

All You Need Is Capitalism?: An Ideological Criticism Of The  
Beatles-Jackson Auction Controversy

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	pg. 1
Background.....	pg. 3
Method.....	pg. 8
Analysis.....	pg. 11
Discussion: Findings and Limitations.....	pg. 18

## Introduction

Forty-seven million dollars can buy many things. It can buy a small string of private islands in a tropical sea, a mansion comparable to an old English castle, or forty-seven parking spots in the city of Manhattan, New York. Forty-seven million dollars can also buy the publishing rights to nearly every song written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, two unquestionably talented members of the legendary, classic rock band, The Beatles. To say that The Beatles were popular would be an understatement – they were arguably the most famous and influential rock quartet of all time. Unfortunately, due to a set of unfortunate events, even one of the most renowned rock bands in history could not hold on to the basic publishing rights to their songs. In 1984, the king of the moonwalk, Michael Jackson, attained The Beatles' publishing rights in an intense and controversial bidding war.

While the fact that the Beatles no longer own the songs that they had written is ironic in itself, it is the messages behind The Beatles' songs that make this auction so divisive. Some of The Beatles' most popular songs, such as the pro-free love anthem, "All You Need Is Love," and the anti-war ballad, "Revolution," further an overall positive message of acceptance, togetherness, and peace. Much to their dismay, a band that once took pride in their anti-capitalist, anti-establishment views lost their music to the very system they ostensibly criticized.

Many people are unfamiliar with the events of the Beatles-Jackson bidding war but it is an important moment in the history of the modern music industry. Even though the controversy seems like a pop culture anecdote, the event and the discourse surrounding the event shed a considerable amount of light on how perceptions of capitalism are shaped rhetorically. Capitalism is a belief system fueled by the spirit of competition and the promise of profit; in capitalist societies, individuals or corporations privately own resources of production and

distribution. I argue that it is not the fundamental tenets behind the capitalist ideology that shape the academic community's and the general public's attitudes about capitalism; rather, it is the discourse the public is exposed to that enables them to formulate individual opinions regarding the capitalist ideology. Negative perceptions of capitalism are formulated by the words of the American news media and other scholarly contributions to the rhetoric; in the case of the Beatles-Jackson controversy, the rhetoric portrays the capitalist perspective as an evil, one that robs musicians of song rights and creative license. I will also discuss the rhetoric of economics, which furthers the belief that economics and economic discourse are not statistics-based but rhetorical, using persuasive language to ensure the dominance of the capitalist way. Consequently, I can discuss the influential properties of the rhetoric and the ethical framework of our economic system.

This paper examines the ideological constructs behind The Beatles' songs in relation to the discourse surrounding the bidding war between John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Michael Jackson. Utilizing the lens of ideological criticism, I examine The Beatles' dominant "ideologies" in the context of the 1984 scandal and draw conclusions about not only the ethics of the music industry and its intellectual property ownership laws but also how the rhetoric constructs a negative view of capitalism. The discourse surrounding the bidding war between The Beatles and Michael Jackson disseminates ideological values that undermine the central messages of The Beatles' songs and constructs capitalism as a negative system that is unethical, unjust, and unsuitable for today's modern world.

This study surveys a variety of newspaper and scholarly articles generated in both the 1980s and the present day. First, I explain the theoretical assumptions behind the rhetoric of economics and the method of ideological criticism. Next, I analyze the discourse using the ideological

criticism framework. I then describe the explicit messages of The Beatles' most popular songs and the implicit messages of the discourse surrounding the Beatles-Jackson bidding war.

Finally, I closely examine the discourse and its contributions to rhetorical practice and theory, which allows me to question the effect of the rhetoric on societal attitudes regarding the capitalist system.

