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# A cultural justice approach to popular music heritage in deindustrialising cities

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## ABSTRACT

Deindustrialisation contributes to significant transformations for local communities, including rising unemployment, poverty and urban decay. Following the ‘creative city’ phenomenon in cultural policy, deindustrialising cities across the globe have increasingly turned to arts, culture and heritage as strategies for economic diversification and urban renewal. This article considers the potential role that popular music heritage might play in revitalising cities grappling with industrial decline. Specifically, we outline how a ‘cultural justice approach’ can be used within critical heritage studies to assess the benefits and drawbacks of such heritage initiatives. Reflecting on examples from three deindustrialising cities – Wollongong, Australia; Detroit, USA; and Birmingham, UK – we analyse how popular music heritage can produce cultural justice outcomes in three key ways: practices of collection, preservation and archiving; curation, storytelling and heritage interpretation; and mobilising communities for collective action.

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## Introduction

Over the past several decades, industrial decline in Western countries has contributed to significant economic, social, cultural and material transformations for local communities. This phenomenon, often referred to as ‘deindustrialisation’ and ‘post-industrialism’, has been accompanied by rising unemployment, poverty and urban decay. In the wake of deindustrialisation, many cities have increasingly recognised that arts, culture and heritage can be important for their rejuvenation and the diversification of their economies. Local governments across the globe have turned to ‘creative city’ strategies as a form of renewal, aiming to invest in creative industries, strengthen their service economy and expand their cultural offer (see e.g. Barnes et al. 2006; Atkinson and Easthope 2009; Waitt and Gibson 2009). These strategies have included, for example, a greater emphasis on popular music, with places branding themselves as ‘music cities’ (e.g. through the UNESCO ‘City of Music’ scheme; see also Flew 2008; Homan 2014) in an effort to revitalise their image and bolster a music tourism industry. This trend encompasses promoting contemporary live music scenes as well as looking to the past through popular music heritage initiatives. These efforts have manifested as both government-led, authorised projects and more vernacular, DIY initiatives (see Baker 2017).

In this article, we analyse the potential benefits and drawbacks of popular music heritage for cities that have grappled with deindustrialisation. The effects of industrial decline are often measured and discussed in relation to economic and social factors: the closure of plants, job losses,

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reduced quality of living conditions, population decline, increasing inequalities, and legacies of trauma (Strangeman and Rhodes 2014). However, deindustrialisation also has significant cultural effects. These effects can be described as what Nancy Fraser (1995) calls ‘cultural injustices’, which manifest as ‘cultural domination’, ‘nonrecognition’ and ‘disrespect’. In this article, we examine the extent to which popular music heritage can resist these injustices. Reflecting on examples from three deindustrialising cities – Wollongong, Australia; Detroit, USA; and Birmingham, UK – we analyse how popular music heritage initiatives in these cities might produce cultural justice outcomes. First, however, we make a case for the usefulness of the ‘cultural justice approach’ to critical heritage studies, followed by a consideration of the cultural injustices specific to our case study cities and the role of popular music heritage in the pursuit of cultural justice. This analysis highlights the capacity for a cultural justice approach to heritage to open up dialogues about multiple, intersecting issues – in this case, popular music’s relationship to local identity, industrial decline, race, class, sexuality, gender, and so on. We conclude by reflecting on the potential for heritage to resist or reinforce cultural injustices, and offer recommendations for how a critical cultural justice approach can be put into action.

## Social justice, cultural justice and critical heritage studies

Considerations of equity, power and well-being are central concerns within critical heritage studies (Gentry and Smith 2019). As a field, critical heritage studies rejects the notion that heritage products, processes or institutions are neutral, and instead considers the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of how heritage is constructed (Winter 2013; Waterton and Watson 2013). For example, Smith (2006) has examined how heritage is framed through an authorised heritage discourse that reinforces existing historical canons, privileges the perspectives of dominant groups and ‘reproduce[s] established social hierarchies’ (Gentry and Smith 2019, 1149). Likewise, Waterton and Smith (2010, 9) unpack how traditional notions of ‘community’ deployed by scholars and heritage professionals ‘can lead to misrecognition, discrimination, lowered self-esteem and lack of parity’ and can obscure issues of ‘disharmony, power and marginality, thereby heightening misrecognition’. Research in critical heritage studies has also considered projects that resist such discourses, such as practices of ‘heritage from below’ (Muzaini and Minca 2018) or archival activism (Flinn 2011; Collins 2015).

With the above in mind, critical heritage studies and associated fields (see e.g. Waterton and Smith 2010; Sandell and Nightingale 2012; Duff et al. 2013; Jaeger, Shilton, and Koepfler 2016; Johnston and Marwood 2017) have drawn on ‘social justice’ as a framework for understanding how heritage objects, practices, processes and policies can be deployed ‘to both perpetuate and resist social inequalities’ (Kryder-Reid 2018, 691). Social justice has also become a central concern within the heritage profession, with some heritage practitioners advocating for archives, museums and other heritage initiatives to ‘explicitly adopt a social justice mission’ (Punzalan and Caswell 2016, 25). Punzalan and Caswell (2016, 27) suggest that questions of social justice are apparent in discussions surrounding issues such as: ‘Inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized sectors of society’; ‘Development of community archives’; and ‘Efforts to document human rights violations’. Similarly, Baird (2014, 12) points out that questions driving the social justice approach include: ‘how is heritage mobilized in knowledge claims and identity creation? Are specific discourses or practices privileged in the name of safeguarding heritage? Are certain voices included and/or silenced ...?’. In highlighting how inequalities of power manifest in heritage practice, the social justice approach reveals the importance of attempting to better capture ‘the needs, interests, and values of communities, particularly those who have been historically marginalised and effaced’ (Kryder-Reid 2018, 691).

