolling Stone*, hit the shelves with none other than American rebel, Jim Morrison, on its front cover. Journalist Jerry Hopkins was lucky enough to sit down with the singer and dive deep into many of the insights that fueled The Doors and their performances. The interview paints Morrison as a subtle, tame poet that has an eye for multiple mediums of art, whether that be music, poetry, or film. Seldom did the Jim Morrison who allegedly exposed himself drunkenly on stage come out to Hopkins, again providing evidence that magazines like *Rolling Stone* were more in touch with youth rebellion and the music that accompanied it, refusing to slam the singer. Morrison’s ability to use music to express his opinions was revealed when Hopkins asked him; “Deliberate media manipulation, right? Two questions come to me. Why did you pick that phrase [“erotic politicians”] over others? And do you think it’s pretty easy to

¹⁰⁴ “ACLU Protests on Ban on ‘The Doors’ at Kiel,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, June 10, 1969.

manipulate the media?”¹⁰⁵ Morrison calmly responded: “I knew the guy would use it [“erotic politicians”] and I knew what the picture painted would be. I knew that a few key phrases is all anyone ever retains from an article. So I wanted a phrase that would stick in the mind.”¹⁰⁶ The response Jim Morrison gives to Hopkins in reply to this question reveals how the singer knew how to influence an audience and journalists and showcase what The Doors were doing with their music and performances. “Erotic politicians” gave the entire country the sense that The Doors were not just on a mission to create music characterized by a unique sound; it said that their live performances expressed messages that influenced social change among the rebellious American youth of the time through suggestive acts and chaos.

The term “erotic politicians” is very comical in itself because of the straightforward professionalism politicians are forced to constantly display by their peers and those they serve. By expressing political views through a provocative manner, The Doors turned the idea of what a politician actually was in the 1960s on its head. The band, especially Jim Morrison, knew that their recordings and live performances would have to be provocative and rebellious in order for youth to embrace the political messages they contained, because that is what the young people wanted to see. Hopkins later asks Morrison about his ability to test the bounds of an audience and how chaotic he could make a performance. Morrison replies after Hopkins confronts him over youth in the audience jumping on the stage trying to push past cops; “If there was no barrier, there’d

¹⁰⁵ Jerry Hopkins, “The Rolling Stone Interview: Jim Morrison,” *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969, 15-24.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

be no incentive. You see cops today...setting himself up like the toughest man on the block. It's a good thing, because it gives the kids a chance to test authority."¹⁰⁷

This statement reveals a great deal regarding Morrison's regarding of authority. Again, the constitutional rights of every American were tested by police officers and politicians. The entire motive behind The Doors and groups like SDS and SNCC was to question the lack of rights provided to protestors. Would anyone ever rebel if there was nothing to rebel against? Most likely not to the extent young Americans did at anti-war protests and civil rights marches. If there was no bloodshed in Southeast Asia or murder on the streets of the United States, songs like "The Unknown Soldier" and "Peace Frog" (to be discussed later), would never have been written. It is hard to find discontent when the environment of any setting is characterized by peace. Yet, a number of politicians and police officers decided to test the authority of the constitution, giving many reason to question what the United States of America had come to by 1969. Morrison created the perfect connection with his crowd to inspire the rebellion necessary to question these figures and their decisions concerning treatment of American youth.

After Jim Morrison's arrest in Miami and several months later Phoenix, and subsequent interview with Jerry Hopkins, it seemed that The Doors and the radical movements they embodied fully embraced a new strain of radicalism.¹⁰⁸ A large portion

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁸ See "Jim Morrison Takes a Trip," *Rolling Stone*, December 13, 1969, 8. Several months after Morrison's Miami arrest, the singer and friend Tom Baker got uncontrollably drunk in the airport on their way to a Rolling Stones concert. Baker began harassing one of the flight attendants, and after the captain came back and told them to stop, Baker got even drunker and groped the attendant. When their plane arrived in Phoenix, the police were there to arrest the two. They were charged with interfering with a flight crew, and the next day US marshals charged them with assault, intimidation, and threatening a flight attendant. Morrison's attorney had to fly to Arizona to pay their bail. Of course, the next issue of *Rolling Stone* featured the story of Morrison's latest run-in with the law, confirming his status as an "erotic politician" with the harassment of the flight attendant.

of civil rights and anti-war activists realized the blood spilled on American streets in combatting police and government forces had exceeded the limit they were willing to sacrifice. The gap between leaders of peace movements and groups such as SDS and SNCC and musical acts like The Doors was now fully solidified. The fork in the road was permanent, and now the erotic politicians of the era would need to find a way to continue to inspire their audience and fellow radicals, or the movement they had carried over the past four years would collapse right in front of them.

