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Bob Dylan as a Political Dissenter



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This Bachelor's thesis is the result of a research period of five months. It is also the final assignment of a pre-master's certificate in American Studies at Radboud University.

This thesis has given me new insights in the phenomenon of Bob Dylan and his image as a political dissenter. Thanks to this thesis I have been able to showcase the research skills I developed over the past ten months.

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Abstract & Keywords

The topic of this BA Thesis is Bob Dylan as a political dissenter during the 1960s. The main research question is: to what extent can Bob Dylan's songs written in 1962 and 1963 be considered "protest" songs against the Vietnam war? Answering this question will help establish an analysis of whether or not Bob Dylan may be considered a political dissenter. This is a relevant topic because Bob Dylan can be considered one of the most iconic protest musicians of the 1960s, but the question remains: was he really protesting anything specific of that time? In the first chapter of this thesis I will contextualize what qualifies as a protest song of the sixties. Furthermore, I will explore Dylan's place within the context of the antiwar movement and the folk music revival. In the second chapter I will analyze the lyrics of "Blowin' in the Wind", "With God on Our Side", "Masters of War" and "Talking World War III Blues" through a narrative analysis based on the theory of Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). Lastly, in the third chapter I will explore the media reception of the aforementioned songs and his image as a political dissenter through documentaries about his early years; *Don't Look Back* (1967), *No Direction Home* (2005), and *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007). I will analyze the documentaries through a discourse analysis as described by Wodak and Meyer (2008) and apply reception theory as described by Stuart Hall (1999; 2001).

Keywords: 1960s, Bob Dylan, protest, music, musicians, Vietnam, war, narrative analysis, lyrics, discourse analysis, documentaries, reception theory.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	Page 6
II. Chapter 1	
1.1 Protest and Music	Page 10
1.2 Historical and Cultural Context of the Anti-war Movement	Page 10
1.3 Origins of the Folk Music Revival	Page 12
1.4 What is a Protest Song?	Page 13
1.5 Vocabulary Specific of The Time	Page 14
1.6 Theory Behind Music and Social Movements	Page 14
1.7 Protest Music and Politics	Page 16
1.8 Protest Musicians of the Era	Page 17
1.9 Bob Dylan's Place in Protest Music	Page 17
1.10 Conclusion of Context Analysis	Page 19
III. Chapter 2	
2.1 Why These Songs?	Page 20
2.2 Narrative Analysis	Page 20
2.3 Analysis of "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962)	Page 21
2.4 Analysis of "Masters of War" (1963)	Page 23
2.5 Analysis of "Talkin' World War III Blues" (1963)	Page 24
2.6 Analysis of "With God on Our Side" (1963)	Page 25
2.7 Conclusion of Narrative Analysis	Page 26
IV. Chapter 3	
3.1 Why These Documentaries?	Page 28
3.2 Reception Theory	Page 29
3.3 Discourse Analysis	Page 30
3.4 "Don't Look Back" (1967)	Page 31
3.5 "No Direction Home: Bob Dylan" (2005)	Page 33
3.6 "The Other Side of the Mirror" (2007)	Page 36
3.7 Conclusion of Discourse Analysis	Page 38
V. Conclusion	Page 39
VI. Bibliography	Page 41
VII. Appendix	Page 44

I. Introduction

1.1 Context

“I define nothing. Not beauty, not patriotism. I take each thing as it is, without prior rules about what it should be.” (Dylan, quoted by Shelton, 1965) This quote demonstrates how Dylan continuously rejects his image as a protest songwriter, he does not want to be what others perceive him to be. At the height of the anti-war protests against Vietnam, Dylan suddenly rejected his image as pioneer in the folk music protest movement and he went electric at the Newport folk festival in 1965. He disregarded his image of the folk troubadour and all of a sudden he performed with an electric guitar and a band instead of solo with an acoustic guitar. Therefore, this thesis will focus on a number of songs from his second and third album that were written before Dylan ‘went electric’. The songs that Dylan wrote before 1965 were considered to be protest songs and his songs after 1965 do not address politics or social protest in any specific way. Dylan’s 1965 performance is perceived as the turning point in Dylan’s career, since he did not want to be engaged with politics or folk music anymore. Even though his performance was nothing like the protest songs he had performed at the 1963 Newport folk festival, Dylan was still framed as a political dissenter and his music was constantly used in anti-war rallies against the Vietnam war. Within the field of protest music Bob Dylan always remains a mystery because he has never explicitly addressed his involvement in politics or social movements while at the same time he is considered one of the most important folk protest writers of this time and age, especially during the Vietnam war, the Cold war and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Dylan has been “trapped” in the image of protest writer for a long time, and as the quote shows, he did not even want this. Therefore, my thesis will address the issue of Dylan as a political dissenter of the 1960s, and more specifically the Vietnam war.