While the concept of social justice is regularly invoked in critical heritage studies, discussion of *cultural* justice remains underdeveloped. This gap is significant given that heritage is a *cultural* product and process that seeks to represent *cultural* identities, expressions, practices, symbols and

materialities. Cultural justice can be described as a form of social justice, in that both are concerned with power and inequalities. Cultural justice, however, offers a more precise lens through which to consider the cultural dimensions of injustice. Distinguishing between socio-economic injustices and cultural or symbolic injustices, Nancy Fraser (1995) describes the latter as:

rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. Examples include cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one's own); nonrecognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretative practices of one's culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions).

Cultural justice, therefore, refers to the processes and actions through which these injustices are resisted, subverted and challenged through discursive and material practices.

In *Real Love*, Andrew Ross (1998, 2) suggests that cultural justice refers to 'doing justice to culture, pursuing justice through cultural means, and seeking justice for cultural claims'. He notes that cultural justice is often linked to other kinds of struggles against injustice, including being 'an integral part of a long revolution in social justice' (Ross 1998, 194). For Ross (1998, 3), striving for equality and justice necessitates the 'respectful recognition' of cultural differences, which can be 'a vehicle for the material and ethical improvement of our lives', reversing 'the channels of official neglect, economic subordination, and cultural denigration and turn[ing] them into routes toward pride, empowerment, and equity'. Ross's work on the pursuit of cultural justice has been taken up by a number of scholars working to build an understanding of what that pursuit might look like in contemporary society.

For example, in the book *Creative Justice*, Mark Banks (2017a) explores injustices and inequalities relating to creative labour and the cultural industries. Banks (2017a, 2) is concerned with three layers of justice in relation to culture: giving justice to culture; giving justice to cultural work; and distributive justice in relation to how different institutions 'distribute their resources and favours in more or less fair or equal ways'. The first two layers speak to taking seriously cultural work and its products 'as meaningful phenomena with their own objective (as well as subjectively-experienced) properties' (Banks 2017b, 2–3). The third layer is concerned with achieving parity of participation in cultural work and 'how resources and positions are socially *distributed* and how cultural value is recognised and judged' (Banks 2017a, 7, original emphasis).

Michael Denning (2004) argues that cultural justice encompasses much of what is generally understood by the term 'cultural politics' – it refers to 'affirmative action', 'politics of recognition' and 'struggles to reassert the dignity of despised cultural identifications' (Denning 2004, 164). Denning (2004, 164–165) notes that in struggles for cultural justice, 'artists, intellectuals, and cultural workers' self-organise and create organisations and cultural institutions that can work to reinstate dignity' and rally 'for equal access to the institutions of cultural production and cultural distribution', including galleries, libraries, archives and museums, performance venues and recording studios. The struggle for cultural justice also involves 'the battle over the relations of representation', with attempts to 'reshape the selective traditions that determine which works of art and culture will be preserved, kept in print, taught to young people, and displayed in museums, and which cans of film will be housed, whose manuscripts and letters will be archived and indexed' (Denning 2004, 165).

The work of Ross, Banks and Denning highlights the key concerns at the heart of cultural justice – namely, the recognition and value of cultural objects, cultural institutions and cultural work, as well as issues of power, participation, access and representation. It is also important to consider, however, the specific strategies through which cultural justice is sought. In their work on the adoption of cultural narratives in environmental justice movements, Banerjee and Steinberg (2015, 41) detail the 'Cultural Justice Approach' and 'how perceptions of cultural injustices are

adapted to create cultural tools of protest to mobilize communities against injustice'. Banerjee and Steinberg (2015) offer three key tools that constitute a cultural justice toolkit:

- (1) *Symbologies of place*, which refer to 'physical remains of a community's past history', 'images of ongoing economic and cultural relationships in the community', 'cultural symbols and imaginaries', 'landmarks that are part of community members' collective memories', and 'collective efforts for historic preservation of cultural heritages' (p. 43). These material artefacts 'allow communities to reconstruct their attachment to place and heritage' (p. 42) and 'forge meaningful connections to their collective past and resist injustice' (p. 43).
- (2) *Historiographies of space*, which refer to historical narratives and 'place-based storytelling' used to 'construct a platform for sharing knowledge about a community's spatial history and attachment to place' (p. 43). Storytelling initiatives 'allow communities to contest "official" public knowledge and offer alternative sets of knowledge claims about local culture, history, and heritage' in ways that seek to 'promote and protect cultural ties that affirm collective cultural identities to residents' (p. 43).
- (3) *Social ties and community networks*, which refers to how the community mobilises for collective action and to help 'retain links to collective identities' (p. 42). Social ties and community networks refer to informal networks and 'intra-community' support, including drawing on resources for 'financial support, volunteering, and organizational needs' (p. 44), as well as 'inter-community' networks – 'relationships with well-established activist networks' that can help 'garner support and [a] public platform for community resistance' (p. 48).