Part V. The Seeming Decline of The Doors & A Different Morrison

As the 1960s transitioned to the 1970s, movements of rebellion lost steam or picked up too much to be effective. The hippie movement had started to go sour. Antiwar and civil rights groups such as SDS and SNCC had become too militant for any real positive change to come about. In one of the most shocking counterculture events of the twentieth century, Charles Manson, who led a group of hippie rebels at a compound outside Los Angeles, gave the government reason to further squash protesters and hippies due to the fear LSD-induced violence could cause the United States. In August 1969, Manson's cronies set out for Los Angeles and murdered pregnant movie star Sharon Tate and five others in the house she owned with husband and director Roman Polanski. Just hours later they murdered a middle-aged couple in the same area.¹⁰⁹ Was this what counterculture protest against mainstream movie stars and those who failed to identify with youth rebellion against government-established societal norms was coming to? The direction of anti-authority rebellion seemed lost as the Manson crimes took place. Around

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 348.

the same time, The Doors began performing live shows again; however, the fire Morrison was able to capture in the band's earlier albums and performances was lacking. As the rebellion of the counterculture declined, so did Morrison and The Doors.

Initiating around the time their third studio album *Waiting for the Sun* was released, the band's chemistry was evaporating. Sources surrounding the band reported that Jim Morrison seemed to dislike the way in which the band was now developing their material. Despite its political and social motives, the process that created the album made it sound bland with songs that failed to enchant like those on *The Doors* and *Strange Days*.¹¹⁰ Unlike *Rolling Stone's* positive album reviews of their past two records, reviewer Jim Miller stated that *Waiting for the Sun's* real problem was Morrison, "for the Doors have come to be structured around him: there are no extended solos to speak of. On this album Morrison doesn't seem to sing as well as on the first Doors' release."¹¹¹ Morrison himself admitted to Jerry Hopkins in his cover interview for the July 26, 1969 edition of *Rolling Stone* that, "when we [The Doors] became a concert group, a recorded group, and when we contracted to provide so many albums per year that natural, spontaneous, generative process wasn't given a chance to happen. Do I think my work has suffered? Yeah. I do."¹¹² As the face of the band, publications like *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* that were in touch with youth counterculture music expected Morrison to lead The Doors to more record glory. American youth cared less about the band's albums than Morrison's ability to create rebellious performances. Popular newspapers like the *New*

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 258.

¹¹¹ Jim Miller, "Waiting for the Sun: The Doors," *Rolling Stone*, September 28, 1968, 28-29.

¹¹² Hopkins, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Jim Morrison," 15-24.

York Times and *Los Angeles Times* expected Morrison to create disorder in concert, and as representatives of the adult generation, they took any chance they could to expose this disorder. No matter what medium Morrison found himself in, someone or something was always expecting *something* from the singer. He could not escape the spotlight.

The release of the band's fourth and fifth studio albums, *The Soft Parade* and *Morrison Hotel*, in the summer of 1969 and spring of 1970 received a reception no different from that of *Waiting for the Sun*. While *The Soft Parade* was a commercial success due to The Doors' big name, it failed to capture the spirit of previous albums. *Rolling Stone* reviewer Alec Dubro opined "*The Soft Parade* is worse than infuriating. It's sad because one of the most potentially moving forces in rock has allowed itself to degenerate" and "the mood they've created is loud, dull boredom."¹¹³ Fans missed the acidic slides and riffs that created the musical chaos characterized by the music on albums like *The Doors* and *Strange Days*. *The Soft Parade* featured songs like "Touch Me" that were dominated by trumpets and other brass instruments.¹¹⁴ Although talented displays of musicianship, American youth did not embrace brass music as anthems to revolt to. It seemed to many as though The Doors had defaulted to brass in order for Elektra to sell their record, betraying the youth that looked to the band as agents of

¹¹³ Alec Dubro, "The Soft Parade: The Doors," *Rolling Stone*, August 23, 1969, 35.