1.2 Previous Research

Previous research shows that Dylan was indeed considered a protest song writer and the icon of the 1960 folk revival. “Journalists and historians often treat Dylan’s songs as emblematic of the era and Dylan himself as the quintessential “protest” singer, an image frozen in time.” (Dreier, 2011, 1). As this quote illustrates, many sources consider Dylan to be a protest musician, while others argue that Dylan himself rejected this image: “Yet Dylan was never comfortable being confined by the ‘protest’ label.” (Dreier, 2011, 4). While Dylan may be

considered one of the most iconic protest musicians, his songs never seem to be specifically about the matters of the 1960s, as the following source argues: “Dylan’s avoidance of any specific political agenda in “Blowin’ in the Wind” is typical of many of his best ‘protest songs’ and is actually a source of strength, as it helps assure their continuing relevance despite changes in the political climate.” (Starr and Waterman, 2003, 279). Peddie (2006) and Street (2001) argue that Dylan did not want to be openly linked to anything political, and he did not want to be the pioneering preacher of social movements.

1.3 Relevance Within the Field and Research Question

My thesis is in line with the aforementioned statements of the current state of research on Bob Dylan in the sense that I also want to look at the image of Dylan as a political dissenter in the 1960s. An aspect my thesis could add to the previous research is that I will link the analysis and reception of Dylan’s music specifically to the Vietnam war whereas other sources have mostly linked his music to the civil rights movement. While the songs which I will analyze throughout this thesis were written before the Vietnam war had reached the public consciousness, Dylan’s songs were still used as a means to protest the war. Since his songs were used to protest Vietnam, Dylan was automatically framed as a political dissenter against the Vietnam war. Nonetheless, Dylan himself stepped away from protest when the anti-war protests reached a climax in 1965. This resulted in the following overarching research question: to what extent can Bob Dylan’s songs written in 1962 and 1963 be considered “protest” songs against the Vietnam war? I will try to answer this question through a cultural analysis in which I will critically address the phenomenon of Bob Dylan as both a musician and political dissenter.

1.4 Useful Sources

The most important sources which are relevant to the aforementioned research question are Peddie (2006), Street (2001;2012), James (1989), Rahn (2001), Arnold (1991), Young (2015), Small (2002), and Danaher (2010). One of the key sources to this thesis is Peddie’s (2006) *The resisting muse: popular music and social protest*. This source describes the origins of protest music and its influence on social movements, this is an important source for my thesis because I want to see to what extent Dylan’s music fits protest music. In order to make this comparison, I need to know about the origins of protest music first.

Similar sources are Street’s *Rock, pop and politics* (2012) in which the author describes the relation between rock music and pop’s power in politics throughout the years and his 2001 book *Music and Politics* in which he critically describes different approaches of

music in politics. Another source which explores the relation between music and social protest is Danaher (2010), he explores the different aspects of social protest and the role of music within protest. These sources are important to my thesis because it offers a framework of music and social protest, which is at the core of my research. Sources which explore the 1960s folk music revival and its relation to the Vietnam war era and Bob Dylan are James (1989), Rahn (2001), Arnold (1991), and Young (2015). One more source which is important to my thesis in order to understand the historical and cultural context of the Vietnam war era is Small's *Antiwarriors: the Vietnam war and the battle for America's hearts and minds* (2002) in which he describes the context of the anti-war movement.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

In the first chapter of this thesis I will explore the sources mentioned above to describe the historical and cultural context of the anti-war movement in the Vietnam war era and the role that musicians and protest music played during these times. This chapter will be a cultural analysis within the context of the following sub question: what qualifies as a protest song of the Vietnam antiwar movement? In order to answer this question, I will give a description of the origins of protest and protest songs. In addition to that I will address other key musicians of the era and Dylan's place in the protest music movement of the era. Moreover, I will look into the origins of the folk music revival, vocabulary specific of that time, and the history of the protest movement itself. The answer to this sub question is relevant to the overarching research question because it is important to contextualize the time of social protest in the sixties and to define what actually qualifies as protest music before I embark on an analysis of Dylan's music.

In the second chapter I will answer the following sub question: to what extent do Dylan's lyrics of "Blowin' in the Wind", "The Times They are A-changing", "Masters of War" and "Talking World War III Blues" address protest against the Vietnam war? In order to achieve this, I will analyze these songs through a narrative analysis based on the narrative research by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). This question is relevant to answering the overarching research question because the songs are a big part of Dylan's rebellious and politically involved image. The method I will use to analyze Dylan's songs is a narrative analysis based on the narrative research theory of Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) as demonstrated by Yanik (2016).