These tools can be drawn on to navigate and resist injustices, or 'construct strategies of action and influence collective mobilization' (Banerjee and Steinberg 2015, 43).

Reference to cultural justice in heritage scholarship is largely limited to passing comments rather than detailed explication. For example, Waterton and Smith (2010, 10) draw on Nancy Fraser's work to examine the 'cultural aspects' of social (in)justice, but the term or concept of 'cultural justice' is not explicitly discussed. Bastian's (2013) work on cultural archives concludes by proposing that social justice and cultural justice could 'work in tandem as we build archives that reflect both', although she does not define cultural justice here. Similarly, Banks' (2019, 223) study of the collection of African-American art by Black art collectors refers to cultural justice in the chapter title, and goes on to discuss the extent to which these collectors factor race into their purchasing choices 'as a strategy to address the underrecognition of African American artists'. However, the concept of cultural justice is not mentioned until a concluding sentence acknowledging that 'more nuanced and empirically grounded insights on cultural justice and consumption' (Banks 2019, 223) are needed.

In the field of popular music heritage studies, cultural justice has started to receive greater attention. Long et al. (2017, 2019) consider the archiving of popular music culture as a form of public history practice defined by an orientation to cultural justice. Their work suggests that cultural justice is operationalised through the 'democratized practices' that constitute 'the formation and content' of popular music archives (Long et al. 2017, 63). Such archives seek to address the injustices that 'have occurred through the trivialisation of music cultures and the marginalisation of popular music histories in authorised heritage activities and discourses' (Long et al. 2019, 99). For these authors, the principle of cultural justice is at work in community archives of popular music in that they privilege 'overlooked stories built by the community itself from the materials of its archive and their affective connections to it' with this activity 'an important assertion of the [community's] right to be documented and heard on their own terms' (Long et al. 2019, 109).

While this work by Long et al. (2017, 2019) focuses on doing justice to popular music and its recognition as a legitimate form of heritage, in this article we instead concentrate on the various ways that popular music heritage can be a means through which to seek cultural justice. We aim to

further conceptualise cultural justice in relation to popular music heritage, drawing on empirical evidence to reveal how it unfolds in heritage initiatives. Deploying and refining Banerjee and Steinberg's toolkit, we map their three key tools onto examples of popular music heritage initiatives in three deindustrialising cities. We take a critical approach to understanding cultural justice, recognising that heritage can both resist and reinforce inequalities.

## Methods and case studies

This article emerges from research investigating how the preservation and display of popular music heritage in deindustrialising cities might offer itself as an alternative and sustainable strategy through which to enhance wellbeing and civic pride in these places. Strangleman, Rhodes and Linkon (2013, 8) observe that within deindustrialisation scholarship, there is growing interest in long-term 'cultural legacies' of industrial decline rather than only its immediate social, political and economic impacts. They note the value of 'a cultural approach to understanding deindustrialization' – in particular, considering how industrial pasts are remembered, interpreted and represented, and their role in framing the present and future (Strangleman, Rhodes, and Linkon 2013, 11). Our approach was therefore necessarily ethnographic, with data collection involving interviews, observations, photographs and the gathering of materials such as brochures, flyers, books, CDs and DVDs. Fieldwork was undertaken in Birmingham from 30 March–2 April 2019 and 28 August–15 September 2019, in Detroit from 3–14 April 2019, and in Wollongong from 8–13 October 2018, 15–20 June 2019 and 16–23 October 2019. The final period of fieldwork in Wollongong involved the implementation of cultural justice as method, with the research team facilitating a public panel on popular music heritage in deindustrialising cities. Held at Wollongong Art Gallery, the panel brought together project respondents from Detroit, Birmingham and Wollongong. The transcript of the panel, along with materials emerging from other research-related activities (e.g. a radio interview and an arts-based method workshop), were later published in a zine compiled by the research team which acts as both a data source and public engagement output (see Baker, Cantillon, and Nowak 2020).

This article takes a comparative approach to case studies, placing the datasets from Wollongong, Detroit and Birmingham in conversation with each other using NVivo qualitative software in order to undertake a thematic analysis which identified patterns, regularities and differences relating to symbolologies of place, historiographies of space and social ties and community networks. This involved 'attending to the intricacies of the individual case', documenting the 'diversity and variety' across all cases, and addressing 'the reasons for variation or indeed for similarity across cases' (Filippucci 2009, 322). Below, we discuss a few select examples from the case study cities that highlight how cultural justice might be at work in popular music heritage projects.