¹¹⁴ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 78-80. "Touch Me" emerged as the band's hit single off *The Soft Parade*. Although up to that point Morrison had written a majority of The Doors' work, the third most successful song in the history of the band was written by Robbie Krieger. Krieger wrote it after engaging in a verbal argument with his wife, and lyrics like "I'm gonna love you, till the heavens stop the rain, I'm gonna love you, till the stars fall from the sky" did not identify with Morrison to a great extent. Morrison was less interested in songs that talked about love at this point in the band's career than he was with the protest that plagued American streets in light of the increasing American troop presence in Vietnam and abuse of African-Americans on home soil by police officers. *The Soft Parade's* negative perception by reviewers at magazines like *Rolling Stone*, who viewed its jazzy brass theme as a genre The Doors were meant to stay away from as agents of youth rebellion, makes sense with Morrison's decreased role in writing the album.

rebellion. Further, sounds of background orchestral music reminded youth fans of the opposition: the older generations. High-production music with brass and strings required capital and practice to record, unlike the more attainable guitars and drums any kid looking to create socially influential songs could pick up and learn.

When *Morrison Hotel* was released the following March, it represented the changing times. America was not in the swinging sixties anymore. Although life was as hectic as ever with more young American men returning home in caskets from Vietnam, the scene was not about a trippy, psychedelic experience like it was when The Doors released their first album in 1967. The new album's music continued *The Soft Parade*'s brassy and upbeat style. There were no tracks like "The Unknown Soldier" and "Not to Touch the Earth" in which Morrison's poetry took on a very dark side that called directly on the US military's involvement in Vietnam. *Rolling Stone* reviewer Lester Bangs stated that the record "could have been a fine album;" however, a majority of its material failed to capture the musical intrigue of earlier Doors' records.¹¹⁵

The two hits off the album were "Roadhouse Blues" and "Peace Frog." The former was a jazzy track that featured Morrison yelling in his typical fashion and was an anthem for bikers and truckers constantly on the road.¹¹⁶ The latter, unlike any other track

¹¹⁵ Lester Bangs, "Morrison Hotel: The Doors," *Rolling Stone*, April 30, 1970, 53.

¹¹⁶ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 96-100. "Roadhouse Blues" is regarded by many Doors fans as one of the band's greatest songs. Although Jim Morrison rarely discussed his personal life in his music, he dedicated the track to a bungalow he bought in Topanga Canyon outside of LA for girlfriend Pamela Courson. The place was a popular scene for a variety of people, including hippies and bikers. The most striking lyrics of the track emerge when Morrison profoundly sings, "well, I woke up this morning, and I got myself a beer, the future's uncertain, and the end is always near." These couple lines give the listener the sense of the transition youth protest movements were going through in 1970. Rebellious Americans still enjoyed getting intoxicated, but now it was with alcohol, a drug that did not enhance one's perceptions of the world and heighten the senses. Protest movements were getting left behind in the 1960s, and rebels like Jim Morrison were trying to figure out a direction to go in that would revive the spirit that forced Americans onto the streets of D.C. to protest US involvement in Vietnam. The future was certainly uncertain for Jim Morrison and his fellow rebels, and many could sense an end to their protest around the corner.

on the album, referenced the turmoil that occurred with the band and the general American public in the decade the country had just left behind. The upbeat tempo is aided with Morrison singing “blood in the streets in the town of Chicago, blood on the rise it’s following me...blood in the streets in the town of New Haven, blood stains the roofs and the palm trees of Venice...” The track was a representation of everything the sixties had been. Its happy tune combined with its violent lyrics represented the euphoric state psychedelic music created for its listeners as rebellion at the Democratic National Convention of 1968 and revolt on college campuses simultaneously occurred. It was The Doors’ way of saying goodbye to a different time in the United States. The Doors were once again questioning the state of their country, but this time it did not call for rebellion, but merely seemed to question where the country was headed. They, like many others, were searching for answers.