Furthermore, in the third chapter I will look at the reception of the aforementioned songs by the media through documentaries of the early years of Bob Dylan to be able to

answer the final sub question: how have documentaries received and interpreted “Blowin’ in the Wind”, “With God on Our Side”, “Masters of War” and “Talking World War III Blues”? The answer to this sub question is relevant to the overarching research question because it explores the media reception of Dylan’s songs which contribute to the public image of Dylan’s music as protest music. The documentaries which I will use in the chapter are *Don’t look back* (1967), *No direction home* (2005) and *The other side of the mirror: Bob Dylan at the Newport folk festival* (2007). The method I will use to analyze the reception of Dylan’s music in these documentaries is a discourse analysis together with the application of reception theory. The discourse analysis is based on the principles of Michel Foucault as demonstrated by Wodak and Meyer (2008). The reception theory I will apply to this analysis is based on the encoding/decoding aspect of media analysis by Stuart Hall (1991; 2001).

Lastly, the answers to these sub questions will then lead to a conclusion of the overarching question to what extent Dylan ‘s music could be considered protest music against the Vietnam war. This thesis will be relevant within the field because Dylan is usually put in the context of the civil rights movement instead of the Vietnam war, so this thesis will approach Dylan from a different angle. I will also make recommendations for further research based on my findings which could lead to a more comprehensive image of the phenomenon and living legend called Bob Dylan. My expectations are that the media wanted to frame Dylan as a political dissenter of the antiwar movement, while his songs will not show any specific references to the Vietnam war.

II. Chapter 1

1.1 Protest and Music

In order to be able to identify the anti-war protest song of the Vietnam war, I should define what is meant by the term ‘protest’. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary ‘protest’ is defined as “the act of objecting or a gesture of disapproval resigned in protest; especially: a usually organized public demonstration of disapproval”. This definition is meant when the word ‘protest’ is used throughout this thesis.

This chapter will explore what qualifies as a protest song of the Vietnam war era. In answering this question, a connection will be made between social protest and the use of music in an intermedial context. An intermedial context means that music addresses the historical and cultural context of the era and that it serves as a platform for social movements. This connection between music and social movements will be addressed more thoroughly further ahead in this chapter.

The question then arises; why is music used to accompany social protest instead of television or film? According to James (1989), Street (2001), and Young (2015), music is the most accessible platform and easier to enter than film or television; “That music should be used like this is a consequence of its history as an accessible and flexible platform for political sentiment.” (Street, 2001, 247). According to James (1989) and Street (2001) the music industry is relatively cheap and flexible whereas the film industry is “rationalized and hierarchized” (James 1989, 137). It was deemed easier and cheaper to start a band than to make a film. Furthermore, music appeals most to the youth generation, which made up the biggest part of the antiwar movement (James, 1989, 137). Also, according to Young (2015) radio was the most influential and popular media of the 1960s, so being heard was more important than being seen (Young, 2015, 461).

1.2 Historical and Cultural Context of the Anti-war Movement

Investigating the history of American protest against the Vietnam war and protest music itself may help to recognize the role of music in social conflicts and political dissent. A starting point in the history of American protest music would be the 1960s. This was an era of skepticism and protest; the Vietnam war, the cold war, and the civil rights movement all originated in this decade. According to Young (2015) and Rahn (2001) this era was an explosion of dissent and rebellion: “Everything was questioned – from race to gender, from

war to the environment, from consumerism to middle-class values, indeed the way of American life itself.” (Young, 2015, 453). One factor which contributed to this skepticism is president, John F. Kennedy, with his famous message: “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” he inspired many liberal baby boomers who were very fond of their youthful president (Small, 2002, 8). Therefore, when John F. Kennedy was suddenly assassinated, this gave rise to the counterculture of the 1960s together with the suffocating conformity of suburbs and shopping malls.

The baby boomer generation was inspired by the protests of African American students fighting Jim Crow during the civil rights movement and public figures such as Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy who publicly denounced the Vietnam war. This gradually made many more American citizens question the war. (Young, 2015, 470). This contributed a great deal to the rising protests and resistance against the Vietnam war and life in the United States itself: “as the war in Vietnam began to escalate in middecade, dissent intensified at an exponential rate, not only in opposition to the war but also in questioning everything about American society.” (Young, 2015, 454). The generation of baby boomers had now reached the age of college students and the number of students grew from sixteen million to twenty-five million in the 1960s (Small, 2002, 7). This group made up a substantial number of American citizens who opposed the Vietnam war.

However, not only students protested against the Vietnam war, there were many other Americans from different walks of life who also questioned the role of the United States in Vietnam. According to Young (2015) and Small (2002) the protestors of the anti-war movement were not just pot-smoking hippies. Among others there were clergymen, suburbanites, politicians, housewives, Quakers, journalists, intellectuals, working people, and anti-war organizations such as Mothers for Peace, Students for a Democratic Society, and Businessmen Against the War (Young, 2015, 459; Small, 2002, 3). The movement did not have one dominating organization; “If you said you were in the movement; you were accepted as a member in good standing.” (Small, 2002, 3). Each group had different reasons for joining in on the war resistance; many protested because of the draft while for others it was the morality of the war which they questioned. Others also believed the unpopular image of the war would influence American foreign policy negatively. (Small, 2002, 3–4).