The case study cities were selected because each had experienced significant growth through the early to mid-twentieth century spurred by their booming manufacturing industries, followed by periods of industrial decline in more recent decades. Wollongong's major industry was its steelworks, while Birmingham and Detroit centred on automobile manufacturing and engineering. Birmingham and Wollongong experienced significant industrial decline throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, due in part to global economic restructuring. Wollongong's steelworks was the city's biggest employer from World War II through to the 1970s (Watson 1991). An estimated 20,000 jobs in steel and coal were lost between 1982 and 1983 (Watson 1991), and by 1996 the steel workforce was just over a quarter of the size it was in the 1970s (Hagan 2002). Birmingham, on the other hand, suffered from an overdependence on its car manufacturing industry (Martin 1995). From 1981 to 1991, 70,000 manufacturing jobs in the city were lost (Shaw 2000). Detroit's decline began earlier – its population peaked at 1.8 million in 1950 (Shaw 2000) and has been declining ever since, with a current population of half that (United States Census Bureau 2018). The city's massive population loss has been due to multiple complex and interconnecting factors, including the downsizing of industry, racial inequalities, suburbanisation and 'white flight', and, more recently, the foreclosure



of homes and deteriorating economic conditions following the 2007/2008 global financial crisis (Shaw 2000; Pedroni 2011).

In the wake of industrial decline, each of these cities suffered from high unemployment rates, increasing poverty and urban decay. In each case, there was a need to diversify the city's economy and reorient its image. In Wollongong, this manifested in the adoption of 'creative city' strategies (Barnes et al. 2006; Waite and Gibson 2009) and the growth of health and knowledge industries, with University of Wollongong now a significant employer in the city. Birmingham's city council focused on renewal via shifting to service-based industries, expanding its cultural offer and regenerating the CBD (Martin 1995; Long et al. 2019). Detroit's recovery has been slower, with the city filing for bankruptcy in 2013. However, in recent years Detroit has been in a process of regeneration, attracting 'large-scale redevelopment, ruin tourism and entrepreneurialism' that has led to the renovation or demolition of many urban ruins, but also the displacement of marginalised residents and the erasure of their histories (Fraser 2018, 443).

In addition to these trends of deindustrialisation, each case study city has a rich history of popular music production and consumption. Wollongong is most well known for its rock, punk and grunge music traditions, exemplified by bands such as Tumbleweed, Proton Energy Pills, Zambian Goat Herders and Hockey Dad. Detroit is famous for blues, gospel, jazz, pop, soul, rock, techno and hip hop, Motown artists, and musicians like The White Stripes, Juan Atkins, Eminem and MC5. In Birmingham, genres that have flourished include reggae, heavy metal, folk, Bhangra, progressive rock, punk, post-punk, techno, dub, grime and indie, with notable bands such as Steel Pulse, Black Sabbath, UB40, Electric Light Orchestra, Duran Duran, The Streets and Editors. In this article, we are less concerned with the wider significance of these musical pasts, and more with how they are embedded in meaning-making and place identity at a local level. 'Deindustrialization is a highly place-dependent phenomenon' (Berger and Wicke 2017, 12) and our discussion centres on the localised effects of and responses to globalised processes of industrial decline as it relates to remembering popular music's past by communities in-place. In recent years, each case study city has seen a number of heritage initiatives emerge that aim to document, preserve and celebrate popular music's past and present. We discuss some of these initiatives below in relation to cultural justice.

## Applying the cultural justice toolkit to popular music heritage

Cultural justice is intertwined with 'the transformation of socioeconomic conditions' (Ross 1998, 191), meaning that cultural expressions and economic forces are deeply interconnected. It is unsurprising, then, that the economic changes underpinning deindustrialisation have shaped cultural identities and practices and played a role in creating, reinforcing and challenging cultural injustices. As outlined above, communities in deindustrialising cities face a number of injustices – job losses, reduced access to public infrastructures and services, and high levels of poverty, crime and urban decay, resulting in stigmatisation, disrespect and exclusion – and these have disproportionately affected non-white, migrant and working-class people (see e.g. Shaw 2000). Popular music has provided an important mode of cultural expression for these marginalised groups and the wider community. In some cases, musicians have been influenced by the industrial soundscape of these cities while lyrics have reflected on the experiences of working – and losing work – in factories. For instance, Birmingham bands Black Sabbath and Judas Priest drew on the 'rhythm of the factory' (Bottà 2015, 113) and the themes in their music were influenced by their 'poor, working-class experience' (Harrison 2010, 145).

It is important to remember the deindustrialising city not only as 'a victim or a place of loss but also home to robust social organization and community life' (Linkon and Russo 2002, 246). Stories surrounding popular music production and consumption in deindustrialising cities highlight the potential for creative activity and senses of affinity to flourish during times of immense hardship. Rather than only imagining deindustrialising cities in terms of pollution, ruin and despair, looking

to rich histories and contemporary practices of popular music can provide alternative narratives that acknowledge and celebrate the cultural vibrancy of these places. On the other hand, looking to the past can also provide opportunities to acknowledge ‘difficult heritage’ (Macdonald 2009), recognising – and doing justice to – experiences of trauma, loss and oppression that might typically be silenced or minimised (see Cvetkovich 2003). These differing potentials emphasise people’s heterogeneous affective engagements with heritage and the pluralistic ways that cultural justice may manifest.

