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Margaret Thatcher's foes turned anger into big business, and a soundtrack for the '80s

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Rosie Hallam/Getty Images

Mugs bearing the image of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.



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Marketplaceby [Stacey Vanek Smith](#)[Marketplace for Monday, April 8, 2013](#)

STORY

Margaret Thatcher's legacy: Three things that changed for the U.K.

Hating Margaret Thatcher wasn't just a political stance. It became something of an industry. From punk rock to TV and magazine satires, many entertainers and writers profited by

criticizing her policies.

"She diminished a lot of cultural funding. She put the BBC really in her sites," explains Toby Miller, professor of cultural studies at City University in London. In turn, the BBC put Thatcher in its sites, lampooning her in comedies, such as "Friday Night Live" and critiquing her policies in dramas, such as "Edge of Darkness." The BBC hit "Dr. Who" [even created a Thatcher-like character, Helen A, ruler of humans on Terra Firma.](#)

"There was a lot of cultural creativity that managed to express what wasn't really getting heard in the mainstream newspapers," Miller says.

And then there was the music.

"No political figure in British politics has inspired quite so many songs that Margaret Thatcher has inspired," says Paul Williams, head of business analysis for Music Week. "She certainly was very inspirational in terms of bringing out an anger."

Williams says the punk movement gained a lot of momentum and global interest because of Thatcher's policies. Thatcher became a sort of anti-muse for The Clash, Elvis Costello and Pink Floyd. Billy Bragg practically made a cottage industry out of hating the conservative prime minister.

	1. I'm In Love With Margaret Thatcher... NotSensibles Hating Margaret Thatcher...
1. I'm In Love With Margaret Thatcher... NotSensibles	3:39
2. Whine and Grine/Stand Down M... The English Beat	3:47
3. Maggie Chaos UK	1:50
4. Maggie's Farm The Blues Band	3:18
5. Ghost Town The Specials	5:16
6. Kick Out The Tories Newtown Neurotics	3:53
7. The Fletcher Memorial Home Celtic Pink Floyd	4:35
8. Thatcher's Fortress The Varukers	2:19

And it wasn't just British audiences getting the message.

"I can remember being a preteen listening to Pink Floyd's 'The Final Cut' and wondering, who's this Maggie he's so mad at?" says Aram Sinnreich, a professor of media at Rutgers University.

He says during the '80s, cable TV and, specifically, MTV were coming of age, and that put a lot of British music in front of an American audience. "The digital era was just beginning," he says. "You saw the rise of cable TV, especially of MTV and really the globalization of our media infrastructure... Because of that, the vitriolic hatred a lot of musicians had for Thatcher at the time was imported to us."

Sinnreich doubts punk would have become the global movement it did without Thatcher.

"She really galvanized the culture war's troops in England and helped them amplify their message," he says. "It's kind of ironic, because the deregulation that was one of the hallmarks of the politics that Thatcher herself espoused, lead to this explosion of anti-Thatcherist sentiment within the U.S. marketplace and around the globe."

Sinnreich says thanks to that, the anti-Thatcher industry turned into a profitable export.

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Stacey Vanek Smith is a senior reporter for Marketplace, where she covers banking, consumer finance, housing and advertising.

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mememe - Apr 9, 2013

You're missing Morrissey's 1988 "Margaret on the Guillotine," which led the British police to search his home. Too edgy?

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graubart - Apr 9, 2013

Your comment "Sinnreich doubts punk would have become the global movement it did without Thatcher." doesn't quite fit the timeline.

The emergence and growth of punk - and its export from the UK - occurred during the Callaghan government, not during Thatcher's time in office.

Punk itself emerged from 76-78; by 1979 the punk era was largely over. Even the Clash were putting out rock & roll records by the time Thatcher came into office (Sandinista), not the punk of their first few albums.

So, yes, Maggie "inspired" many UK bands to write songs about her. But the angry political punk music came before she did.

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e11enb - Apr 8, 2013

Did you really make a playlist of anti-Thatcherite songs WITHOUT a single Billy Bragg song? Not even one?!

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svaneksmith - Apr 9, 2013

Oh my gosh, you are completely right! We have to fix that.

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jc and the boys - Apr 8, 2013

Nice playlist. You forgot "Dear Margaret" by The Kinks.

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GeneDebs - Apr 8, 2013

Thatcher's foes turned anger into big business? Really? The last time I checked, the BBC is a public service broadcasting corporation. E.g. like NPR or PRI, they don't make a profit. Punk rock cashed in on Thatcher? The last time I checked, very few punk rockers barely managed to pay for the next safety pin, much less make a profit. (And if you think Elvis Costello and Pink Floyd were part of the punk movement, you probably also classify Abba and Boney M as R&B groups.) More importantly, punks and others didn't hate Maggie - - they hated her government's policies and the destructive effects they had on British life and society. Come on guys, you can do better than this kind of lazy reporting, especially on my NPR-donated dime. Your coverage of Thatcher is so uncritical and just plain mis-informative that it's embarrassing. Jeez.

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pjhinton - Apr 8, 2013

I might also recommend adding to the list the song "70s 80s" by Nightmares on Wax. Although released in 2002, it recalls what things were like for the working class during Thatcher's time in office and makes reference to her by name and by the moniker "Wicked Witch".

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sithere2409 - Apr 8, 2013

Try Martyn Joseph "Please Sir"

And did you REALLY leave out Elvis Costello and Trample the dirt down?

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tao101 - Apr 8, 2013

Wow. I was wondering if anybody would broach this side the Thatcher legacy. Just beginning to understand *American* politics in the 80's, I wasn't going to dwell much on British politics. But there it was, all over the music. I wonder what it says when a business program scoops All Things Considered on something like this?

And you can add Marty Willson-Piper's "Evil Queen of England" and various sketches on "Alexei Sayle's Stuff" (BBC) to your already considerable list.

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nc_beer_wench - Apr 8, 2013

Dead Kennedys - Kinky Sex Makes the World Go 'Round

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bleed_for_Me_%28Dead_Kennedys_song%29http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVGg_5grOTg[Log In](#)

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