### **Background**

In order to effectively study the rhetorical impact of the articles, however, I must first explain music industry publishing laws and their role in the conflict between The Beatles and Michael Jackson. The concept of music publishing is "tied to royalties for songwriters" (McDonald 1). In essence, the musical publishing company ensures that songwriters receive royalties each time their song is featured, played, or covered by another artist. In exchange for its services, a publishing company takes home a percentage of song royalties (2). While publishing companies can be corrupt, most companies allow the artists and songwriters to focus on the musical aspect of their careers rather than advertising and promoting their songs. Publishing rights are simple in theory but in the case of the Beatles-Jackson bidding war they enable us to question the way the music industry and the capitalist system function. However, to begin an examination of capitalism in discourse, one must study the personal history between The Beatles and Jackson, too.

Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson were once considered close friends. In fact, it was Sir Paul himself who told the young Michael Jackson that the real way to make money in the music business was through publishing, a casual piece of advice that Jackson eventually "took to heart" (Harris 1). Not so long after McCartney told Jackson about the easy money in publishing rights, The Beatles sold their song rights to a publicly owned company so that they could avoid paying

hefty income taxes on royalties (“The Rights Stuff” 1). The Beatles relinquished their song rights to the Associated Television Company, or ATV, where they held only about 30% of the company’s stock. While this seemed to be a viable solution to their monetary issues, it eventually caused the band to lose control over the song rights. Thus, when ATV put their 4,000-song catalog (which included all of The Beatles’ songs written from 1964 to 1970) up for sale, The Beatles were forced to bid on the publishing rights so that they could play and distribute their musical property. Unfortunately, The Beatles and McCartney were unable to pay for all of the songs in the complete ATV catalog. As a result, the catalog went to the 1984 auction’s highest bidder, Michael Jackson, at the price of \$47.5 million (1).

As one can imagine, Paul McCartney was furious. Presently, each time that a Beatles song is featured on a television commercial or each time that Paul McCartney plays a Beatles song Sony/ATV, the venture between the late Michael Jackson and Sony, turns a profit (Gornstein 1). McCartney was quoted saying that it “doesn’t feel very good” when he “[goes] on tour and [pays] to sing all [his] songs” (Harris 2). But even though the money is a pertinent issue in the conflict, it is not the only thing that makes the auction controversial; in fact, it is the loss of the song rights that upsets the band the most. The Beatles’ songs are musically brilliant and it is understandable that the band wants to control what is arguably theirs. It seems ethically wrong that they no longer control the publishing rights to their songs, but while it is interesting to mull over the wrongness of the situation itself one must first understand why a perception of wrongdoing exists. In this study, I argue that while the events of the bidding war are inherently unethical by today’s standards, it is the discussion of the events that makes the public feel morally slighted (*vis-à-vis* a negative description of capitalism).

While facts about music industry laws and The Beatles' and Michael Jackson's personal relationship provide major insight into the context for this study, there is another piece of background information to address – the foundational rhetoric of economics and capitalism and their relationship with ideology. In the past, scholars have considered economics a purely scientific field, one that relies on numbers, careful testing, and facts and figures. In her famous article, “The Rhetoric of Economics,” Deirdre McCloskey, an economics professor and scholar, challenges common perceptions about the field of economics. McCloskey states that “academic economists are [not] engaged in scientific and non-normative scholarly inquiry” but rather “persuasive conversations, using language tools and post-modernist arguments similar to those found in literary works” (Mbatha 151); further, she asserts that the dominant scientific economic paradigm contains persuasive qualities and “[discourages] onlookers from satisfying the curiosity they might have had about alternatives to coercion in [economic] philosophy, politics, or method” (McCloskey 483). The study of economics is shaped by past events and, just as in the Beatles-Jackson bidding controversy, the way in which the economy and capitalism are discussed in the rhetoric helps to determine whether society accepts, rejects, or even questions the system as a whole. For example, if the dominant ideology of the time is capitalistic in nature it is likely that those who support capitalism will write about it in a way that is inherently positive and persuasive. It is common knowledge that language itself is biased regardless of the author's intention, which implies that while the power of language in the rhetoric of economics is “ignored in precept,” “the range of persuasive discourse is wide...[and] potent in practice” (501). Consequently, it would be naïve to say that the societal perceptions of capitalism are unaffected by the discourse of economics.