In our case study cities, we came across a range of popular music heritage initiatives that aim to celebrate communities of interest and place-based histories through documenting, preserving and commemorating popular music’s past and present. Table 1 lists some examples of popular music heritage in Wollongong, Detroit and Birmingham and how they relate to the three key tools of cultural justice outlined by Banerjee and Steinberg (2015). Although these tools have been separated for the purposes of the table, it is important to note that they can overlap and intertwine – for example, material remnants of history being used for storytelling processes, or community networks mobilising around practices of preservation. Below, we discuss some of these specific examples from our case study cities and how they align with the cultural justice approach.

### ***Symbologies of place***

The first cultural justice tool – symbologies of place – refers to the physical and digital remnants of popular music’s past, such as those collected in archives and museums. For example, Steel City Sound was a Wollongong-based, DIY online archive maintained from 2010 to 2015 by a local music enthusiast, Warren Wheeler. Before it went offline in 2019, the archive aimed to document the city’s popular music history through a collection of blog posts focusing on various venues, bands, publications and events. On the website, Wheeler (2013) explained the significance of understanding this heritage and its relationship to local identity:

Documenting and archiving the sound of our city provides more than just a novel nostalgic trip for those that have since ‘grown up’ and moved on. It paints the story of Wollongong and our surrounds. It celebrates the creative spirit that the region cultivates and aims to ensure that the product of that spirit is preserved for future generations.

Here, Wheeler elucidates the value of collecting and archiving popular music heritage to capture the richness of the city’s vernacular creative activity, reaffirming a positive cultural narrative about Wollongong and its identity beyond the rise and decline of industry. However, in terms of cultural justice, it is imperative that such collections are accessible; in the case of Steel City Sound, it can now only be viewed through internet archive services such as Wayback Machine, limiting opportunities for people to engage with its contents.

Symbologies of place also relate to built heritage. The non-profit heritage organisation the Detroit Sound Conservancy (DSC) has led several projects aimed at protecting and revitalising sites of significance to popular music’s past in Detroit, recognising the connections between tangible heritage and its intangible associations. The DSC has been working since 2012 to protect the United Sound Systems recording studio – the first independent recording studio in Detroit, which has hosted the likes of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Lee Hooker, Aretha Franklin and the Red Hot Chilli Peppers. Since 2013, the site has been under threat of demolition for a highway expansion. The DSC and its partners applied for the studio’s designation as a historic district in 2015 and fundraised for a Michigan Historic Marker installed in 2017 (see Figure 1). In 2019, the Michigan Department of Transportation purchased the building and announced it would not be demolished – although it would be relocated and later auctioned. In this case, cultural justice manifests in the process of fighting for the preservation of a cultural landmark in the face of development, which is particularly significant given Detroit’s broader prioritisation of urban renewal (see Ryzewski 2017).



**Table 1.** A cultural justice approach to popular music heritage. Quotations from Banerjee and Steinberg (2015, 44–45).

Cultural justice tools	Features	Relationship to popular music heritage	Examples from case study cities
Symbologies of place	Material remnants of a community's history in physical and digital form; 'collective efforts for historic preservation of cultural heritages'.	Practices of archiving, collection, preservation, documentation, conservation, digitisation and restoration  Built heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steel City Sound online archive, Wollongong</li> <li>• Exhibit 3000 techno museum, Detroit</li> <li>• Motown Museum, Detroit</li> <li>• Birmingham Music Archive, Birmingham</li> <li>• Graystone International Jazz Museum &amp; Hall of Fame collection, Detroit</li> <li>• In the Que project, Birmingham</li> <li>• United Sound Systems Recording Studio, Detroit</li> <li>• Blue Bird Inn, Detroit</li> <li>• Grande Ballroom, Detroit</li> <li>• The Crown, Birmingham</li> </ul>
Historiographies of space	Modes of place-based storytelling to 'construct a platform for sharing knowledge about a community's spatial history and attachment to place' and to disrupt authorised historical narratives.	Exhibitions  Heritage walks and tours  Books, documentaries and music maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home of Metal: Black Sabbath – 50 Years (2019), Birmingham</li> <li>• Salvaging Sound exhibition (2019), Detroit</li> <li>• Steel City Sound exhibition (2014–15), Wollongong</li> <li>• Kid Rock Music Lab (2012–present), Detroit</li> <li>• Detroit Sound Tour, Detroit</li> <li>• Bearwood Musical Heritage Walking Tour, Birmingham</li> <li>• Diamonds and Pearls: A Musical Tour through the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham</li> <li>• <i>Friday Night at the Oxford</i> (2018) book by Glen Humphries, Wollongong</li> <li>• <i>The Grande Ballroom: Detroit's Rock 'n' Roll Palace</i> (2016) book by Leo Early, Detroit</li> <li>• <i>Mothers: The Home of Good Sounds 1968–1971</i> (1997) book by Kevin Duffy, Birmingham</li> <li>• <i>The Occy: A Docu</i> (2012) documentary film, Wollongong</li> <li>• <i>Made in Birmingham: Reggae Punk Bhangra</i> (2010) documentary film, Birmingham</li> <li>• for-Wards Soundmap, Birmingham</li> <li>• Michigan Historic Markers, Detroit</li> <li>• MC5 mural on the exterior of the Grande Ballroom, Detroit</li> <li>• Black Sabbath Bridge, Birmingham</li> <li>• Walk of Stars, Birmingham</li> <li>• Oxford Tavern historical panels, Wollongong</li> <li>• Detroit Sound Conservancy</li> <li>• Birmingham Music Archive</li> <li>• Friends of the Grande Ballroom, Detroit</li> <li>• Home of Metal Symposium, Birmingham</li> <li>• Annual conference of the Detroit Sound Conservancy</li> <li>• Sounds of our Town workshop, Wollongong</li> <li>• Grande Ballroom Emergency Roof Fund online fundraiser, Detroit</li> </ul>
Social ties and community networks	The ways communities mobilise in order to seek cultural justice, including the exploration of ties with similarly affected communities.	<i>In situ</i> interpretive tools, murals, plaques, statues, monuments and signage  Grassroots heritage organisations, institutions groups and other collectives Activism, fundraisers, meetings, workshops and symposia	

