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Capstone seminar

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Prospectus

The project which I am working on for my capstone is a rhetorical and cite analysis of Ronnie Scotts Blues Club in Austin. More specifically, I am researching how the media portrayed on the connected website promotes an idea of authenticity in regards to blues music and performance. This project will focus on the different sections of the Ronnie Scotts website and produced media, and through analysis offer explanations on how the business creates an idea of authenticity.

There are several audiences who will be concerned with this work and the project outcome. I have divided these communities into different sections, the first of them being Blues musicians. As the players of this music, it is important for those concerned with the learning of this music to gain a better understanding of how it can be portrayed through media. Especially for professional musicians who are participating in performing in music venues, understanding how businesses advertise artists is important for individual artists to think about. Furthermore, it helps for any type of community to have members who are well educated in the communities history and how that community is portrayed. This applies to Blues musicians who are participating in the blues community

as performers of this art form. Furthermore, there should be a number of interested parties in the Blues community as a large group. This community includes patrons of the Antone's venue as well as those who participate in listening to the Blues elsewhere. Furthermore it includes the venue owners, the content creators, talent agents, and other workers involved in the world of Blues as they go about their individual jobs surrounding the performing of Blues music. I would like to note that I separate performers from the audiences and other organizing workers due to the fact that through the performance of Blues music all of these other community members are structured. If there was no Blues being played then there would be no venue, need for organization, or audience. An additional audience which will be concerned with this work are black communities in Austin and outside of it which are concerned with Blues history in America. Blues originated from black communities, and those community members may have interest in how an art created by their predecessors is portrayed through media. The interest of this community is one of the most important due to the long history of negligence in listening to black voices in the Southern parts of the United States. Included in the audiences interested in this research will certainly be music scholars who study but are not limited to the genre of Blues music, especially in the United States. Such scholars should have interest in seeing what younger perspectives take on the portrayal of such a historic genre, even if their work has not been included within my research or analysis. Furthermore, I imagine any author whose work is included in this project would have interest in seeing how their literature is interpreted. The final audience which I am expecting to attract a significant amount of attention from is Antone's music venue, as well as other "authentically" Texas venues in Austin. As the business is my research

object, I expect that there will be a level of interest in how my research portrays their media. Other venues may be interested in this work as they look at critiques I make about Antone's venue and the ways in which it constructs an idea/brand of authenticity.

In the research for this project, it is important to reference quality research to ensure the project is held to a high standard and that the concerned audience members are able to reliably reference this work in confidence that it is based on quality research. Fortunately for the purposes of this research, there is a healthy amount of academic work performed on Blues as a genre of music. A large majority of this research is focused on the concept of authenticity in Blues music and how this authenticity is performed and demonstrated. Research of this nature will take up the majority of my project's academic backbone, helping me to gain a better understanding of how authenticity is structured. Furthermore, there is research which is more pertinent to how authenticity takes place in the creation of music and the branding practices. This will be especially helpful in understanding how Antone's venue takes its constructions of authenticity and turns them into a brand. Additionally, there is helpful existing research that focuses on how gender and sexuality are performed in the blues and how this has been ignored in Blues scholarship. Referencing this scholarly work, a methodology based on site analysis will allow me to analyze media concerning branding, construction of authenticity, and the advertising of blues. The methodology will also of course include rhetorical analysis in the studying of language used in the previously mentioned media as there is a great deal of rhetoric used on Antone's website. Splitting the website into different sections for the purpose of analysis will allow for different aspects of the media to be categorized for the reader to comprehend. The sections will include the below

categories, the first being merchandise sold by Antone's such as hoodies and hats. The second section will look at the historical context of the club as described on the website, and study how this interconnects with the idea of branding authenticity. The third and final section will be focused on analyzing how Antone's website advertises shows and artists for patrons to buy tickets. Through these categories, I seek to understand how Antone's constructs a concept of authenticity through the practice of branding, advertising of music and artists, and the historical descriptions of the blues club.