The relationship between capitalism and rhetoric is a close one too, as the former could not exist without the latter. In the United States, economic rhetoric not only defines capitalism but also ensures its continued acceptance and dominance. Dr. Ronald Walter Greene, a Communication Studies professor at the University of Minnesota, argues that rhetoric performs a “communicative labor” function in American economics; in layman’s terms, the rhetoric “gets the work done” by (either overtly or covertly) propagating an economic ideology. The rhetoric’s communicative labor function “brings...to the forefront changes in the sphere of production and the role that rhetoric plays as a practice, process, and product of economic, political, ideological, and cultural value” (Greene 202). In the years leading up to the Beatles-Jackson bidding war, supporters of capitalism took advantage of the informational, instrumental, cultural, and cooperative dimensions of rhetoric to promote their ideology – a practice that eventually helped create an American capitalist consciousness. Ultimately, capitalism became the dominant system because society “[rearticulated] communicative action into a material history of production and living labor” (202). Humans, the “symbol-using animal,” interpreted the rhetoric and adopted capitalist practices from the get-go, embracing materialism, private ownership, and capital gain.

Still, private ownership and market competition are not the only ideas perpetuated by capitalist rhetoric. Because capitalism endorses the prevalence of the worker and the working class, the rhetoric also performs the communicative labor function of maintaining the societal status quo. Under capitalism, there exists a “struggle between classes over the control or allocation of the surplus of production” because workers “produce more than is needed to sustain themselves” (Hogan 66). The relationship between rhetoric and capitalism has allowed capitalism to rule the United States’ economy, dividing society into clear class sectors where

some are afforded more than they need while others are left with nothing. Therefore, it is no wonder that all Americans work harder to elevate their socioeconomic status, continuing to fuel the spirit of economic competition that led Michael Jackson to purchase the ATV song catalog in the first place.

In the case of the Beatles-Jackson conflict, the economic rhetoric surrounding the event played a vital role in perpetuating negative views of capitalism. The 1980's were a turbulent decade marked by economic difficulty and massive change. At the time, the United States was facing an economic recession due to rising oil prices and skyrocketing interest rates (Amadeo 1). Ronald Reagan, the 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, responded to the economic crisis by adopting his economic policy coined, "Reaganomics." The pillars of his policy were to reduce government spending, taxes, government regulations, and inflation (Poole 1). Reagan also supported privatization and transferred "trillions of dollars' worth of state-owned enterprises to investors" during his presidency (1). While Reagan's economic policies were ultimately effective in lowering the unemployment rate and reducing federal income taxes, his economic practices were unpopular with the general public; in fact, a poll conducted by NBC in 1981 revealed that an overwhelming 50% of the American population was unhappy with Reagan's fiscal policies (Phillips 1). The American public's disapproval of Reagan was only fueled by the rhetoric, which openly criticized Reaganomics and capitalism as a whole. The driving force of economic competition combined with public frustration fostered negative attitudes towards capitalism and capitalist practices, setting the stage for the dispute between The Beatles and Michael Jackson years later in 1984.

To fully understand how the discourse surrounding the Beatles-Jackson conflict constructs feelings of moral wrongdoing and effects negative feelings towards the capitalist viewpoint, I

will now examine the artifacts using the ideological criticism framework, utilizing both a coding process and the four-step ideological criticism method. In general, the ideological critic is concerned with both the tangible components of the artifact and its ability to induce action or change, making this method suitable for a discussion of the rejection of the capitalist system.

In order to locate the collection of artifacts, I utilized the *ProQuest Historical Newspaper* database. The *ProQuest Historical Newspaper* database provides articles and images from the *New York Times* (1851-2009) and the *Los Angeles Times* (1881-2009). To search for articles, I first used a keyword search containing the terms “Beatles” and “Jackson” and limited the date parameters to articles published after 1984. The search returned a total of 1,343 results, more than enough material to serve as a starting point. Upon conducting my preliminary research, however, I noticed that the most relevant newspaper articles were listed in the first 20 or so returns, prompting me to modify the search terms in my next three searches. In the second keyword search, I searched for articles published after 1984 containing the key terms “Beatles” and “ATV,” an effort that returned 58 articles. The third keyword search utilized the terms “Beatles” and “publishing” and located 359 articles published before 1984; the fourth search looked for articles containing the words “Beatles” and “EMI” and produced 386 results, but only after I widened to date parameters to articles published after 1983. Like my first search, my second, third, and fourth keyword searches returned a relatively large number of articles, but only about the first two pages of returns were relevant to the study. From here, I chose the thirty most informative and relevant articles and coded them for positive and negative marker terms.

