

Christian Music Festival Tourism and Positive Peace

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Abstract

Christian youth music festivals (CYMFs) have received surprisingly little attention in the literature. This exploratory study seeks to better understand the CYMF phenomenon, and in particular, the role of these festivals in promoting (or failing to promote) positive social values, such as tolerance, inter-group harmony, and peace. To this end, a field study was undertaken examining two popular CYMFs held annually in the United States: Lifest and Cornerstone. The paper presents an ethnographic portrait of each festival and then analyzes the ideological position promulgated by each. It concludes that Lifest and Cornerstone are very different, in terms of the constructions of Christian doctrine and Christian identity that each festival advances, and that these constructions of the meaning of Christianity and of what it means to be a Christian ultimately have political implications.

Keywords: religious tourism, cultural politics, ideology, festivals and events, music.

Introduction

I'm not a regular churchgoer, but each time I attend services with my parents at their Protestant church or with my in-laws at their Catholic church, I am always struck by the shared ritual—common between these two, in many other ways, quite different Christian traditions—of pausing at a midpoint in the service for congregants to reach out to those seated around them and wish them the simple blessing “Peace be with you.” But peace is a complex thing, and Christianity, despite the Bible’s exhortation to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” hasn’t always been on the side of advancing it. Although the Crusades might be the most stunning example of this religious tradition at its worst, we don’t need to look further than the current era to find instances of the way that Christianity—like all major world religions—is both advancing and hindering humanistic concerns. American evangelical Christianity is a particularly interesting tradition to consider in this regard because of this movement’s long and complicated imbrication in the American political scene, culminating with the rise of the Religious Right over the last four decades.

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To fruitfully explore evangelical Christianity's relationship with the promotion of peace is not to ask questions of a theological or doctrinal character. Instead, we must look at evangelicalism as a social force—at the way this movement operates in the world and at its consequences for the lives of individuals, communities, and broader society. Central to such an interrogation is the exploration of evangelicalism's subculture, as perhaps more than any other branch of American Christianity, this faith movement has articulated and sustained itself through cultural practices and systems that lie outside the bounds of the Sunday sanctuary—most notably, practices related to leisure, entertainment, and tourism (Marsden, 2006; Carpenter, 1997; Schultze, 2002). Questions of the evangelical subculture's role in the advancement or hindrance of peace thus dovetail nicely with emergent concerns in tourism studies about the role of tourism in the same. Recent efforts, such as the establishment of the International Centre for Peace through Tourism Research, along with publications like Moufakkir and Kelly's (2010) edited volume *Tourism, Progress and Peace*, have helped to place concerns about the role of tourism in promoting intergroup harmony and social improvement higher on the agenda of tourism scholarship. Nevertheless, religious tourism is an understudied area in the realm of peace and tourism research.

In this paper, with the help of my team of co-authors, we aim to explore a particular aspect of evangelical Christian tourism—travel to American Christian youth music festivals (CYMFs)—in order to analyze the role these festivals play in the furthering of peace (or lack of peace), defined broadly, as discussed below, in keeping with Haessly's (2010) conception of peace as representing far more than simply the absence of war or physical violence. I write here in first person, as the lead author of this piece, because it facilitates my ability to share reflections gleaned from my lifetime of engagement with American Protestant Christianity, and because the paper's central argument, about the ways that CYMFs influence the production of peace at different levels in American society, is my own, and I take sole responsibility for the criticisms of evangelicalism expressed in the proceeding pages (although certainly my various co-authors share some or all of my concerns in this regard). The paper as a whole, however, is a joint effort, in the sense that it is part of a larger project, with the ethnographic data from the two CYMFs examined in this paper having been collected (and its analysis confirmed) by the second author, scholarly understanding of tourism and the evangelical subculture having been contributed by the third author, and expertise in the area of music festivals as spaces of sociopolitical import having been provided by the fourth and fifth authors. A motley group of current and former Christians, Jews, and agnostics, we have each contributed personal experiences and observations, as well as formal scholarship, to this project, and we are united in our interest to understand American evangelicalism and its role in the world.

The paper begins by contextualizing the present study with regard to concerns in the literature about the relationship between tourism and peace and about the role of religious tourism and heritage festivals in ideological production. The study's method-related details are then shared, after which, an analysis is presented of two popular American CYMFs, Lifest and

Cornerstone, which represent different manifestations of the production of evangelical Christian identity and meaning through tourism practice. Each festival, and the religio-cultural tradition of which it is a part, has its own complex implications for peace-building. The paper thus illustrates the way one particular form of religious tourism—the American evangelical Christian rock festival—can simultaneously create and undermine conditions conducive to creating peace in the American socioscope, and in the world more broadly.

Tourism, Religion, and Peace

Tourism's potential to promote peace is a longstanding concern within the academy, and one that has been reenergized of late, as part of the recent "critical turn" (Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007; Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2012) in tourism studies. Although early work in this area—such as d'Amore's (1988) sentinel research note in *Annals of Tourism Research*, "Tourism—A Vital Force for Peace"—may have emphasized a more traditional notion of peace as the absence of armed conflict between nation-states or other groups, concerning itself primarily with tourism's facilitation of cross-cultural contact, which could provide opportunities for people to meet others perceived as being different from themselves face to face and therefore promote stereotype reduction (i.e., the contact hypothesis—Tomljenovic, 2010), more recent work has tended to consider peace as a broader concept than simply the absence of violence. Haessly's (2010) conceptualization of "positive peace" nicely captures the broadening of this notion, as she argues that peace is best imagined not merely as an absence (of war, turmoil, suffering) but as a presence—of wholeness, contentment, and profound integration, as captured in the Russian notion of *mir*, or of harmony and unity in diversity, as in the Chinese concept of *ping*. Haessly has examined various religious traditions and notes that they tend to share such notions of peace, recognize that peace is characterized by both an individual and a social dimension, and hold that these features of individual and social well-being are interdependent.