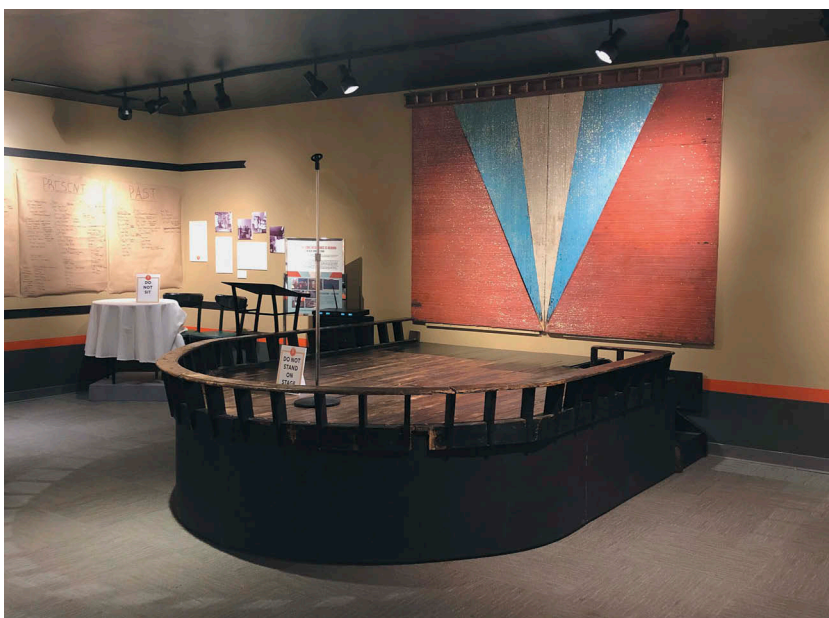


Figure 1. United Sound Systems Recording Studios, Detroit.



Figure 2. Blue Bird Inn exterior, Detroit.

More recently, the DSC purchased the former site of a famous jazz club, the Blue Bird Inn (see Figure 2), using funds from a community development grant from The Kresge Foundation. The DSC plans to restore the site and re-open it as a music archive and live music venue. Decaying since its closure in the early 2000s, the venue requires substantial renovations including an urgent replacement of its roof. In the meantime, the DSC has worked to restore and tour the Blue Bird's iconic stage (see Figure 3), which has material and symbolic significance as 'an exceptional example of African American mid-century vernacular art and design as well as a launchpad for sonic and social rebellion during the Civil Rights movement in Detroit' (Detroit Sound Conservancy n.d.). At its peak in the 1940s, the Blue Bird was 'a black-owned, working-class bar in the heart of the West Side black community' – a gathering space for



**Figure 3.** Preserved stage from the Blue Bird Inn on exhibition at the Detroit Historical Museum.

neighbourhood locals, particularly factory workers (Macías 2010, 49), as well as an important space for black musicians to practice and perform. The venue's location on Tireman Avenue is also significant given its function as a dividing line that segregated the black community to the south from the white community to the north (Gonda 2015). Carleton Gholz, founder of DSC, noted 'this is definitely not a nostalgic project for us', but rather is driven by concerns including: 'how do we leverage things that we still remember, that are in our hearts, to keep our neighbourhoods?' (cited in Baker, Cantillon, and Nowak 2020, 12). In regard to cultural justice, efforts to restore the site pay respect to its musical and historical legacy and enable expressions of civic pride within the neighbourhood in the present. Preserving the Blue Bird Inn also opens up potentials for important stories to be told that do justice to past and present social, cultural, political and economic struggles within the local community, including those relating to race, industrial decline, and the intersections between them. For Gholz, the Blue Bird will act as 'an inconvenient reminder of a hundred-year history [of the African-American West Side] that hopefully can't be removed anytime soon' (cited in Baker, Cantillon, and Nowak 2020, 22).

