

The contribution of janis joplin to the cause of feminism and sexual liberation i...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Janis Joplin was born January 19th, 1943 in Port Arthur, Texas, USA. She was an American Singer / Songwriter who had released three albums. Joplin was born into a middle-class family and had an interest for blues and folk music at a young age. She was bullied at a young age and was labeled as a “freak” and “weirdo” she ended up becoming a loner for some time. “Janis finally decided that if she couldn’t fit in with the rest of the crowd, she was going to be a “freak” and proud of it”. She eventually found friendship with a group of guys and became rebellious. Her friends introduced her to blues music and inspirational women like “Ma Rainey” and “Bessie Smith”. These artists and others inspired Joplin and her way of singing. Janis graduated from her high school in 1960. She had enrolled into college but dropped out early. When she was 17 she ran away from her home and started to sing in clubs around Texas in which she earned money to save for a trip to California. When she finally reached California she realized it wasn’t what she had hoped as blues wasn’t such a big thing there so she left and went back to Texas trying college for a second time. Joplin started to play at music festivals at her college and recorded her first song “What Good Can Drinkin’ Do” at around the same time.

“Joplin did not write many songs; she mostly interpreted other peoples. But she made them her own in a way few singers dare to do. She did not sing them so much as struggle with them, assault them.”

She died at the age of 27 on October 4th 1970 making her a member of “club 27”. “Janis was a habitual drug user and heavy drinker throughout her career; it was widely known that she took methamphetamine and occasionally used heroin along with other psychoactive drugs.” Her addiction

<https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

ultimately leads to her death. Her official cause of death was a heroin overdose. Joplin was heavily into heroin at this point in her life and it's said that she had taken a more potent dose of the drug which led to her death. "The last person to see Janis alive was Hagy, the Landmark's manager. He told police he spoke to her briefly at 1 a. m. Sunday morning, and that she "appeared cheerful." Janis had finished a recording session at about 11 p. m. Saturday night and went with several members of her band to Bernie's Beanery. John Cooke said Janis had had " a few drinks" and then drove her organ player back to the motel, said goodnight, and went to bed." Janis always seemed to be troubled whether it was love or drugs when she went to New York for the first time she said to a writer " I never seemed to be able to control my feelings, to keep them down ... my mother would try to get me to be like everybody else ... And I never would. But before getting into this band, it tore my life apart. When you feel that much, you have superhorrible downs. I was always victim to myself. Now though, I've made feeling work for me ... Maybe I won't last as long as other singers, but I think you can destroy your now by worrying about tomorrow. If I hold back, I'm no good now, and I'd rather be good sometimes than holding back all the time ... like a lot of my generation, and younger, we look back at our parents and see how they gave up and compromised and wound up with very little ... Man, if it hadn't been for the music, I probably would have done myself in."

The Summer of Love

The summer of love was a social phenomenon that occurred in the summer of 1967. " The spring and summer of 1967 brought nearly 100, 000 outsiders, activists, and dreamers to San Francisco. These young people

<https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

traveled far and wide to join a community of artists, musicians, poets, and radicals who would change the world—influencing popular culture through music and art; launching the natural and organic foods movement; protesting war with peace and love; and ushering in an era of greater connectivity.” During this time young people started to support the hippie clothing scene and started to experiment with drugs. “ The focus was San Francisco, where young people travelled from across America and beyond, attracted by the promise of the chance to cast off conservative social values and experiment with drugs and sex.” A local council had apparently come up with the term “ Summer of love” as their way of putting a positive look on the gatherings of the hippie culture.

The Monterey International Pop Festival was an event that took place in San Francisco and was deemed the event that started the Summer of Love. This festival was a turning point for Janis Joplin’s career and it is said that Janis Joplin was the soundtrack of the Summer of Love.

It eventually came to an end and all aspiration of the hippie culture had seen the dark side. The movement had become a mess and the reality of dropping out of college and moving away from home became clear that it wasn’t going to work for anyone. The free love movement was sometimes used as a way to cover up rape and drug problems. San Francisco had become overcrowded with people who were runaway or drug addicts. “ Realizing that peace and love couldn’t sustain them forever, most of the hippies eventually had to go back to university or get a job, although some found ways to continue their alternative lifestyles at home or abroad. For most, though, the utopian dream had come to an end.”

<https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

“ In 2017, a group of cultural, civic, social service and health advocacy organizations have joined forces to commemorate and celebrate this complicated, influential period while exploring its relevancy to our current world.”