## **Method**

Ideological criticism has as its purpose to challenge a particular group’s “fundamental social, economic, political, or cultural interests” (Foss 209). The concept of ideology was first

introduced by French Revolutionaries, who asserted that ideology “[refers] to the critical study of ideas” (Wander 77). In its earlier days, the concept of ideology was used to uncover specific political and religious agendas in discourse, but the meaning of ideology and ideological criticism has been more widely appropriated and changed by various individuals over time, including political leaders like Napoleon and economic theorists such as Marx. Presently, an ideology is defined as “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (Foss 209). Ideologies in themselves consist of evaluative beliefs that help explain the foundation for knowledge, attitudes, and motives of particular groups. Ideologies provide a mental framework for viewing the world, meaning that the judgments that make up an ideology subsequently influence the use of language and patterns of thought.

Texts and artifacts play a vital role in perpetuating ideology because they disseminate cultural values and ideas. Discourse is “constitutive of objects” and “[makes] them visible... [objectifying] them as such” (Irvine 1). Texts encourage awareness and acceptance of ideologies because the ideas that make up an ideology, while not imaginary, would not be knowable or communicable without their discursive elements. In tandem with the discourse itself, the media perpetuates ideologies and “has the power to influence public opinion, color the public’s perception...and sway the national agenda” (Rucker 51). In a mass mediated culture like the United States, “ideas [become] commodities and [assimilate] to the economics of mass media consumption,” meaning the discourse becomes the “cultural authority” (51). The power and perceived legitimacy of the media makes the tenets behind an ideology the public’s reality, not only formulating, but mediating, the ideology itself. Thus, if an ideology (such as capitalism) is already dominant in a society, texts and media “[support] the status quo and the ruling corporate elite that own it” and “consciously or unconsciously coerce humans into intellectual and

emotional submission to the...media, thus creating a contested site for human struggle” (52). Even though discourse can encourage and spread new ideas, it can also maximize or minimize their importance, effectively determining the cultural, social, or political interests of a society. Therefore, it is necessary to critique artifacts that shape public opinion using ideological criticism so that one does not merely observe the world but evaluates issues and oppressive ideas in order to change them for the better.

In the practice of ideological criticism, the rhetor not only discovers the ideology hidden within an artifact but also determines the role that communication plays in “creating and sustaining an ideology” (Foss 213). An ideological critique establishes a connection between discrete language and rhetorical effect, seeking to discover individual or group interests by pointing out what is perpetuated or concealed in the rhetoric (Wander 78). The use of words, images, and rhetorical appeals all play a part in furthering an ideology, meaning that the rhetoric can help explain the dominant beliefs held in a particular group or society. That said, some ideologies are more dominant in a society than others. Hegemony, or “the privileging of the ideology of one group over that of other groups,” can help to explain why a particular culture is inclined to identify with certain viewpoints. If an ideology is hegemonic in a culture it helps shape underlying norms, beliefs, and values, meaning that it constructs the ideology as being “normal” or “natural” for that particular group (Foss 210). In the case of the Beatles-Jackson auction controversy the hegemonic nature of the capitalist ideology can help explain how capitalist ideas became a central component of the discourse and why the bidding war occurred in the first place.