The pressure of delivering chaotic, rebellious shows to the youth that attended Doors’ concerts caught up with Jim Morrison beginning around the time of *Waiting for the Sun*’s release. He was a shadow of the tight leather pants-wearing rock star that appealed to youth and teenage girls across America; he was noticeably heavier as a result of his drinking habits. The first of multiple performances criticized by youth fans and media came at the Los Angeles Forum in 1968. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Donna Chick covered the show in similar critical fashion to her colleagues at the publication, writing that the majority of fans who had paid to see “the ‘fantastic Door’ was disappointed.” Rather than calling for an encore like most Doors’ performances, “applause and cheers were replaced by endless obscenities and irritable silence.”¹¹⁷ Fans

¹¹⁷ Donna Chick, “IN INGLEWOOD: Doors in Concert at Forum,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1968.

did not care as much for the music as they did for the show that would display the chaos and abstractness of Morrison's lyrics and poetry. Yet, Morrison's rebellion was missing.

Two shows at the Aquarius Theatre in Los Angeles in the summer of 1969 followed a similar beat to that of the Forum show. Elektra tried to cut a live album from the performances but again, Jim Morrison's usual rebelliousness was not in evidence. Morrison was a faint ghost of the sex symbol and radical he was best known for being. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Robert Hilburn's article "Audience Hears a New Jim Morrison" says it all about the Aquarius shows. Hilburn stated that Morrison "looked anything but a sex symbol" and that "he seemed only remotely interested" in the performance.¹¹⁸ However, Hilburn also stated that the performance proved the lead singer "was trying to demonstrate that he is more than a black leather freak, more than a rock sex symbol, more than a Miami incident."¹¹⁹ The *Los Angeles Times*' John Mendelson similarly stated that "Morrison behaved himself in a way that not even the Youth for Decency could object to."¹²⁰ Jim Morrison exhibited a side of himself that was acceptable to the press. Traditional American newspapers and the journalists that worked for them could except him and tolerate The Doors if Jim Morrison was not out on stage in front of thousands of people pretending to perform oral sex or inciting a riot. For the moment, Morrison's uncontrollable rebelliousness was controllable and subdued. Was the youth movement in the United States dying? According to the *Los Angeles Times*, evidence of the singer's changing persona signified this fact. However, it would be near impossible

¹¹⁸ Robert Hilburn, "Audience Hears a New Jim Morrison," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1969.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ John Mendelson, "Doors Perform Twice at Aquarius Theater," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1969.

for Jim Morrison to maintain this behavior for an extended period of time. If the lead singer was not extremely calm on the stage, he was extremely chaotic. There was no in-between. A middle ground is what the popular American newspapers and powerful politicians wanted, yet was something they would fail to get out of The Doors.

That August the Woodstock Music Festival commenced in Bethel, New York; it was the largest festival to convene in American history, and it was one that The Doors were not meant to be a part of. Major acts such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and The Who all gave memorable performances; however, a chaotic Doors performance was not on the schedule. It is unclear whether they were not invited or simply did not want to perform, but sources close to the band indicate Jim Morrison wanted no part in an outdoor show.¹²¹ Tired from developing The Doors' fifth studio album, live shows, and his personal life (specifically legal battles pertaining to Miami and Phoenix), the life of Jim Morrison seemed to be a major balancing act. In addition to this, would The Doors, specifically Jim Morrison, have even been a good fit for the type of crowd at Woodstock? While Morrison's performances at the Aquarius Theater and Los Angeles Forum may have shown a side of the lead singer that was more relaxed and subdued, replicating that at a festival of Woodstock's magnitude would be a difficult feat.

Although a majority of Woodstock attendees were young Americans involved in the counterculture movement, their mentality was drastically different from that of Jim Morrison's and youth involved in radical groups such as SDS and SNCC. The same can be said about the musicians who performed over the course of those three summer days.

¹²¹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 348.