Contemporary peace researchers have added flesh to this characterization, describing positive peace as "the presence of some desirable conditions in society, including integration, justice, harmony, equity, freedom, wholeness, the promotion of the dignity of each person and the wellbeing of all of a society's citizens (Macquarrie, 1973; Wallensteen, 1988; Brock-Utne, 1989)" (Haessly, 2010, p. 5). Central to this image is the idea of the members of a society being able to actualize their potential, a notion taken up by philosopher-activists Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen in their "capabilities movement" (Nussbaum, 2011). In the contemporary world, Haessly highlights several concrete concerns as being central to the creation of positive peace: the promotion of a worldview that does not draw lines between "us" and "them" but recognizes all people as part of a human family, and hence seeks to overcome racism, sexism, and all other forms of bigotry and exclusion; a concern for human rights around the globe, in terms of people having the right to life, to adequate food and shelter and the environmental resources that sustain life, to health care, to education, to meaningful work, to security, to free expression, to treatment with dignity, and to participation in decisions affecting their lives; the prioritization of ecological security; and a commitment to non-violent paths to social change.

Work on the relationship between tourism and peace is growing and has considered, among many other issues, host–guest interactions in contact zones for ethnic groups with a history of tense relations, such as Arabs and Jews in the Sinai (Uriely, Maoz, & Reichel, 2009; Maoz, 2010); tourism’s ability to unite acrimonious groups through large-scale events that celebrate the human spirit (Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2010); solidarity tourism, or travel for political purposes, to protest human rights violations or to promote reconciliation between groups (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Higgins-Desbiolles & Blanchard, 2010); tourism as a catalyst for development and social normalization in post-conflict areas (Bujisic, 2011; Causevic & Lynch, 2011), representation and stereotyping in tourism (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Caton, 2011); and philosophical explorations of the essence of the tourism experience and its role in promoting or hindering peace (Pernecky, 2010).

Religion and spirituality in tourism is a robustly developing concern in the literature, as well. Work in this domain includes extensive considerations of tourism and pilgrimage (Cohen, 1979; Digance, 2006; Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Collins-Kreiner, 2010); investigations concerning the commercialization of spirituality (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shackley, 2006); explorations of the New Age phenomenon (Pernecky, 2006; Timothy & Conover, 2006); and general overviews of the relationship between the phenomena of religion and tourism (Vukonic, 1996; Sharpley, 2009). However, as noted, this area of research has only recently begun to intersect with explorations of tourism and peace. This paper seeks to advance discussion at this intersection through the exploration of American evangelical Christian tourism—specifically that to religious youth music festivals, often called “Christian rock festivals,” as a reference to their rock-and-roll orientation in terms of genre. In so doing, it also advances the literature on tourism and peace more generally, by exploring religious tourism as a site of ideological production that can have consequences for peace—a highly under-researched phenomenon. Only a handful of interrogations in this direction are thus far extant, including Moufakkir’s (2010) analysis of Jerusalem tourism brokers’ use of tourism to promote various political goals; Sofield and Li’s (1998) consideration of religious tourism as a political apparatus of the state in China; Vukonic’s (1992) exploration of emergent pilgrimage to Medjugorje, which provoked a negative response from the socialist government of the former Yugoslavia, and thus played a role in the troubles in the Balkans in the 1990s; Hill’s (2008) work on New Age tourists’ appropriations of Quechua cosmology and ritual and their role in furthering the practice of othering and perpetuating “racialized structuralized inequality”; and the work of various scholars, including Bowman (2000), Sizer (1999), Belhassen (2009), Belhassen and Santos (2006), and Belhassen and Ebel (2009), on Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, its ideological and political implications, and the need for responsible pilgrimage.

Religiously based festivals have not been given their due in tourism scholarship, but festivals in general have often been explored as sites of ideological production in tourism studies and beyond. Indeed, from the earliest days of western civilization, special events have served powerful ideological purposes, reaching well beyond any entertainment value they may have provided, with the Ancient Olympics, for example, having served primarily as an activity for

generating civic pride among warring Greek city-states (Gomez-Lobo, 1997), and the Roman Circus Maximus having been used to draw attention away from sociopolitical concerns by providing a distraction for citizens; “bread and circuses,” from the Latin “panem et circenses,” was the going metaphor for the strategy of combining substantive security for the citizenry with superficial means of appeasement through the elaborate staging of circus games and other forms of entertainment to increase political power through populism. Events as sociopolitical phenomena continued through the medieval era and into the present day, and scholarship on this issue includes, among many other explorations, Mullaney’s (1983) deconstruction of a series of Renaissance events and spectacles to reveal cultural understandings of otherness, Banet-Weiser’s (1999) analysis of beauty pageants as discursive spaces of national identity construction, and Xu’s (2006) consideration of the modern Olympic Games as a space for official national articulation of discourses surrounding the politics of multiculturalism and modernity. Scholars of cultural politics have also explored festivals as sites of contestation, as different groups vie to articulate local culture in terms favorable to their own goals and position (e.g., Jeong & Santos, 2003; Cohen, 1998; Davila, 1997). It is against this backdrop of festivals as spaces of ideological production that our interest in Christian youth music festivals emerges.

Study Method

Given the lack of extant work on the phenomenon of CYMFs, the present study proceeded in an inductive and exploratory manner, using what has been referred to in the qualitative methods literature variously as a mini-, micro-, or compressed time–ethnographic approach (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004; Hammersley, 2006). Such an approach draws on the anthropological tradition of ethnography, with its emphasis on participant-observation and a holistic approach to the gathering and analysis of data, which often comes in many forms, including direct field observations, experiential understandings, formal and informal interviews with others in the research context, and physical and electronic documents pertaining to the field site. It differs from traditional ethnography, however, in its length of engagement with participants; whereas a traditional ethnographer might spend a year or more living and working among a cultural group she wished to study, a researcher conducting a compressed time ethnography would instead engage in participant-observation during concentrated time periods deemed particularly relevant for gaining an understanding of the group or phenomenon in question.