In order to fully assess the dominance of the capitalist ideology in the articles, however, one must employ the method of ideological criticism. The method of ideological criticism is a four-

step process which includes: (1) identifying presented elements, (2) identifying suggested elements, (3) formulating an ideology, and (4) identifying the functions served by the ideology (Foss 214 – 220). The first step, identifying presented elements, seeks to “identify the assumptions or premises behind the artifact that [constitute] its ideology” (214). The critic examines marker words and codes the artifact, evaluating the frequency of particular terms that indicate the presence of a particular ideology. In the next step, identifying suggested elements, the critic works to identify the meaning represented by the elements in the artifact (216). The terms that are directly associated with the ideology serve as the basic assumptions behind the ideology; essentially, the critic assigns significance to words and phrases within the text, adding their interpretation of what is present in the discourse. The third step, formulating an ideology, consists of grouping the suggested elements into categories and organizing them into the components of the ideology. The organizational process provides the critic with a framework for the ideology and ultimately constitutes the ideology that is implicitly present in the artifact (217). Finally, the critic identifies the functions served by the ideology. The goal of this last step is to determine how “the artifact functions for the audience who encounters it and the consequences it has in the world” (220). The functions served by the ideology can reveal many things about its audience, including an explanation of the power dynamics within an audience, its dominant norms and beliefs, or its actional tendencies.

### **Analysis**

To further our discussion of the Beatles-Jackson controversy, it is necessary to first define the tenets that make up what can be termed The Beatles’ “ideology.” The Beatles’ songs “[challenge] a world of clear class and gender distinctions” and seek to encourage “world revolution and liberation” (Bunch 1). One of their most popular songs, “Revolution,” exhibits a

clear anti-war mentality, a position that was extremely popular during 1960s events such as the Vietnam War protests and the hippie countercultural movement. Many of their songs are a “celebration of genuine or mutual love” and comment on “the nature and meaning of love” (Inglis 71). The Beatles’ songs were most popular at a very turbulent time in American history and many times their purpose was to question and overturn conventional wisdoms in the dominant capitalist system (72). The band’s music is unique in that it ran counter to existing norms at the time, ultimately seeking to establish new ways of thinking among listeners while simultaneously encouraging social change and freedom.

In contrast, evidence from the collection of artifacts suggests that the capitalist ideology is based on values such as competition, capital gain, and private ownership, ideas far from The Beatles’ belief in equality and free love. However, in order to fully understand how the discourse negatively constructs capitalism, one must look at how the issue is discussed in both past and current newspaper articles because it is the influence of the media and the media’s dissemination of the story that make capitalism out to be the enemy. The discourse surrounding the bidding war is eclectic and somewhat sporadic, but I found what seemed to be the most pertinent and relevant newspaper articles related to the subject. The study examines thirty newspaper articles dated from 1984 to 2009, all of which mention some form of the auction and present either a positive or negative view of the capitalist ideology.

When selecting the articles for this case study I found that the most appropriate ones contained two fundamental elements: a comment on the Beatles’ feelings about the loss of their publishing rights and a covert opinion regarding the fairness of or justification for the change in ownership. These concepts are vital to understanding how the bidding war and capitalism are discussed in conjunction with one another and how the discourse influences the public’s

understanding of capitalism. The articles serve as a collection of artifacts that allow us to examine the ethical implications of an economic system that “distributes resources among competing interests” (Wesbury & Stein 2). While they come from a variety of authors and opinion columnists, the articles depict the history behind the controversy as well as the implications it has for the music industry and the capitalist system under which it operates.

As a whole, the newspaper articles identified and defined key components of the capitalist ideology. All of the articles contained key terms such as, “bought,” “sold,” “money,” “acquisitions,” “earnings,” and “revenue.” These marker words are directly related to the capitalist ideology and are the individual elements that help to define the capitalist belief system. The articles also made clear distinctions between support for capitalism or rejection of capitalism. Articles that supported capitalism contained positive terms such as “successful,” “benefits,” “valuable,” and “strategies.” Consequently, articles that portrayed capitalism as a negative construct contained words such as “lost,” “complicated,” “disappointed,” “tensions,” and “irony.” The discovery of positive or negative marker terms identifies suggested elements, words and phrases that provide the critic with a perspective on the capitalist elements present in the rhetoric.