Most of the youth that gathered in Bethel, New York believed in peace as an alternative to the bloodshed occurring on American streets and in the jungles of Vietnam. Instead of rebelling and fighting back like members of SDS, SNCC and other protestors on the streets of Chicago in 1968, they were content with getting high and blocking out the violence through peaceful music, like it was the “Summer of Love” all over again. Performers like Country Joe, Arlo Guthrie, The Band, and Joan Baez expressed anti-Vietnam sentiments in their music yet did it by performing in a relaxed, peaceful manner on stage. The message was preached to their young audiences but it was in sync with the peaceful mentality the audience embodied. The Doors taking the stage in Bethel meant similar messages of anti-war sentiment and a questioning of the choices made by the country’s leaders, but conveyed in a way that represented complete chaos and rebellion by Jim Morrison. The Doors’ performances were about stirring up crowds to influence the rebellion their music represented. This is where bands like The Doors and most bands at Woodstock diverged from one another. Although Morrison had been behaving himself of late, it was still a chance those in charge of the festival were not willing to take.

While the band’s fifth album had only two hits, The Doors’ “Roadhouse Blues Tour” to promote it was a huge success. The two most popular tracks from that album combined with hits from the band’s previous four albums created shows that inspired their audiences like it was 1968 again. When Morrison returned to his usual lively self at a show in Denver, the local media did not hesitate to criticize his influence on the youthful audience, seeming disgusted with the way Morrison’s “audience of young girls and young men loved every minute of it.”¹²² On the American streets, it seemed like it

¹²² Jim Pagliasotti, “It’s All in the Acting to Doors’ Morrison,” *Denver Post*, April 13, 1970.

was 1968, too. That May, four Kent State University students were killed after President Nixon sent in the National Guard to halt an anti-Vietnam rally on the Ohio school's campus.¹²³ Those around him reported that Morrison seemed affected by all that was going on. He was caught up in the transition between the sixties and seventies and began to show it again in most aspects of his life. He had just been acquitted of all felony charges from the Miami incident, but found guilty of indecent exposure, a misdemeanor. This meant his chances of serving jail time were quite high.¹²⁴ Shortly after, close friend Janis Joplin overdosed on heroin in Los Angeles, and Pamela Courson ran off to Paris with the dealer that supposedly sold her the lethal dose.¹²⁵ It was no longer the 1960s, and everything seemed to be falling apart in Morrison's life as fellow youth agents of rebellion began to slip into the cracks of the past decade. Had the "Roadhouse Blues Tour" never been scheduled, Morrison's role as a rebel against authority might have ended in 1970; however, it reignited a fire that had nearly burned out during this slump.¹²⁶ Jim Morrison was ready to give it one last shot as a rebel inciting youth to call for change in the government's international and domestic policies through militant action, meaning so were The Doors.

Part VI. Comeback

As much as Courson's fleeing tore Morrison apart, it did not prevent him and his bandmates from creating debatably one of the greatest rock and roll masterpieces of all time. Their "Roadhouse Blues Tour" was winding down, initiating their return to

¹²³ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 374.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹²⁶ See Barry Gilbert, "Morrison, the Doors play and play at Arena," *Boston Globe*, April 13, 1970.

rebellious stardom. The Doors returned to the studio for their sixth and final record together. What no one expected was for Jim Morrison to engineer a record filled with hits as inspirational and popular as those from their first record five years ago. A piece of 1967 Jim Morrison returned to 1971 Jim Morrison.

The band initially played a few of the original versions from The Doors' newest record for their long-time co-producer, Paul Rothchild. Rothchild did not care for them and quickly resigned from working on the final studio album.¹²⁷ The album, titled *L.A. Woman*, contained a variety of tracks. The album title track, "L.A. Woman," was one Morrison wrote to represent his driving binges around Los Angeles' city, deserts and beaches. It was almost as if Morrison was surrendering to aimless direction, still rebellious in nature but uncertain what his next step in life would be, representative of many counterculture movements in the early 1970s.¹²⁸ Vietnam was winding down, meaning many rebels would have one less political injustice to protest. The song was upbeat and extremely bluesy in combination with its brilliant crescendo in the middle. "Riders on the Storm" was slow and sounded like elevator music, but it contained lyrics dubbed over with Morrison whispering them to add a mystical, creepy element to the track.¹²⁹ "Love Her Madly" was Robby Krieger's masterpiece on the album, featuring

¹²⁷ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 394.