Compressed time ethnography has obvious limitations, in that it does not allow for the researcher to build long-term relationships with study participants or to view each of their lives in its full context, but it can be appropriate in certain situations where traditional ethnography is not possible. In the case of this project, which involves a subculture of participants who are geographically spread out and who only come together for brief but intense periods (i.e., when a given CYMF is under way), the compressed time ethnographic approach allowed the researcher collecting the data (this paper’s second author, Colleen) to reap some of the benefits of traditional ethnography, in the sense of being able to immerse herself in the phenomenon, to

understand it from an experiential point of view, and (in some instances) to bond with participants on the level in which they tended ordinarily to bond with each other in the liminal context of the festival. These brief periods of intense participant-observation were then supported by a broader and longer-term engagement with the phenomenon through formal interviews with festival organizers outside the timeframe of festival operations, analysis of documents pertinent to the festivals studied, and secondary research regarding the larger contexts of the Christian music subculture and Christian youth movements.

The fieldwork was conducted between 2010 and 2012 and was anchored by participant-observation in the summer of 2011 at two important CYMFs in the United States: Lifest and the Cornerstone Festival. Colleen spent a total of 11 days attending the two festivals, camping on site, unobtrusively observing attendees, participating in various aspects of each event, and conducting more than 30 informal interviews, ranging in length from 15 minutes to two hours, with attendees, performers, staff, and volunteers. Observations and casual interviews took place at campsites, music performances, retail markets, exhibitions, activities, and seminars at each festival site. Participating in the same activities as the other festival attendees facilitated a quick sense of trust and rapport between the researcher and the study participants, although all participants were made aware that the researcher was attending the festival for research purposes as well as to participate in the celebration of Christian music, and that her goal in conducting informal interviews was to better understand the phenomenon of CYMFs and the experiences of attendees and performers at these events. In keeping with the inductive study design, the informal interviews were open-ended, allowing interviewees to describe their experiences and to negotiate the meanings of those experiences within the context of the interview conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Interviews with festival organizers were more formal in nature and lasted between one and two hours. In these interviews, Colleen sought to gain an understanding of each festival's history and of its organizers' purpose in producing their respective event. She also sought to understand the organizers' perceptions regarding the effects of their festival on attendees and the relationship of the festival to popular youth culture at large. An additional formal interview was conducted with Andrew Beaujon, author of *Body Piercing Saved My Life: Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock* (2006), an engaging book which offers a journalistic snapshot of the unique subculture surrounding Christian rock. In his interview, Beaujon was able to offer the perspective of an "outsider" who had spent significant time exploring Christian rock festivals, and this helped to complement Colleen's more emic perspective, as she has participated in the Christian youth music subculture for several years, as well as the obviously emic perspectives of Lifest and Cornerstone attendees, organizers, performers, and volunteers. Finally, the research included consideration of textual materials, including the official Web sites of each festival and the organization behind it, event programs, educational leaflets and advertisements found on site at the festivals, and Web discussion boards for Christian music enthusiasts.

Christian Youth Music Festivals and the Evangelical Subculture

CYMFs must be understood not simply as desirable leisure opportunities pursued by groups of like-minded young people, but as an integral part of a broader evangelical subculture, with complex roots in both theology and American social and political history. What is known today as evangelical Christianity can be traced back to Martin Luther and his revolutionary stand against prevailing Christian doctrine and practice, in what history remembers as the Protestant Reformation. Luther felt the Church had badly misconstrued God's message by coming to focus on a theology of works, in which one earned salvation through actions (hence the idea of purchasing pardons for one's misdeeds), rather than a theology of grace, in which salvation depended simply on embracing Jesus Christ as the messiah, whose crucifixion had redeemed humans from sin (Nichols, 2007). Luther advocated a return to the gospels, or the "good news" of Jesus Christ come as humanity's savior, and the word *evangelical* derives from the Greek expression for one who shares the good news.

Evangelicalism thrived in North America, and by the nineteenth century, evangelical Christians were an important part of the American political scene, championing such progressive causes as abolition, women's rights, and amelioration of urban poverty (Balmer, 2006). Evangelicals in that day generally favored a theological position known as "postmillennialism," one of the various ways of interpreting the colorful and cryptic passages of the Bible, such as the Book of Revelation, that deal with the notion of the "end times"—what, in theological terms, has become the branch of religious study known as *eschatology*. In short, postmillennialism is the belief that Jesus will return after God's kingdom has been established on earth and humanity has experienced a 1000-year golden age of peace, prosperity, and happy living in accord with Christian principles. As postmillennialists, nineteenth-century evangelicals' progressive political activism was thus logically aligned with the project of bringing the kingdom of heaven into being on earth, a task they saw as the responsibility of humanity to help initiate (Balmer, 2006).

But as the century wore on, things were not going as planned. American southerners were not responsive to northern evangelicals' calls for an end to slavery, and the Civil War, which abolitionists thought would be a reasonably quick effort, due to the obvious moral superiority of their anti-slavery position, instead deepened into a nearly half-decade struggle that tore the nation apart (Balmer, 2010). At the same time, the American landscape was changing, as the Industrial Revolution led to rapid urbanization, with its concomitant problems of poverty, poor working conditions, and poor sanitation in cities. The immigrants who took up residence in the burgeoning cities of the American North were a diverse lot, often of Catholic or Jewish religious identification, and evangelicals felt their grip on the American socioscope slipping away. As Balmer (2010) notes, such social conditions, in the eyes of nineteenth-century evangelicals, hardly looked like the millennial kingdom come to earth. Evangelicals thus needed a new eschatology—a new way of interpreting the Bible's end times prophecies—that better suited the verve of the times. They found this new interpretation in the dispensational premillennialist theology of a former Anglican priest, John Nelson Darby (Weber, 1987). Darby argued that all of human history could be divided into distinct ages, or "dispensations," with each era representing

a different covenant between God and humanity. As Balmer (2010, p. 34) explains, according to Darby, “God had struck a particular deal, or covenant, with Adam, for instance, and another with Noah and Abraham, and with the people of Israel.” Darby argued that humanity was living in the final dispensation and that Jesus would return at any moment to fulfill God’s promise of taking his followers to heaven in the rapture, leaving the rest of humanity behind to face the great tribulation, after which point the millennial kingdom would be established (Balmer, 2010).