In general, articles written near the time of the auction and in the past four years presented a negative view of capitalism, often perpetuating the idea that it is unfair and unjust that The Beatles were forced to relinquish their publishing rights to avoid financial woes. Media coverage of events related to the Beatles-Jackson auction controversy was centered around several important incidences, including The Beatles’ Lawsuit against EMI in 1979, the 1984 auction, a series of mid-1980’s lawsuits regarding commercial use of The Beatles’ songs, Michael Jackson’s financial difficulties in the early 2000’s, and culminating with Michael

Jackson's death in 2009. For the purposes of this study, I grouped the articles by publication date to fully understand how media coverage of the controversy progressed over the years, allowing me to later assess the Beatles-Jackson conflict's role in fostering negative attitudes towards capitalism.

To begin, I examined an article published in 1984 in the *Los Angeles Times*. The article, titled, "Beatles File Fraud Charge in N.Y. Suit," described The Beatles' 1979 legal actions against Capitol Records where they sued the label for allegedly "cheating" them out of rightfully earned song royalties (Taylor 1). It is evident that The Beatles were already sensitive to issues of music royalties and the language of the discourse reinforces The Beatles' dislike of the capitalist system. Following the auction, however, the news coverage patterns changed; though Michael Jackson bought the ATV song catalog in 1984, many newspaper articles discussing the purchase were published in 1985. Of the four articles from 1985, two discussed capitalism in a positive manner and two discussed it in a negative manner. Positive articles maintained that Jackson had obtained the "one of the largest music acquisitions ever by an individual," snatching up a catalog of "real serious earners" that would "substantially" boost his income (Knoedelseder 1). While the purchase was financially lucrative for Jackson, fans of The Beatles saw him as a coldhearted businessman who took advantage of The Beatles when they "[lost] their rights" (Hilburn 2). Still, though the newspaper articles about the auction itself advance negative attitudes towards capitalism, the thirty-year long press coverage of the events following the auction only further ensured that the American news audience would come to see capitalism as an unfair and unjust institution.

In 1986, the Beatles-Jackson controversy once again became a top story in American newspapers. That year the popular rap trio, The Beastie Boys, asked ATV to give them

permission to record a cover of The Beatles' song, "I'm Down" ("CBS" 1). Newspaper columnists said granting the request would make a "mockery" of The Beatles, criticizing the capitalist transaction that had put the publishing rights in the wrong hands in the first place. Disapproval of Michael Jackson's past decision to purchase the ATV song catalog only heightened when "The Beatles filed a \$15-million lawsuit...[against Nike] to halt use of their song, 'Revolution,' in a Nike running shoes TV commercial" (Hilburn 1). Moreover, of the seven articles written the following year in 1987, all seven portrayed capitalist practices in an overwhelmingly negative light, criticizing Nike's "revolting" and "sacrilegious" commercial that would "cheapen the value of the song" ("Pop Eye" 1). As a whole, the articles expressed the band's discomfort with having their songs used in mainstream commercials, highlighting the fact that they were unhappy with their loss of publishing rights ownership. The Beatles' fans were not pleased about the Nike lawsuit either; one man wrote the *Los Angeles Times* an angry letter that called the Nike commercials a "defilement," stating that he didn't want The Beatles' songs to "be desecrated by the crass graffiti of Nike" (Teton 1). The rhetoric of the time outwardly criticized capitalism and it is evident that the large amount of media coverage was largely responsible for affecting negative feelings towards capitalism.

With the exception of an article describing the settlement between The Beatles and EMI in late 1989, news media coverage of the Beatles-Jackson controversy died down in 1989 and the 1990's. However, the Beatles-Jackson conflict resurfaced once again when Michael Jackson's financial problems made media headlines in 2005. Michael Jackson's excessive spending habits caused him to sink deep into debt, a problem that was exacerbated by decreased albums sales due to child molestation charges, negative press, and a "declining musical career" (Leeds 1). Michael Jackson was desperate to pay off his debts so he put half of his stake in "one of the most

treasured catalogs in music” up for sale as collateral for his loans (1). Though selling part of the ATV catalog was advantageous to Jackson, fans were upset that he put up such valuable intellectual property on the market simply to make a quick dollar. Jackson’s popularity slowly decreased amongst Beatles fans as he took advantage of capitalist practices to ensure his own personal financial stability.