Sexual Liberation

In the 1960s in the United States of America a variety of issues changed there was an urge to find oneself through activism a quest to find one's sexual attitudes at them time. The sexual revolution happened because of the tensions between the public and the private life of the youth at this time. Young women and men who might have had sexual encounters with people other than their partners were at risk of being fired from their work place or expelled from school and homosexual people were at risk with being imprisoned for their sexual preferences. The US experienced tensions over the Kinsey reports which were a collection of studies about people's sexual behaviors. “ The Kinsey Reports revealed that 50% of women who participated in the study had sexual relationships before marriage (even though 89% were against it citing “ moral grounds”) and 61% of college educated men and 84% high school educated men enjoyed sexual relationships outside of marriage.”

“ Janis was an unlikely sex symbol—a kinky-haired, acne-scarred, gravel-voiced shrew swilling a bottle of Southern Comfort. Most reasonable men would prefer raw liver in a greasy rubber glove. And yet, everyone who saw her perform was transfixed by the oozing sexuality upon which her bare feet slid into the spotlight.” Joplin was an icon of the liberation generation.

Gender

Janis Joplin as a female rock and roll artist was a nonconformist and she had her own vision of how to look and act and had a big impact of changing the social norms of society. In the years where Joplin grew up the social expectations for women were extremely limited however Joplin had decided to rebel against the society norms and had become more comfortable wearing men's clothes " Most teenage girls were following the traditional fashions of the 1950s but Janis preferred to wear men's shirts and jeans". Janis Joplin had an unapologetically tough persona. " Joplin was not attempting to imitate men. " What made Janis stand out from the rest of the female blues singers of the 60s was her rebellious attitude towards gender roles. Janis was not known for her femininity, but for being completely honest in who she was. A true pioneer of her craft, Janis was a non-conformist both on and off stage. She rebelled against typical gender norms with her " manly" characteristics and untraditional outlook on life."

Joplin also embraced qualities about herself that were thought to be inherently feminine" She would mix together her feminine and masculine qualities which were both tough and feminine. " Although Joplin was bold enough to confront the social constrictions that she felt were limiting, Joplin was not as emotionally strong as her persona would suggest." This would lead back to her childhood insecurities and trying and eventually dying from heroin. " Her radically unorthodox lifestyle and her refusal to submit to patriarchal norms can teach us a great deal of how to reverse our current conception of gender identity." Joplin was able to break down the oppression

system and create a new social framework for gender which would be considered inspiring for years to come.

Feminism

Joplin's life and lifestyle helped the new feminism in America. Where she was oblivious to the feminist movement her actions served as a feminist symbol to young American women. " Her most universal influence came through her popularization of naturalistic dress and hair styles." This helped young girls see another side rather than the idealistic views that were placed in front of them from magazines and other media outlets at the time. " Joplin helped liberate millions of young girls from lipstick and girdles, while she pioneered the braless look and wild, loose individual clothes combinations." She helped encourage girls to be themselves. Although Joplin's clothing did not often suggest that she was sexually liberated, her manner usually did. Dress styles aside, the popularly-defined sexy woman must be the pursued and not the pursuer. Joplin was truly liberated; both in her bandstand pattern and her private life, she reserved the right to be the hunter as well as the hunted. Joplin had the courage to decline to dress sexily on the one hand yet to act sexually aggressive on the other."

" Joplin's lesbian activities may have been part and parcel of her refusal to be sexy in traditional ways. Her homosexuality has been exaggerated by lesbian feminists, who often suggest that her problems stemmed from not admitting her lesbianism." Her homosexuality was ignored as it was feared it would ruin her image but Joplin was determined to get as much love as she could regardless of gender". " Janis Joplin's music raised the right questions, but suggested no answers. Her songs offer solace, but no wisdom. As

<https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

feminist educator Florence Howe aptly put it, popular songs tell women “ to love being a sex object,” but they need songs about the pain of being a woman.”

Women is Losers

In 1967 Janis Joplin released her song “ Women is Losers” which appeared on her album while she was with the Big Brother and the Holding Company. This song generated a lot of mixed messages as the lyrics created questions about her intentions. We can hear Joplin singing a repeated chorus of the words “ Women is losers” which some people would suggest it not suiting to Joplin’s persona, However Joplin singing these lyrics is slightly more empowering than you would think. It can be heard as more of a question as to why women allow themselves to fall behind men. “ The song functions then as a ‘ call to arms’ for women, questioning why ‘ women are losers’. She questions a patriarchal society, asking “ Why the hell there ain’t another way, oh!”.

“ Men always seem to end up on top anyway.” Joplin examines the there’s no winning situation many women felt they were in, feeling that they were trapped in the men go to work women stay at home era. With these lyrics we can see how in society no matter how hard women try the men will always be on top. Society is far more accepting of men and their actions than women.