The idea that Jesus would return to earth *before* the 1000-year golden age, and that humanity should expect things to get worse before they got better, easily made more sense to the beleaguered social reformers of the Civil War era, who weren’t seeing much hope in bringing about the millennial kingdom on their own. A consequence of this shift of theology, however, was that it effectively absolved Christians of all responsibility for social activism and improvement (Balmer, 2010).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelicals had begun to feel that their values were becoming in need of protection from what were then often articulated as “modern” impulses within society at large (Marsden, 2006). Mainline Protestant denominations (e.g., Presbyterianism, Lutheranism) and their congregants were viewed as having sold out to these forces of modernism, condoning such practices as dancing, drinking alcohol, embracing immodest fashion trends, and consuming entertainment products that promoted lifestyle elements of greed, materialism, sex outside of marriage, and so forth. To insulate themselves and their children from such temptations, evangelical Christians constructed a rich subculture, complete with its own schools, artistic products, and avenues of entertainment (Carpenter, 1997). They generally withdrew from politics, perceiving, in line with their premillennialist views, that the world was hopelessly lost to sin and evil, and they instead focused fully on living piously and converting others to the faith so that their souls would not be lost at the coming of the rapture, when Jesus would lift his followers into the air, carrying them to heaven to avoid the great tribulation before the golden age of the millennium would finally be ushered in—a series of events felt by most people in the movement to be imminent.

Twentieth-century evangelicals’ distrust of mainstream culture did not stop the movement from drawing on rhetorical forms from popular culture in order to engage followers, especially youth. Evangelicalism had long had somewhat of a theatrical element to it, dating even back to the open-air preaching of George Whitefield in the 1700s, which had all the trappings of good dramatic oratory and spurred listeners to emotional responses. As the times changed, evangelical leaders were not hesitant to employ new technologies and cultural forms, such as televangelism programs, radio broadcastings, film, and the Internet, to promote their message among their laity (Cobb, 1998; Erickson, 1992; Melton, Lucas & Stone, 1997; Zaleski, 1997). At the same time, evangelicals needed a safe space from mainstream culture, where they could raise their children in ways that minimized contact with the values and practices of the outside world, which they considered corrupting. Thus, an evangelical subculture began to take form, existing in parallel with mainstream America and providing its own “Christian versions” of all things deemed essential to a twentieth-century life, including leisure and entertainment options.

Christian entertainment products, such as music, films, and novels, thus served two purposes simultaneously: through their rhetoric, they provided a call to Christianity that was different from (and for young people, certainly more engaging than) the typical Sunday sermon, and they also served as a rallying force for creating a sense of community and cohesiveness among followers (Carpenter, 1997). This latter outcome was particularly important for evangelical youth, who often faced a sense of alienation from their mainstream peers, both because of their parents' (or their own) choices to cordon them off from the activities of their classmates and because of discrimination against them by some classmates who viewed their beliefs and their separatist tendencies as strange. I recall many a friend from my childhood, growing up in the American "Bible belt," who was not allowed to attend the string of high school dances that served as bright spots for so many of us in the annual academic calendar; their reactions to this fate ranged from annoyance, or even anger, at their parents for "being so out of touch," to pride at exhibiting a proper Christian "witness"—a popular term in the evangelical subculture, meaning testimony through behavior—by steadfastly sacrificing these widely coveted social opportunities in the name of their faith.

It is against this backdrop of the construction of America's evangelical subculture that the phenomenon of the American Christian youth music festival was born. Christian rock festivals provided youth with the opportunity to participate in the music festival experience—a quintessential part of American teen cultural life—without having to leave the shelter of a subculture supportive of their spiritual values. They also provided a venue for Christian musicians to share their music, as these artists were increasingly finding themselves shut out of the mainstream music industry (Dueck, 2000; Thompson, 2000).

From there, however, the story becomes more complex. I have been speaking of evangelical Christianity thus far as though it were some sort of perfectly coherent, homogenous movement, which it certainly is not nor ever has been. From the beginning, evangelicalism has had many strands, and this is nowhere more evident than in the current ethnographic study, which examines two very different CYMFs, premised on two very different ideologies, in terms of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in twenty-first-century America.

The first CYMF considered here, Lifest (pronounced "life fest"), is a Christian music festival held each July at a community exhibition grounds in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The festival began in 1990 as a walk-and-run fundraiser and evolved into a full-on festival, featuring Christian music acts, in 1999. A five-day event, Lifest attracts an average of over 16,000 attendees on any given day of the festival, some of whom camp on-site and some of whom drive in for the day to attend music shows and seminars. Most participants are youth under the age of 18, and they typically attend the festival with their parents or with a church youth group. Tourists to the event come from near and far; Colleen counted license plates from 30 U.S. states and several Canadian provinces on the festival premises. Slogans for the festival include "Party with a Purpose," "More than Music," and "Where Kids Have the Time of Their Life without Hiding from Their Parents" (Lifest, 2012). The 2011 Lifest event attended by the researcher featured live Christian

music acts, comedians, and speakers on multiple stages, as well as seminars and workshops for youth pastors and leaders and for general attendees.

Lifest is run by Life Promotions, a nonprofit organization that produces faith-based programs and events for churches and value-based programs for public schools in the United States. The organization was founded in 1982 by Bob Lenz, a Christian speaker who still serves as president today (and who was still the event's keynote speaker in 2011), and emphasizes the need to reach youth before the age of 18 through a focus on intervention and education to encourage positive life decision-making (Life Promotions, 2012). Program topics include abstinence, cults, domestic discord, reverse discrimination, alcohol, pornography, drug abuse, and so forth (Life Promotions, 2012).