While the majority of the articles contain marker words that portray the capitalistic bidding war as wrong, those written in the year 2006 focused primarily on Michael Jackson’s, not The Beatles’, financial difficulties. In these articles, three of the six artifacts portrayed Michael Jackson’s acquisition of the publishing rights as “beneficial” due to the fact that Michael Jackson sold off 50% of his ATV catalog holdings to alleviate his own economic burdens. Newspaper writers also stated, “Jackson relied heavily on the Sony/ATV publishing catalog to support his finances [for more than a decade],” only further confirming that Michael Jackson increased his economic wealth by way of The Beatles’ music (“Jackson Makes Deal” 1). In this sense, capitalist practices, such as Sony’s decision to buy out “25 percent of the [ATV song] catalog,” were portrayed as essential to Jackson’s financial success. Jackson “used his stake” in the catalog to alleviate his financial difficulties, a transaction that eventually earned him a total of \$100 million. Though most of the articles seem to sing Jackson’s praises, it is still ethically wrong that The Beatles lost out on a large amount of potential income from royalties and publishing rights agreements, especially in a world where “the publisher or record company [took] the lion’s share and [The Beatles got] the scraps” (Kozinn 2). In many people’s eyes, The Beatles rightfully owned the songs and should have received most, if not all, of the profits from the use of their songs. It is ostensibly evident that the upset caused by media coverage of the

Beatles-Jackson auction only further fostered negative attitudes towards capitalism, even twenty years later.

Though the newspaper coverage of Sony's partial acquisition of the ATV catalog made capitalism out as an evil, the press coverage surrounding The Beatles' lawsuit against Apple attacked the capitalist system even more viciously. In 2006, The Beatles sued Apple for selling their songs online, only further expressing their resistance to the capitalist practices that caused them to give up their song rights in the first place. The judge on the case ruled in favor of The Beatles, a decision that strengthened the public's negative attitudes towards capitalism when it was retold in the day's papers ("Apple versus Apple" 1). Though The Beatles refused to comment on the Apple lawsuit at the time, band member Paul McCartney later publicized his disapproval of Michael Jackson's actions in one of four recent articles published in 2007 and 2009 (Harris 2). Of the two articles I examined from 2007, the first portrayed capitalism as positive and the second portrayed it as negative; surprisingly, however, both of the articles from 2009 painted a positive picture of the capitalism. In a 2007 article following the Beatles-Apple lawsuit, a newspaper columnist wrote that, while many artists were selling music online, The Beatles openly "resisted the trend" (Pfanner 1). Capitalism was portrayed as inherently harmful in the majority of the artifacts, but the rhetoric's tone changed when the most recent newspaper articles quoted Beatle family members like Yoko Ono overjoyed after the auction.

Though newspaper articles that were favorable towards capitalism were few and far between, it is important to examine these outliers for the sake of fair argument. In contrast to many of the other articles, some columnists held a different opinion of the Apple lawsuit, stating that "[The Beatles'] original [songs] stand up, but it wouldn't hurt their legacy one bit to let some outsiders play with [their songs] too" (Pareles 2). Another article published in 2009 supported Michael

Jackson's decision to purchase the ATV catalog, asserting that it was "the most astute business transaction of his career" (Sisario 2). An additional interesting outlier in the collection of artifacts was Yoko Ono's (the late John Lennon's widow) comment on Michael Jackson's purchase of the publishing rights. Ono stated that she was "pleased" by the sale because "Michael Jackson [was] a fellow songwriter, so [she thought] it [was] a nice thing to happen" ("Beatles Song Rights Reported Sold" 1). Regardless of these abnormalities, the overall frequency at which the capitalist ideology is portrayed as a positive belief system pales in comparison to the frequency at which capitalism is portrayed as a negative construct. Even after Michael Jackson's tragic death on June 25, 2009, the Beatles-Jackson bidding war received more media attention because the catalog was used to pay off the late Jackson's debt; moreover, Jackson's death raised questions about the new owner of the catalog, reigniting the cycle of capitalist transactions (Sisario 2). It would be an understatement to say that The Beatles disapproved of capitalism; still, it was not just The Beatles' dissatisfaction with capitalism that contributed to its negative construction – the news media and the general public undoubtedly all played a part.