In order to move forward with this project the following research questions will help to direct my research. Firstly, I am interested in what groups of people are playing at Antone's venue today. Historically of course the bar has been a home for blues players to come and perform, however since its opening it has hosted artists of a wide variety of genres. As questions of authenticity regarding the blues at Antone's arise, it is important to consider what talent is being showcased at the venue currently as opposed to what was shown historically. My second question is what artists is the club highlighting the most? On the website there is a category in the merch section where you can select shirts from a number of historic blues artists who have performed at the club. Furthermore in the historical descriptions of the club there is mention of several artists on the website, begging the question of what artists are being advertised to construct an idea of authenticity. Finally, the question of how the club's website compares to the actual venue must be asked. I believe that it is very necessary for this research to compare how the website's constructs of authenticity compare to the actual venue's physical design. This comparison will need to take place through a physical site analysis of the club in order to compare it to the findings of the website analysis

The first set of literature which should be addressed is the scholarship regarding authenticity. This scholarship concerns the origins of blues music and who the creators of this genre are. To do this it is important to consider what scholarship around authenticity defines authenticity as. Scholar Gardner, Robert Owen discusses the very prominent idea that authenticity in regards to media is highly defined by public interpretation. This means that authenticity regardless of how it is defined by academics will always be subject to change by audiences, making it difficult to have a true understanding of authenticity. However, it is understood that authenticity is connected to the history of the particular subject it is referring to. In regards to blues, there are some fundamental requirements for a song to be blues music. The history of a genre of music is important to discuss as in music, the same fundamental concepts are evolved to create new sounding versions of the original songs. This being said, the people who were making blues music when it first began were not just creating songs. These compositions created the fundamental basis for blues music from henceforth, meaning that the stories and messages of that music were carried on through generations of artists and brought to the present day. There have been many interpretations of blues music from artists in and out of the creating community, but they all had to evolve from that original community in order for us to have a modern blues genre.

Furthermore, the style in which the chords are played and the song is made up is a large defining factor into what constitutes blues as a genre. Of course lyric content also plays a large factor in the creation of blue music as well. These are all factors which are seen throughout the many different genres of music, and while they all

influence each other there is a necessity to categorize music into different genres. An example of two genres which are similar but different could be a comparison between blues and rap. Both genres connect to a similar history of coping with a history of slavery, but there are some fundamental differences in how the two genres sound. Rap has a prominent use of low bass frequencies which need to be played through subwoofers in order to emphasize the beat of the song. 808 bass drums are a very common tool in hip music as a primary focus for artists to create a rhythmic repetitive beat. In blues we see similar connections, but there is not nearly as much need for an intense 808 bass as there is on guitar or piano. The instrumentation of the blues is one of the main characteristics of the genre, with artists singing while improvising solos alongside a band. An example of how the two genres intersect is through the use of samples in rap music. A rap song may take a sample, a short segment of a song, and tune it to a certain frequency and then repeat the portion over and over. With the addition of a beat and lyrics, you have the foundations of a rap song down and further work can be done. However the two genres have noticeable differences in their sound and design process however much the two interconnect.

As mentioned before, the communities in which blues arose as a genre were black communities. The environments from which this music arose primarily came from a history of slavery in the United States and evolved through the times of segregation in the nation. Throughout the history of blues, there have been many interconnections between religion and the demonization of blues music by the church. This interconnection is important due to the fact that blues music shares a lot of fundamental connections to gospel and soul music. These two genres are very prominent in worship

culture, however the content that is primarily covered in this genre is in regards to worshipping god. Black communities have a large influence on these genres of music, and the two genres share a similar history of being appropriated by white communities. Where blues music differentiates itself is in the prominent sinful nature of blues music that discusses coping with the hardship of life through alcohol, drugs and sex. This is discussed in the “Ethos of blues by author Neil, Lary” as he discusses the demonization of the blues player by institutions of religion in the U.S. The author shares how part of blues history is the outcasting of blues music by institutions of power as a corrupting influence to white institutions of religion such as the catholic church. This understanding of blues music as a genre outside of power institutions is important to consider when regarding what the blues is. Fundamentally we see blues music starting out as a threat to mainstream religious beliefs before it was indoctrinated into popular culture. The authenticity of blues is fundamentally connected to concepts of black suffering and the coping of integrating into a society which is rooted in exclusion.