Ideologically, Lifest is characterized by its affiliation with *conservative* evangelical Christianity, which is the mainline form of evangelicalism in the United States today. Followers of this movement hold the Bible to be the literal and inerrant word of God, which is provided as a guide for how human beings should live their lives (although, in reality, this literalism is practiced selectively, as Balmer (2006) demonstrates in his analysis of evangelicalism and politics); they believe that Christians bear a responsibility to proselytize and “share the good news” of Jesus' coming with nonbelievers; and they hold that acceptance of Jesus as the messiah is the only path to salvation and a heavenly afterlife. This form of Christianity is also often characterized by the experience of being “born again,” meaning to have had a conversion experience in which one comes to Jesus of his or her own volition and accepts him as his or her personal savior and path to an eternal afterlife with God. Conservative Christianity also tends to be characterized by its promotion of traditional social values (Stowe, 2011)—such as heterosexual marriage and differential roles for men and women—which are often viewed by its members as being under attack by mainstream culture.

Lifest's enmeshment in conservative Christian culture was immediately apparent upon setting foot in the festival grounds, with vendor booths on display addressing hot-button social issues like abortion or offering attendees the opportunity to sponsor children in developing countries or to learn about how they could engage in mission work. The latter type of information was particularly ubiquitous, with most tents offering some sort of promotional material for missionary involvement, thus illustrating the festival's strong evangelical moorings. Artists and speakers on stage would also frequently ask attendees to “raise their hands and worship,” a common worshipping style associated particularly strongly with the conservative branch of Christianity in America.

Essentially, Lifest exists to convert young people to Christianity, to help those who already identify as Christian to strengthen their faith and their ties to the church, and to provide a space in which Christian youth can experience elements akin to mainstream popular culture that they will find attractive (e.g., loud music, edgy fashion) but in a protective setting in which the ideological messages of these elements are tightly controlled. It is hoped that by drawing on elements akin to popular culture, the festival organizers will be able to communicate with youth in “a language they understand,” in order to deliver what is ultimately an evangelical message, as

well as other secondary associated messages about a safe and healthy way to live their lives according to conservative Christian principles. Seminars for youth leaders were advertised as helping these adults learn to “capture the hearts of youth with messages of hope,” as well as helping them to “get a new perspective on youth culture, music, and what it means to be relevant in an ever-changing world.” The testimonials from festivalgoers published on Lifest’s official Web site (Lifest, 2012) go far in capturing the essence of the festival’s purpose. As one parent expressed, “My 9 year old son accepted Jesus at Lifest 2011!” Another commented that attending Lifest “is like giving your life to Jesus all over again.” A third wrote, “This year I brought my 16 year old nephew to Lifest with me, praying that he would be moved enough to want to learn more. He not only wants to learn more but on his own he decided to accept Jesus as his savior. As I saw him headed toward the prayer tent, my eyes swelled up with tears.” As a final attendee stated, “Sometimes God speaks in a still, small, quiet voice; sometimes he speaks through amplified music. But He always has a way of getting through.”

The second festival considered here, Cornerstone, differed strikingly from Lifest in many ways during its years of operation. Cornerstone has a long pedigree, dating back over a quarter of a century to 1984, when it was founded by the Jesus People USA movement (or JPUSA, pronounced “japooza”), a counterculture Christian group which sprung from the hippie movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Jesus People (also sometimes called “Jesus Freaks”) movements were commonly found throughout the United States in this era, but they declined with the general collapse of the hippie subculture, and JPUSA currently refers specifically to a particular group descended from this legacy, which remains active near Chicago, living communally and sharing all goods and property. It is this group that organized the Cornerstone Festival for 29 years until the event officially came to an end in 2012.

Cornerstone rose from the cornfields near Bushnell, Illinois, for six days each summer, with most attendees camping on site and spending their days taking in music acts, seminars, and art exhibits and workshops. The festival attracted predominantly young people, but there was also a significant component of older attendees who returned to the festival year after year, and this group was especially prevalent in 2011, as the organizers pushed for a “reunion” theme in an attempt to shore up declining participation numbers, with festival attendance having tanked from a height of 20,000 participants to fewer than 10,000 in recent years. Like Lifest, Cornerstone drew event tourists from a wide geographic area; again, license plates from most U.S. states were observed in 2011, and a significant Canadian contingent managed to find one another to create an impromptu celebration of Canada Day early on in the festival week.

Counterculture values were core to Cornerstone: the festival functioned to counter both the mainstream world’s values of materialism and intense individualism and the socially conservative values espoused by fundamentalist Christianity—especially the notion that the arts and heavy music of the rock and metal genres are sinful. Indeed, the history of JPUSA is one of individuals “united in a general distrust not only of secular society but also of mainstream religious institutions” (Johnston, 2011, citing Di Sabatino, 1999). Despite this stance, JPUSA characterizes itself as aiming to work with other, more institutionalized churches and

organizations, while simultaneously describing itself as a haven for a dropout, rejected generation. This commitment could be seen at the 2011 festival, which featured formal worship sessions from various Christian traditions, including Eastern Orthodox and Catholic. (Notably, this stands in marked contrast to Lifest, which has a strong conservative Protestant bent despite festival organizers stating in an interview that the festival is meant to be welcoming to people from all Christian denominations.)