¹²⁸ See Crisafulli, *The Doors: When the Music's Over*, 130-131. The lyrics in "L.A. Woman" that speak best to Morrison's revived rebelliousness, which he has difficulty figuring out how to channel in light of the changing times are, "drivin' down your freeway, midnight allies roam, cops in cars, the topless bars, never saw a woman...so alone, so alone." The singer paints a tremendous picture of his experience aimlessly driving around LA, taking in everything the city has come to represent: mysterious allies, topless bars where Americans needing their fix of nudity go, accompanied by police offers ready to pounce on anyone disturbing the peace on the streets, a constant theme of the era. The girl Morrison describes is lost just as he is, eager to explore everything the rebellious side of LA has to offer, yet unsure how to go about it.

¹²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 135. "Riders on the Storm" represented Jim Morrison's departure from the rock and roll scene that fueled so many of his public outbursts and acts of rebellion that inspired his audience to take action against agents of government authority. The last track on the album, the song discusses the themes of murder, love, family, and the turmoil of life. Morrison's calmly sung words of, "into this house we're born,

Morrison's powerful, deep voice with his own snaky riffs. The critics loved *L.A. Woman*. Just as the American media had thought that The Doors had fallen for good from the summit of rock and roll stardom and rebellion, their sixth studio album proved otherwise. *Rolling Stone* reviewer Robert Meltzer wrote that the band "had never been more together. There isn't one bummer cut on the entire album obviously a first for them," and "this is *the Doors'* greatest album and (including their first) *the best album so far this year.*"¹³⁰

L.A. Woman was a fitting sendoff for four musicians who had been through so many ups and downs from the time of their founding to the release of their final studio album. They started from scratch on a beach in California, rose to the level of counterculture's famous musical rebels, were knocked down by politicians, police officers, critics, and journalists, and once again found themselves at the top of music's summit. With the release of the album, Morrison fulfilled his duty as a man responsible for inspiring American youth to protest against the injustices committed by the US government and its agents. He had satisfied his fans and reviewers at *Rolling Stone*, he had exemplified he could still perform through the medium of chaos, and he had proven he would never bow to the demands of journalists at papers like the *New York Times* and the politicians who called for his negative press. It was time for Jim Morrison to satisfy his own desires, and that is exactly what he did after *L.A. Woman's* completion.

into this world we're thrown, like a dog without a bone, an actor out on lone, riders on the storm," portray an individual caught up in everything that is going on in the world. He is thrown into a chaotic world without choice, not knowing what to do with himself. The storm represented what Morrison's life had become. He had rose to fame as one of America's most influential counterculture bands, hit rock bottom by legal issues and less than stellar live performances, and had now returned to the top for one last hoorah. Morrison needed to escape the storm that was characterized by the turmoil of his and The Doors' career. Escape is just what he did, moving to Paris shortly before the album's release in 1971 to leave behind a life in which he inspired his audiences to riot and rebel through the medium of live rock and roll.

¹³⁰ Robert Meltzer, "L.A. Woman: The Doors," *Rolling Stone*, May 27, 1971, 48.

Part VII. Death of a Rock Star & The Doors' Legacy

Morrison, who had once again reconciled with girlfriend Pamela Courson, left to meet her in Paris in March 1971. The remaining three members of The Doors would never see him alive again. In fact, most had no clue that he had actually gone through with his plan and left for France.¹³¹ He was escaping from it all. As the era of chaotic rebellion ended, so did Jim Morrison. He wanted no part anymore in the rock and roll scene. Poetry was his main focus, something those close to him knew was his true passion. He was in Europe to relax and live in a way that could not be questioned by the American media and the world of rock and roll. Paris served as a safe haven for him, yet this did not mean he gave up all of his rebellious habits; once a rebel, always a rebel.