### ***Historiographies of space***

The second cultural justice tool – historiographies of space – emphasises storytelling. When archived materials are curated and displayed in an exhibition, there is often a narrative element that tells the story of a place in relation to particular bands, genres or other movements. At Home of Metal's Black Sabbath – 50 Years exhibition held at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery in 2019, one of the first segments contextualised Black Sabbath's music-making in relation to the region's landscape and working-class lifestyles. Photographs depicted Aston's bombsites and factories, with accompanying text noting how the urban environment and dominance of manufacturing industries influenced the band's music (see Figure 4). Particular attention was paid to a story involving guitarist Tony Iommi, who injured his fingers in a factory accident – Iommi is said to have created false fingertips and adjusted the tuning of his guitar for comfort, shaping the 'heavy metal' sound we know today. In this instance, the exhibition is speaking to how socioeconomic circumstances are



**Figure 4.** Connections between Aston's bomb sites and the heavy metal music genre at the Black Sabbath – 50 Years exhibition at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

interlinked with cultural production and expression. Specifically, the exhibition was described as having opened up the gallery to working-class people – as one volunteer described, 'It's the music of the people. It's working class' (Bill Sneyd, 3 September 2019, Birmingham). The exhibition was seen to be particularly important for the younger generation since the city's popular music past is 'not really part of our education because there's not value of the working class' (Richard Warren, 6 September 2019, Birmingham). One of the Home of Metal volunteers explained the exhibition's 'community benefit' is 'being able to celebrate that "I'm from Birmingham and this is the home of metal" ... [it] can really just reinvigorate the sense of place' (Adam Sharples, 7 September 2019, Birmingham).

In Wollongong, the Steel City Sound archive provided the basis for a temporary physical exhibition at Wollongong Art Gallery that ran from late 2014 to early 2015. As the first popular music heritage exhibition held in the city, our interviewees noted that it attracted an audience 'who wouldn't ordinarily be in the gallery' (Ann Martin, 9 October 2018, Wollongong). Local councillor Ann Martin reflected that the exhibition appealed to the local community by reinforcing a sense of pride in the region's music history and 'a sense of positivity about the city'. The gallery's director, John Monteleone, expressed that although art can be seen as 'fairly elitist', his aim was to 'make art much more accessible ... So when [people] come in and they suddenly are experiencing an exhibition that says something about their own life, it actually is a life-changing experience' (11 October 2018, Wollongong). This accessibility was enhanced not only through a focus on popular music history, but also interactive components in the exhibition space that created opportunities for the co-production of heritage – for example, a wall where visitors could write down and attach their own memories and reflections. By encouraging more inclusive engagements with heritage – through participation and storytelling – the Steel City Sound exhibition cultivated the conditions for cultural justice to be enacted.

In addition to exhibitions, stories can be told through mediums such as books, documentaries and maps that trace popular music's history. Storytelling can also be communicated through *in situ* interpretive tools, such as the Michigan Historic Marker mentioned above. Another example is the





**Figure 5.** Black Sabbath Bridge and bench, Birmingham.

naming of the Black Sabbath Bridge in 2019 – with accompanying Black Sabbath bench – on Broad Street, Birmingham (see [Figure 5](#)). Although the location has no specific connection to the band's history, a local organisation, the Westside Business Improvement District, spearheaded the initiative to bolster tourism in the area. An information panel on the bridge also draws attention to the importance of canals to Birmingham's industrial heritage, proclaiming 'Canals still make this city rock'. Music-themed heritage walks and tours perform a similar function, telling the stories of music's past within and in relation to a city's broader social and historical shifts, and highlighting the intangible heritage value of a site which may not be readily observable. Such *in situ* interpretive processes function to 'heritagise' the urban environment, signalling and reinforcing popular music's significance to local communities and urban identity.

### **Social ties and community networks**

The final cultural justice tool – social ties and community networks – can be seen in how the community comes together around popular music heritage through activism or protest, fundraisers, meetings, workshops or symposia. Grassroots heritage organisations such as the Detroit Sound Conservancy are expressions of this tool, bringing together and forging partnerships with multiple stakeholders (musicians, government officials, heritage practitioners, academics, developers, community workers) to achieve specific aims or complete particular projects. The DSC frequently engages with other community organisations to enact projects that benefit a range of groups in Detroit. For instance, the DSC partnered with the non-profit organisation LGBT Detroit to restore the sound system from Club Heaven, a significant nightlife space for queer people in Detroit from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s as well as a key site for the emergence of house and techno music in the city.

As another example, the online Birmingham Music Archive explicitly takes a collaborative, 'do-it-together' approach to heritage ([Collins 2015](#)). By featuring crowdsourced, user-generated materials and memories, the archive aims to democratise heritage ([Collins 2018](#)). From a cultural justice perspective, this participatory heritage practice functions to save and celebrate hidden histories – everyday, vernacular experiences and ephemera that may not otherwise be included in mainstream heritage initiatives – thereby shaping public history and reframing cultural narratives related to

music and place (see also Withers 2015). In this way, the creation of a collaborative archive can be seen as a political, activist practice (Flinn 2011). The emphasis on social ties and community networks by the archive's founder, Jez Collins, is also evident in his work with other heritage practitioners. For example, when Warren Wheeler was establishing the Steel City Sound archive, the two corresponded – 'comparing notes and offering tips and suggestions about how to develop our archives and practice' (Collins 2020, 50). This do-it-together approach to sharing knowledge highlights the extent to which localised heritage practices can have a global reach.