JPUSA has garnered criticism, and sometimes even ridicule, from wider Christian and secular circles for being too radical in its pursuit of communal living and too *avant garde* in its artistic sensibilities, but this has not stopped the group from continuing to articulate its own notion of Christianity, which is purposely resistant to more entrenched expressions of Christian doctrine and practice. The group draws on Christian scripture to emphasize values of creativity (Psalm 149:3; Psalm 33:3), distrust of bureaucratic and hierarchical structures (Romans 13:3), freedom (Psalm 119:45; Isaiah 61:1; John 8:36; Acts 13:39; Romans 8:21; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1), pleasure (Ecclesiastes 8:15; 1 Timothy 6:18), direct and honest contact among persons (2 Timothy 2:15; Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:1), and the need to discard restrictions and inhibitions (2 Samuel 6:22; Matthew 6:26). Its vision is perhaps best expressed in the interpretation set forth by John Thompson (2000), a sympathetic author who has studied the history of the Christian counterculture music scene extensively, of Christianity's central figure, Jesus Christ:

Who was more rebellious than Jesus of Nazareth? He railed against authority, spoke against personal and religious corruption, and took a stick and a whip to the temple. He healed the sick on the Sabbath, and he encouraged people to walk away from their jobs, sell their belongings, and give their money to the poor. He even refused to remain dead, according to the account of the resurrection. He owned only the clothes on his back, and had no home of his own, and got his tax money from the mouth of a fish. He was such a rebel that the religious leaders had him executed. Find one rocker with even a tenth of that rebellious fire. Yet Jesus has been reimagined in our postmodern world as a slow-moving, gentle, cryptic, and painstakingly polite rabbi, not the ruffian whom the San Hedrin thought was so dangerous. . . . From a certain perspective, Jesus and rock music are perfectly suited to each other.

In keeping with the image they advance of Jesus as a rebellious and spunky philosopher and servant who advocated equality among people and love of one's neighbor, Cornerstone's organizers welcomed a variety of activists for progressive social causes to participate in the festival each year, from speakers who offered workshops on healing race relations or addressing urban homelessness to booths where attendees could collect information and sign petitions for social change. Like Lifest, there were many booths featuring information on missionary activities, but there was more of an emphasis placed on taking care of others in the spirit of Jesus as a healer of the sick and an advocate for the poor than on evangelizing for the sake of saving souls alone. And in keeping with the picture, described above, of Jesus as a ruffian rebel, Cornerstone, from its outset, was open to performers whose controversial artistic styles tended to

leave them excluded from the mainstream CYMF circuit. In JPUSA's view, Christianity at its core demands counterculture values and forms of expression.

In 2012, Cornerstone closed its gates for the last time, with organizers citing the festival's inability to maintain financial viability in a poor economy. Given that most attendees drove to the festival, often across long distances, it is perhaps not surprising that rising gas prices and an "employer's economy," in which taking time off from work can more easily result in one's job being given to somebody else, ultimately did the event in, especially given the low-income status of a large proportion of its followers. It is also the case, as Cornerstone organizers expressed in their interviews, that bands whose only refuge was once Cornerstone are now finding more acceptance on the mainstream rock festival circuit, as popular culture becomes more tolerant of overt expressions of Christian identity as long as the performer's goal is not overtly evangelical in nature. The festival's refusal to compromise its principles and seek sponsors who offer donations based on the number of "souls saved" by the event—a tactic pursued by many other CYMFs—may also explain why it was hit harder by the recession than other programs (Johnston, 2011). Finally, Cornerstone's closing may be due in some part to the simple vagaries of the life courses of key individuals involved in its production, as the festival's longtime director moved on after the 2011 event, and follow-up contacts by Colleen revealed that several other festival organizers were in the process of leaving the JPUSA commune to transition into other life projects.

All may not be lost for Cornerstone, however. Shortly after the festivals' ending was officially announced, an "Occupy Cornerstone" page sprung up on Facebook, where devotees of the event held conversations about strategies to revive it, such as purchasing the festival site or the Cornerstone name. The tangible outcome of this strategizing thus far appears to be the creation of a new festival called Audiofeed—a sort of heir apparent, or Cornerstone 2.0 if you will—which will debut in 2013 and attempt to carry the spirit of Cornerstone forward by providing a place where members of the "Cornerstone community" can continue to meet and share the festival experience annually. Audiofeed will no doubt have its differences from Cornerstone, as it will not be coordinated by JPUSA, and it may also have a somewhat different feel on account of being removed from its rural footing and relocated to a mid-size university city, Champaign-Urbana in central Illinois. This time of transition is sure to provide interesting future research opportunities (especially since Champaign-Urbana is coincidentally the first author's hometown!).

The Cornerstone Festival was clearly a product of evangelical Christianity, and its founders and followers embraced many of the same core beliefs as those who gravitate toward Lifest: a belief in Jesus Christ as the path to salvation, a view of the Bible as the word of God and the guide for a Christian life, and a firmness in the responsibility to live one's life as a testament to Christ. Indeed the experience of being born again is common to Cornerstone attendees, and Johnston (2011), in his ethnographic study of the festival in 2008, reports the experience of a group of his research participants "praying over him," a common evangelical practice in which a person who is struggling with his or her faith is surrounded by believers, who offer a prayer that

the person will be able to successfully connect with Jesus and feel Christ's power working in his or her life. At the same time, however, Cornerstone's organizers and attendees tend not to adhere to certain aspects of religious and social belief and practice associated with conservative evangelicalism, such as a skepticism toward Christians who are not conservative Protestants as not really being true followers of Jesus, an adherence to traditional social views, or a literal reading of passages in the Bible that marginalize women or gays and lesbians. Instead, they constitute themselves as rebelling against mainline evangelicalism and bringing their faith back in line with the example of Jesus as a social activist who exemplified a life of putting others first and embracing those on the margins of society. Although their social views may be reminiscent of evangelicalism's nineteenth-century roots in the championing of progressive causes, there is no evidence that this group has shifted its thinking, theologically, back to the kind of postmillennialism that characterized their forebears, or that still characterizes mainline Protestant Christianity. Instead, they are truly a breakaway movement within a breakaway movement—a subculture within a subculture—whose views and practices stand as a testament to a long journey of contingencies that led them first away from mainstream American culture and then away from mainstream evangelicalism.

Cornerstone and Lifest are thus very different manifestations of the CYMF phenomenon. As such, they illustrate the complexity of the evangelical subculture and its constitution through leisure and tourism practices. I now turn to a discussion of the role of these festivals in shoring up different notions of Christian identity and the implications of such constructions of Christian identity for the creation of conditions conducive to nurturing positive peace in American society and beyond.