### **Discussion: Findings and Limitations**

While the articles that positively construct capitalism provide an interesting contrast to those that negatively construct capitalism, the discourse as a whole describes capitalism as an economic system that robs musicians such as The Beatles of royalties and publishing rights that are rightfully theirs. The capitalist ideology, one that supports free trade and economic transactions for the benefit of the individual, is a direct contrast to The Beatles' belief in egalitarianism and anti-consumerism. The ironic nature of the Beatles-Jackson bidding war is clear – if capitalism were not the dominant economic system of the Western world, The Beatles

would not have been forced to sell their song rights and they would not have had to compete with Jackson to buy them back. While one can argue that Michael Jackson was completely within his capitalist rights to purchase ATV's song catalog, the contrast in ideologies, the literature of the rhetoric of economics, rhetoric's central role in formulating ideologies, and the ironic nature of the Beatles-Jackson controversy paints Jackson's decisions as an immoral act that defies any notion of equality or fairness.

Though this study is a discussion of the media's influence on attitudes towards capitalism, it is important to note that it is somewhat limited in scope. Because only thirty articles were examined and coded, my findings may not be completely comprehensive. However, there is a reason for this issue. Due to the limited availability of older articles on the Internet, it was not possible to examine every article related to the controversy. Additionally, the *ProQuest Historical Newspaper* database only searches for articles from the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*; a wider variety of newspapers may eliminate potential biases and provide access to a more diverse range of opinions and a greater variety of newspaper writers (*New York Times* writer Jeff Leeds wrote six of the articles in the study). Admittedly, an even further examination of archived print articles or music magazines would provide a completely holistic view of the conflict. In order to make the study fully comprehensive, more time and a more powerful search database are needed to fully examine the topic. Nonetheless, in the context of this analysis, I believe that the findings still reveal much about how American news media discuss and influence the acceptance or rejection capitalism, which is the goal of the study overall.

At any rate, the most important component of my discussion of the discourse surrounding the auction is this: the way in which the media portrayed the event ultimately helped shape public perceptions of capitalism. Any Beatles supporter or fan would most likely see Jackson as a

shrewd and cruel businessman who undermined a past friend's attempts to reclaim what was arguably his. Fellow musician Tom Petty said that he "[hated] to see [The] Beatles' songs selling sneakers and stuff," and that no one would be able to "take [their] next work seriously" ("Pop Eye" 1). "Beatles fans [were] outraged" when Nike tried to use one of The Beatles' songs in their shoe ads, and one young man was quoted saying: "When 'Revolution' came out in 1968 I was getting tear gassed in the streets of Madison. That song is part of the sound track of my political life. It bugs the hell out of me that it has been turned into a shoe ad" (Wiener 1). The usage of connotatively negative terms such as "loss" and "disappointed" and the inclusion of negative public comments about the bidding war, though not outwardly critical of capitalism, foster a negative attitude toward the capitalist institution. Overall, the way in which the media portrays the issue, whether it be purposefully or accidentally biased, undoubtedly shapes the audience's view of any particular issue. And while the tenets of capitalism itself do not seem ostensibly unjust, this ideological criticism reveals how the academic community's and the media's portrayal of the capitalist system encourages the public to think about capitalism in a negative way, especially in an instance where one of the most loved and idolized rock bands of all time fell victim to the competitive nature of the capitalist worldview.

As I have discovered, the discourse surrounding any major event in history is largely responsible for shaping the public's perception of an issue and the constructs surrounding it. Ideological criticism is meant to incur some kind of societal and cultural change for the better. This study is a first step in increasing consciousness of the media's power in shaping one's attitudes and the media's role in creating a rhetorically constructed, unjust view of the economic ideology that dominates our world today. It is my hope that a new awareness of the unfair aspects of the capitalist system will move the world to change and embrace the ideology of The

Beatles; for a world dominated by peace, love, and freedom seems like a much more desirable alternative to a world overridden by competitiveness and injustice.

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