“ Oh, then they’ll call to you if they want you. They’ll come around and whine at-your door. Whoa I say the’ll hurt you, they’ll desert you, they’ll leave you begging’ them for more.” with these lyrics we can hear Joplin singing of how

it's a man decision, what he says goes. When singing about "They'll" she is talking about the man and how if they want you they will call you and they will hurt you and leave you.

Piece Of My Heart

In 1968 Piece Of My Heart was recorded and released by Janis Joplin, Big Brother and the Holding Company. Piece Of My Heart was originally written and recorded in 1967 but didn't get its mainstream success until Big Brother and the Holding Company covered it in 1968. "During the late summer and early fall, the album's single "Piece of My Heart" became a huge radio hit. The album itself reached the top of the Billboard chart on October 12, 1968, and proved the artistic equal of other major albums released in the very same period." The original recording artist Erma Franklin said she didn't even recognize Joplin's version of the song when she first heard it on the radio as Joplin's version was vocally and arrangement was so different due to Joplin pulling inspiration from her blues influences. This became such a big hit and this year was such a big successful year for Joplin. This song was Joplin's biggest chart success and her best known song. "Though many artists have covered this number (including Sammy Hagar), 'Piece Of My Heart' has become synonymous with Joplin and clearly ranks as one of her most memorable and loved songs".

Piece of my heart involves Joplin singing about a man whose takes a small piece of her heart and breaks it when she gives it to him we can clearly hear this in her lyrics "Take it! Take another little piece of my heart now, baby! Oh, oh, break it! Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah, yeah, yeah." She then moves on to singing "I'm gonna show you, baby, that a

<https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

woman can be tough” this to me sounds like she is warning her lover of her strength. It seems that Joplin wants her lover to take a piece of her heart but she is demanding that her lover will follow her orders if she is going to be heartbroken it’s almost like it is going to be on her terms.

Cry Baby

Cry Baby is a song originally recorded by Garnet Mimms and the Enchanters in 1963. Janis Joplin had covered the song and released it in 1970 putting her blues and rock style onto it. The song was written by Jerry Ragovoy and Mort Shuman. When Janis released this song there were rumors that she could have been pregnant but it turned out that her version of the song was dedicated to her father who she had a strong relationship with.

“ You can go all around the world, Trying to find something to do with your life, baby. When you only got to do one thing well, You only got to do one thing well to make it in this world, babe, You got a woman waiting for you there. All you ever got to do is be a good man one time to one woman, And that will be the end of the road, babe.” Joplin says here that you can live the best life to look or search for purpose but in order to truly find meaning you have to settle down and start a family.

Me and Bobby McGee

Me and Bobby McGee was originally written by an American songwriter named Kris Kristofferson and songwriter Fred Foster. It was performed originally by Roger Miller. Janis Joplin recorded the song for her album Pearl only a few days before her death. Her version of the song had topped the charts and became her only number one single. ” Whatever the reason, “ Me

and Bobby McGee” isn’t only one of Janis Joplin’s signature songs and the definitive version of a frequently-covered song, but it’s also a touchstone for the cultural revolution of the 1960s and rock music in general.”

The song portrays two main characters as friends of lovers who are making their way to New Orleans. They don’t have much resources but still plan on getting there. “ Busted flat in Baton Rouge, waitin’ for a train, And I’s feelin’ near as faded as my jeans. Bobby thumbed a diesel down, just before it rained It rode us all the way to New Orleans” The first verse of the song the two travelers are worn out and are waiting for the train but they then decide to hitchhike to New Orleans instead. They get picked up just before the rain comes by a driver who takes them all the way to New Orleans. At this time they sing blues songs and the driver knows the words. “ From the Kentucky coal mine to the California sun, There Bobby shared the secrets of my soul. Through all kinds of weather, through everything we done Yeah, Bobby baby kept me from the cold” On the second verse we are taken back to a diner where she spent her days on the road with Bobby traveling from Tennessee to California she describes how she and Bobby shared their souls with one another and formed an intimate bond with each other. “ Freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose. Nothin’, that’s all that Bobby left me, yeah. But, feelin’ good was easy, Lord, when he sang the blues Hey, feelin’ good was good enough for me” The song ends on a sad note as it seems she is tired with life and wanting to settle down and build a family but Bobby leaves and she doesn’t follow him.

Janis Joplin had a special connection to this story because she sees it as a reflection of her own life. Her life was almost like one big road trip like in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-contribution-of-janis-joplin-to-the-cause-of-feminism-and-sexual-liberation-in-popular-music/>

song. " Seeing the real connection between the lyrics and Joplin's life endows the song with a new power in the wake (excuse the pun) of Joplin's death. " Me and Bobby McGee" was released right after Joplin's death, and the tragedy may have been one reason that the song skyrocketed directly to the top of the charts."