Christian Music Festivals, the Evangelical Subculture, and American Politics: Implications for Positive Peace

Growing up in the United States in the last quarter of the twentieth century, I lived through an era, still ongoing, of "bumper sticker wars," in which the pulse of the American religio-political scene could be read with little effort, as part of the standard workaday commute. "God Made Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve!" one car would crow, in a condemnation against homosexuality. "Hate Is Not a Family Value," another car would retort. A particularly popular choice during my teen years read "In Case of Rapture, This Vehicle Will Be Unmanned," implying that the driver would have ascended into heaven, leaving his hapless vehicle abandoned on the road. In this case, the response from some non-evangelicals was "When the Rapture Comes, Can I Have Your Car?"—or sometimes the more pointed political response, "When Will the Rapture Take All the Republicans Away?" The clever "As Long as There Are Tests, There Will Be Prayer in Public Schools," received the tart response, "Don't Pray in My School, and I Won't Think in Your Church."

Such proclamations of automotive self-expression can no doubt represent the extreme, hyperbolic ends of the spectrum, in terms of serving as a gauge on public opinion. Nevertheless,

no close observer of American politics in recent decades could easily miss what has been an emerging imbrication of evangelical Christianity with right wing politics. Although people rarely stop to think about it, American evangelicalism's current level of political involvement is curious, given the movement's longstanding shyness toward the political realm, in line with its premillennialist orientation that the earth is lost and doomed, and that a Christian life is best served by turning inward and focusing on one's salvation and the afterlife. In having chosen to re-involve itself in the political sphere, evangelicalism's close relationship with the contemporary Republican Party is perhaps even more curious, given the movement's much more left wing stance during America's key nation-building era of the 1800s. Popular understanding holds that this relationship was born in response to the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973, legalizing abortion in the United States, a judicial action that supposedly caused the evangelical community to erupt in subsequent protest. Balmer (2006) debunks this myth, however, noting that evangelicals were not immediately galvanized by this issue; indeed, key movement leaders even issued statements supporting the Court's decision on abortion rights. Instead, the key political issue centered around taxation status for religious schools, which were being forced to abandon racially based admissions policies if they wished to continue to qualify as charitable organizations under the U.S. tax code, as a result of a very different court decision, this time at the district level: *Green v. Connally*. As Balmer (2006) argues, the issue hinged not so much on the desire of evangelicals to pursue an agenda of racial segregation per se, but on the larger problem it represented: that of perceived government interference in religious practice (albeit simply through the withdrawal of favorable tax terms to religious schools deemed to be *prima facie* not humanitarian in nature, based on their embracing of racial segregation). Thus, evangelicals reentered the political scene in an organized way not because there had necessarily been any shift in their eschatology reinvigorating them to become involved in ameliorating the problems of the world, but quite simply because they felt their subculture—their safe place in a ruinous world not long for existence—was under attack.

It would be a gross exaggeration to say that all American evangelical Christians are strongly political or that, of those who are, all identify with the right wing. Nevertheless, a strong alliance exists between the evangelical movement and the Republican Party, and studies from numerous disciplines have documented American evangelicals' propensity to align themselves with the domestic social and foreign policy agendas of leaders to the right on the political spectrum (Thumma, 1991; Jelen, 1994; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Baumgartner, Francia, & Morris, 2008). Such issues include, perhaps most prominently, opposition to abortion rights, opposition to gay rights and especially marriage equality, support for the state of Israel, and a hawkish approach to American foreign policy in the Middle East.

This alliance was, in many ways, deliberately forged by an invisible hand of political maneuvers in the 1970s, when conservative activist Paul Weyrich, who had been trying to galvanize evangelicals as a potential voting block for years, finally succeeded in recruiting movement leaders James Dobson and Jerry Falwell to his cause in the wake of the *Green* decision and Bob Jones University's unsuccessful attempt thereafter to sue the federal

government to maintain both its tax-exempt status and its operating policies, which prohibited interracial dating among its students. Convincing evangelical leaders that involvement in the political process was their best route to defending their beleaguered subculture and that the Republican Party was best suited to serve their needs and enshrine their values in public policy, Weyrich won key evangelical figures for his conservative movement, a process which involved no little chicanery, as Weyrich was able to successfully pin the Bob Jones situation on Jimmy Carter (himself a card-carrying evangelical!) and the Democratic Party, despite that Carter was actually not yet president when that event occurred (Balmer, 2006). Once an alliance had been born, leaders worked to create a more full and robust platform that would compel evangelical voters. They also worked to consolidate their political voice through the creation of organizations like the Moral Majority, a group which sought to unite evangelicals with other types of religious adherents, including conservative Catholics and Jews, in the quest to advance “traditional values” in the American public sphere, and the Christian Coalition, unsuccessful 1988 presidential candidate Pat Robertson’s organization to unite various branches of conservative Christianity and mobilize them against perceived attacks on “family values,” which in practice tended to result primarily in activism against abortion and gay rights. Thus, although not all evangelicals are overtly political, and although dissent is certainly evident, conservative politics have become very much embedded in the evangelical subculture, a fact evident in any glance at American voting patterns (Stowe, 2011).

As spaces in which American evangelical culture is nurtured, consolidated, and transmitted to the next generation, then, mainstream evangelical CYMFs like Lifest can, on some level, serve as a force for the perpetuation of right wing ideologies and conservative political convictions among youth. Although festival organizers may not see themselves as promoting political messages, just as Belhassen’s (2009) study participants who led groups of religious tourists on evangelical pilgrimages to Israel did not view their activities as political, such implications are nevertheless present. In their motivational speaking sessions, Life Promotions speakers do not actively promote the Christian Right’s agenda, and in fact often encourage criticism of this movement’s approach in subtle ways. They caution youth, for instance, against taking a “morality-based” approach to Christianity, or one which focuses on following the right behavioral codes or coming down on the right side of political debates instead of on enhancing one’s relationship with Jesus. However, they say nothing to challenge interpretations of scripture that lead to negative attitudes toward sexual minorities or followers of other religious traditions. Similarly, they speak of loving those who are “different” from oneself, but the categories of difference enumerated tend to be racial minorities, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor, or perhaps social categories, like “nerds” or other types of kids who are low on the social hierarchy in teenage contexts. Notably absent is the overt mention of a need to exhibit love and tolerance toward sexual minorities, such as gays or lesbians, or members of other religious traditions, such as Muslims. Listeners have to be able to make that extrapolation in their own minds—and there’s no real reason to believe they do, especially given the negative messages they may hear about these groups at home, from their local or national evangelical leaders, or in the Christian media.