Friends close to Morrison reported he began using heroin with Courson on top of the heavy drinking that consumed most of his days with The Doors. On July 3, 1971, Jim Morrison was found dead in the bathtub of his Paris apartment by Courson.¹³² While no cause of death has ever been officially confirmed, accounts range from Morrison's death being the result of a heroin overdose (provided by the same dealer that sold Janis Joplin her lethal dose) to Morrison's body giving out from years of hard drinking and partying. Although it was kept under wraps for an entire week, once it reached the American media it seemed that with the passing of the singer, every type of publication would now write about Morrison in a touching light.

¹³¹ Davis, *Jim Morrison*, 413-414.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 442.

The threat of the lead singer exposing himself or stirring riots in concert halls across the United States had disappeared with his death. *Rolling Stone*'s Ben Fong-Torres released his coverage of the singer's death in the August 5, 1971 issue, which displayed Morrison in his big bushy beard on the cover, subtitled with the years of his life. The article was titled "James Douglas Morrison, Poet: Dead At 27," what many believe Morrison would have wanted it to say. Fong-Torres is careful to point out that, unlike Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, Morrison died of natural causes and that "no drugs, his associates and friends have emphasized, were connected to the death."¹³³ It was important to the media to portray Morrison as a cleaner figure than he was during the course of The Doors' stardom. He was no longer the enemy, but a victim of the rebellious nature of the sixties. *Los Angeles Times* journalist Robert Hilburn reported in his article following news of Morrison's death that Morrison "had also reportedly cut down on his drinking, which had been a problem for him in recent years" and stated how Bill Siddons, one of The Doors' long-time producers, stated that he "hope that Jim is remembered not only as a rock singer and a poet, but as a human being," characterizing him as "the most warm, most human, most understanding person I've known."¹³⁴ Morrison's personality as a friend rather than psychotic rock and roller was what the press chose to emphasize. *New York Times* journalist Don Heckman wrote in his piece the following month that "theater was Morrison's true medium, and he knew it well, using the Doors as a setting for his instinctively effective melodramatics."¹³⁵ Similar to Hilburn, it was important for

¹³³ Ben Fong-Torres, "James Douglas Morrison, Poet: Dead at 27," *Rolling Stone*, August 5, 1971, 35.

¹³⁴ Robert Hilburn, "Why Morrison Death News Delay?," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1971.

¹³⁵ Don Heckman, "Jim Morrison at the End, Joni at a Crossroads," *New York Times*, August 8, 1971.

Heckman to paint Jim Morrison as a one-of-a-kind performer that truly revolutionized the way music and live performances reached an audience and the important messages it could get across to a large group of people, not as a dangerous rebel that threatened the order and peace the US government looked to attain.

Jim Morrison was now the same as any dead soldier on his way back from Vietnam in the eyes of the American media. He was a victim of the times, another young rebel caught up in a revolutionary American era. Although maybe not a living threat to politicians and powerful figures like J. Edgar Hoover any longer, what the media did not realize is how Morrison's legacy would continue to influence rebellion and change in American society. The Doors' music and live performances highlighted and stressed the call for action against unjust American government policies abroad and at home.

While The Doors did continue after Morrison's death for several years, the band would never be the same without him on stage leading the show. Although The Doors only truly existed for five years, their six studio albums and countless live performances changed the way in which music was used as a medium to encourage America's youth to militantly revolt against government policies that allowed for the violation of US constitutional law in Southeast Asia and on American streets, perpetrated by the men that were responsible for upholding it. It would not be until after his death that all forms of American media recognized the role Jim Morrison played in the counterculture and the questioning of the many fateful decisions by powerful Americans such as Richard Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover, and police officers. Often the center of ridicule amongst many of America's biggest newspapers and magazines, The Doors, and even more so Jim Morrison, were portrayed as a negative storm that led chaotic rebellion against attempts

by the country's leaders to keep the nation and world in order. In reality, Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek, Robby Krieger, and John Densmore in fact encouraged America's youth to take action against the unjust policies of the United States in the 1960s pertaining to the issues of the Vietnam War and civil rights through live performances led by a singer that, unlike other popular rock and rollers, blatantly encourage youth to revolt aggressively. Although only one of many pieces involved in American youth protest, The Doors deserve prominent recognition for the important role they played in it.

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