When Wheeler was developing Steel City Sound as an exhibition for Wollongong Art Gallery, he likewise took a participatory approach to assembling and curating the collection. Wheeler spoke of a particularly illustrative moment when the exhibition was being set up, in which he observed a venue owner from the 1960s work 'side-by-side' with a member of the 1990s punk scene, 'talking about their experiences as women in the music scene. Very different eras, very different sounds, very different friendships but just watching them put it together and talking to one another about their experiences was quite amazing for me' (12 October 2018, Wollongong). For Wheeler, the exhibition's 'value was [in] seeing connections, seeing reconnections . . . seeing people come together that hadn't seen each other for years'.

Since grassroots heritage organisations and initiatives typically have limited resources, capitalising on community networks can have important tangible impacts. In Detroit, the organisation Friends of the Grande Ballroom (founded by local historian Leo Early) has initiated several fundraising campaigns through GoFundMe aimed at preserving the venue. The Grande Ballroom was one of Detroit's most iconic rock music venues throughout the 1960s, hosting the Stooges, Led Zeppelin, Velvet Underground and Pink Floyd. The venue is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, due in part to efforts by Early's group, but is still in a state of disrepair. The Ballroom's current owners, the Chapel Hill Missionary Baptist Church, have partnered with the Friends of the Grande Ballroom to maintain the site. A fundraising campaign in 2017 raised money for an official assessment of the building's viability, while a 2019 campaign focused on raising money for emergency roof renovations. In the 2019 case, US\$6,925 was raised by 96 donors. Some donors commented that they had a direct connection to the site, having fond memories of attending or working at the Ballroom, while others simply noted its importance to Detroit's history. This example showcases how the 'do-it-together' approach can be integral in cultural justice efforts, with preservation and storytelling being facilitated by heritage enthusiasts working with other community stakeholders and a wider community of interest.

## Conclusion: A critical approach to cultural justice

This article has explored the cultural justice lens as a framework through which to analyse popular music heritage initiatives. Focusing on three case studies of deindustrialising cities – Wollongong, Australia; Detroit, USA; Birmingham, UK – we demonstrate how popular music heritage can resist some of the injustices impelled or compounded by deindustrialisation. The popular music heritage activities we examine deploy strategies that align with Banerjee and Steinberg's (2015) three key tools for cultural justice, which we summarise as: collection, preservation and archiving; curation, storytelling and heritage interpretation; and mobilising communities for collective action.

In the wake of deindustrialisation, creative strategies for urban revitalisation and community renewal frequently manifest through 'top-down' approaches, such as cultural policy schemes developed and enacted by local governments in partnership with consultants and developers. The literature has noted how creative city strategies run the risk of further marginalising and displacing already disenfranchised groups in the community (see e.g. Catungal, Leslie, and Hii 2009; McLean 2014). Such practices exacerbate the non-recognition and disrespect of cultural identities and histories and the erosion of civic pride and place attachment. This risk is heightened when economic imperatives are given considerable more attention than social and cultural vitality. In this article, our discussion of popular music heritage highlights how vernacular, grassroots heritage



strategies in particular (though not exclusively) may produce important cultural justice outcomes at the same time that they contribute to the regeneration of deindustrialising cities.

Although the examples in this article have focused on heritage initiatives that activate cultural justice potentials, it is important to note that popular music heritage is not inherently aligned with a cultural justice approach. Organisations and institutions devoted to popular music heritage can perpetuate injustices and inequalities, such as maintaining internal hierarchies and other exclusionary practices (for example, in terms of volunteer recruitment and management). Moreover, popular music heritage (like many other types of heritage) has been critiqued for its tendency to celebrate the stories of white men, ignoring or downplaying the contributions and experiences of women and other marginalised groups (see e.g. Reitsamer 2018). A *critical* cultural justice lens is useful not only for how it draws attention to the productive contributions of heritage initiatives, but also for how it reveals approaches that are harmful or problematic, and for how it can be used to address those issues.

For practitioners involved in popular music heritage initiatives, the cultural justice lens can be operationalised to foster cultural justice outcomes in their projects. As is clear in the examples discussed above, the cultural justice potentials of popular music heritage are most obvious in projects that draw connections between music and broader social, cultural, economic and historical circumstances. In particular, it is important for popular music heritage initiatives to take an inclusive approach that does justice to difficult heritage, rather than only capturing the expected celebratory narratives. Similarly, these heritage projects should be attentive to the contestations, uncertainties and tensions that constitute the communities (of interest or of locality, for example) they aim to represent (see Waterton and Smith 2010). Thinking through the lens of cultural justice can allow heritage practitioners, and scholars, to grasp some of these dissonances and interconnections that constitute communities, cities and histories as complex and shifting assemblages. It is also crucial to recognise that cultural justice is not something fixed that can necessarily be ‘achieved’, but an ongoing process. Heritage practitioners should be sensitive and open to issues that arise around power, participation, access and representation in their projects. If striving for cultural justice outcomes, popular music heritage initiatives should embrace multiple, intersectional – and sometimes conflicting – narratives surrounding the expressions, people and places they aim to document.

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