Evangelical prejudice against sexual minorities and religious out-groups continues to be well documented in the psychology literature (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), and events that socialize youth into the evangelical subculture without challenging these prejudices perpetuate them—intentionally or not.

Meanwhile, the social pressures to fit in with one's peers on the Christian social scene can be enormous. I recall well from my own adolescence the sincere pain and fear that characterized the teen years of some of my close friends, as they struggled to achieve the experience of faith that was expected of them by their parents and friends at church. One friend, who was extremely gifted musically, repeatedly threw away all the cassette tapes in her collection that did not fall into the Christian music genre, backsliding each time into an interest in popular music only to eventually renew her religious commitment and purge her cassette box again. At the time, I found her actions a bit silly, and I remember thinking that she was wasting an awful lot of money buying music that she was just going to throw away after her next conversion experience. As an adult, I am able to much more sympathetically recognize the genuine torment that characterized her actions, as she struggled to live what her parents, pastor, and youth group were defining for her as a Christian lifestyle, hoping that her choice to forego the influence of secular music would help her to more fully experience Christ's presence in her life and to live up the expectations of herself and others, regarding what it should "feel like" to be a Christian.

CYMFs like Lifest therefore have complex implications for the building of positive peace. On one hand, they provide a safe space for Christian youth who may feel alienated from mainstream society, allowing them to feel a sense of inclusion and worth as part of a community, while being able to experience some of the trappings of mainstream adolescence, such as rock-and-roll music and current fashion trends. At the same time, however, the evangelical youth leisure subculture may make it difficult for teens to explore other aspects of their identity beyond religion, and the Christian youth scene may also be quite coercive in terms of scripting a single normative path to a young person's experience of Christian faith. Perhaps more importantly, from a sociological point of view, this subculture may insulate young people from those who are different from them, especially in terms of sexuality or religious persuasion, and it may perpetuate prejudice through the advancement of particular doctrinal orientations that discourage tolerance and equal rights.

The Cornerstone Festival can, in many ways, be read specifically as an act of resistance against this outcome. Cornerstone's organizers see themselves as rebels, both against a mainstream society characterized by materialism and greed and a mainstream evangelical subculture characterized by narrow-mindedness and a failure to focus on the actual teachings of Jesus. They feel that conservative evangelicalism has failed to uphold its commitment to care and advocacy for those who are disadvantaged in society—those the Bible terms "the least of these"—for whom Jesus' followers, mirroring his example, are supposed to take responsibility for looking after. In essence, they perceive mainstream evangelicalism as having defaulted on Jesus' legacy. They thus tend to champion causes that would be generally associated with progressive, leftist politics in the United States: inclusiveness, equal rights, poverty alleviation,

environmental protection, and so forth. The festival thus served as a space of comfort and support for individuals who feel alienated from mainstream society and mainstream evangelicalism, and attendees frequently expressed to Colleen that they lived for this event each year, relying on it for spiritual sustenance and community. It also, however, served to advance an alternative construction of Christianity and Christian identity, thus opening a potentially different path for young people who felt drawn to Christianity but also to types of social reform that might be frowned upon by their more conservative leaders, parents, or peers.

CYMFs can thus be seen as flashpoints for the experience and expression of different ways of Christian being. Some festivals tend to buttress the status quo, supporting the maintenance of a conservative evangelical subculture that tends to thwart the building of positive peace in U.S. society, through its support of a right wing power structure that seeks to deny gay rights, cut assistance to disadvantaged members of society, and prevent wealth redistribution through taxation structures that favor the rich. Others, like Cornerstone, resist the alliance between evangelicalism and the Republican Party and provide attendees with educational opportunities, such as workshops and art features, which spur discussion of the Bible's complexities and offer information on how to get involved in social activism projects that reduce poverty and promote inclusiveness. The fact that Cornerstone has now closed its gates, while events like Lifest are going as strong as ever, may lead one to take a rather pessimistic view regarding which of these versions of the evangelical subculture will prevail in the future. Only time will tell.

Conclusion

Haessly (2010, p. 5) conceptualizes peace as a state in which "human beings can achieve their true potential while caring for themselves, each other and all of creation." Prejudice against those outside one's social group is a barrier to actualizing such a vision. So is feeling alienated because of one's spiritual beliefs. CYMFs create a safe space for youth to experience popular culture forms of entertainment and to bond with their fellow Christian peers. As such, they offer a space of teenage normalcy and of solidarity, important features in helping youth to build and maintain self-esteem, an essential feature for realizing peace in the lives of young individuals during the turbulent teenage years, when a lack of inner peace can easily turn tragic. In their insulation of youth and maintenance of a rather closed evangelical subculture, however, CYMFs perpetuate conditions that can interfere with positive peace-building, both by failing to challenge right wing ideology within the evangelical movement and by failing to promote engagement of youth with peers outside their religious circle, which could help to build bridges between evangelicals and members of groups traditionally targeted by prejudice. CYMFs with alternative ideologies and practices have been forged, as exemplified by Cornerstone, but they lack the structural support of the mainstream evangelical community (e.g., corporate sponsorships), and thus are more difficult to maintain. It therefore remains to be seen whether alternative forms of leisure and tourism practice, which challenge ideologies that militate against the building of positive peace, will continue to arise and maintain a foothold in the evangelical community. One

thing is certain, however: the evangelical movement's importance in U.S. politics, and the concomitant significance of the American people's political choices on the world stage, will ensure that this subculture's leisure and tourism practices will remain a phenomenon to be closely watched by researchers interested in the connections between religion, tourism, and peace.

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