Included in the excluded communities associated with blues music are non conforming identities which do not fall into heteronormative ideas regarding sex and gender. Grazian David discusses the performances of non conforming artists throughout history, bringing the concept of cross dressing on stage as an example of rebellious performance. While blues has evolved to be roped into popular culture, this particular component of the genre's history is commonly overlooked by blues scholars. While the sinful nature of blues music in juxtaposition with the church's views on premarital sex and substance abuse are commonly discussed, it is commonly done in a heteronormative light. Queer performers who fall into the category of blues musicians

are left out of machismo discussions which paint the blues player as a masculine hypersexual being, who may not conform to power ideas of religion and law, but does conform to ideas of sex and gender.

Understanding the ways in which authenticity is channeled into branding is a key component in discussing how the music venue Antone's channels authenticity into an actual brand. Academically authenticity can be broken down into three separate perspectives. The perspectives which make up authenticity are the objectivist perspective, the constructivist perspective, and the existentialist perspective. It is important to understand that all of these perspectives are interconnected, with some being more pertinent to people and others being more concerned with physical objects. The existentialist perspective for example refers more to human identity, especially in authentic functioning of leadership roles. Objectivist perspective is more concerned with the ideas surrounding authenticity of blues music as the music venue Antone's. The term indexical is used by scholars when referring to this perspective as the way in which the original concept distinguishes itself from copies. Audiences determine authenticity of a brand through this perspective by observing the logos, dates of performance, and history which is designed into a brand identity. An example of this is a Antone's shirt that says something such as "Antone's Blues, established 1975". In this we see the integration of a historical date, and the continuation of the club's significance by the purchasing and wearing of the shirt itself.

Engaging with this research, I will be able to establish work on a somewhat overlooked area of blues music. I say this considering the amount of research on other Texas cities such as San Antonio and Houston compared to the research of blues in

Austin. The city has a deep history involving many genres of music such as rockabilly, rock and roll, and country. These genres commonly surpass the blues in terms of scholarship and any additional research on the blues scene in Austin helps to surpass such overlookings. Furthermore, continuing work performed by previous scholars I hope to contextualize how past research is present in a prominent brand in one of the fastest growing cities in Texas. By studying the media produced by Antone's venue, I can enter important conversations involving concerned communities and continue valuable research that exposes more about the essential genre of blues.

In entering these conversations, the methodology which I will practice will primarily be made up of site analysis. The primary site that will be analyzed is the website, separated into the three different sections previously mentioned. In this analysis, I plan on identifying the ways Antone's makes a calculated design to construct an idea of Authenticity. The sections on branding, show schedules, and history are all deliberately created for the purpose of selling Antone's to the consumer in a particular light. This calculated response is often referred to as media framing, a strategy discussed by Gitlin Todd as the perspective framing of certain media to curate a desired response from an audience. Through the analysis of the site I will better determine how the organizers of Antone's utilize the club's prominent history to brand itself as authentically blue. In this research I will also need to study the rhetoric used in the website, making the implementation of rhetorical analysis necessary for this study to be successful.

For the branding section I will analyze what styles of merchandise are being created for patrons to buy. Understanding the particular style of Antone's

merchandise will allow for me to show through examples how the club is physically creating a product which advertises blues as a particular kind of authentic. Through showcasing the various clothing available for purchase, examples of what Antone's claims to be authentic can be shown to the reader. Furthermore, there is the extreme use of the objectivist perspective that will allow for me to illustrate how the club uses its history to promote itself as an authentic brand.

In regards to the scheduling and artistry promoted by the club, an idea of how the club has evolved to be an authentic home of the blues in the modern era can be ascertained. With the continuous growth of Austin, there is a massive variation of music genres in the city. As a music venue, Antone's hosts artists from many of these different genres. By comparing ratios of more traditionalist blues artists to the artists which fall outside this category, the reader will be able to see how Antone's has adapted to be more than a home for the blues.

Furthermore, the historical significance which Antone's prides itself on will be analyzed to understand how the club solidifies itself as an authentic blues venue. This historical significance is rhetorically explained on the official website, making it a great site for rhetorical analysis. Through the findings of such analysis, explanations to the reader on what exactly Antone deems to be authentic can be communicated with rhetorical evidence.

Citations

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