The anti-war movement was televised in a predominantly negative way. The media only sought to portray the anti-war protestor as an unwashed, procommunist, rebellious teenage hippie (Small, 27; Young, 458). While there were many clean-cut, well-dressed ordinary adult protestors, the media journalists only sought the unusual personalities to make

their stories interesting. Nevertheless, television also had a positive impact on the protest movement in the sense that it reached people who would not have been exposed to the anti-war movement if it was not broadcast on national television. In addition to this, television reached out to people from different walks of life; rich or poor, black or white, Texan or Californian, almost everyone owned a television set. Therefore television contributed significantly to the fame of the ever-growing protest movement opposing the war in Vietnam.

1.3 Origins of the Folk Music Revival

According to Rahn (2001) these growing protests against American society, the social order and the Vietnam war were accompanied by many folk musicians: “These were uncharted waters and popular folk music provided one soundtrack to the times.” (Rahn, 2001, 193). According to Young (2015), as the number of soldiers who were sent to Vietnam grew, so too did the anti-war resistance (p. 455). The folk music helped to unite people in one unified protest front.

Furthermore, the sixties were known for its “remarkable innovation and creativity in pop music.” (Starr and Waterman, 2003, 283). Pop music, particularly folk music and rock and roll, flourished in this era. The significant and prominent role of folk music is especially worth noting since it became a “generational declaration of independence” founded by the baby boomers. (Rahn, 2001, 194). As demonstrated by Young (2015), folk was a genre which was deemed rather suitable for the growing protest culture in the United States; “Folk songs told stories. Thousands of young people were drawn to the reflexive lyricism of the genre.” (Young, 2015, 462). Street (2012) builds upon this argument by stating that “Music, especially folk music, chronicles contemporary reality. It is a form of news reporting, and folk musicians are a form of journalist or political commentator.” (Street, 2012, 48).

Also folk music appealed to the youth generation of baby boomers because, according to Rahn (2001), it was “more authentic, and therefore more meaningful, than the popular music on the Hit Parade.” (200). Therefore, folk was considered to be the most suitable for writing protest songs. Peddie’s (2006) argument is in line with the aspect of the youth generation in connection to folk, he argues that “youth’s involvement in these protests and, simultaneously, their interest in rock music, created the conditions for a proliferation of protest songs.” (Peddie, 2006, 5)

Folk music was introduced in the late nineteenth century, was revived in the 1930s and eventually the folk music revival of the 1960s was the third period of the rise of folk. (Rahn, 2001, 195). The word ‘revival’ means rebirth of something that already existed in the

past. The folk music revival was a time of “cultural reinterpretation” and discovering the past. (Rahn, 2001, 194). The folk music revival was often used in the anti-war protests through protest songs. These songs were based on the traditional music from the voiceless and the working-class people America in which the ideology behind the song was more important than the brilliance of the music itself. According to Rahn (2001) these songs were accompanied by various acoustic instruments such as guitars, banjos or harmonicas (200).

1.4 What is a Protest Song?

The question that arises from having explored the origins of the folk protest movement is the following: what actually qualifies as a protest song? Yanik (2016) identifies protest songs as “songs whose lyrics convey a message which is opposed to a policy or course of action adopted by an authority or by society as an institution.” (21). The origins of protest songs lay in the African American spirituals during the Abolition movement. These spirituals were songs with double meanings about the unfairness of slavery, their experiences as slaves or the institution of slavery. These songs were sung to rebel against the slave masters while they are unaware of this rebellion. The anti-war movement against the Vietnam war felt connected with the past protest movements of the African American struggle for equal rights. This created a feeling of collective identity with the protest legacy of the civil rights movement (Young, 454, 2015).

According to Arnold (1991) the social protest song which originated in the sixties was an anti-war song, and the anti-war movement unpredictably merged with rock and folk (320). Nonetheless, Peddie (2006) argues that even though the media and public opinion focus on rock protest songs of the Vietnam war era, there were in fact not many popular protest songs (5). He also argues that this has to do with the image that rock musicians themselves created by involving themselves with particular protest activities instead of actually performing protest songs (Peddie, 2006, 7).

However, the 1960s are still known for the most recognizable protest songs of all time. Peddie (2006) recognizes this era as the “Golden Age of Rock Activism” in which the most well-known protest songs originated (8). Peddie (2006) reasons that this was because of the attitude of record labels at the time; “these newer record label executives and managers allowed artists to do their own thing, and one of their things was protest songs.” (Peddie, 2006, 6). Moreover, the radio stations of the sixties and seventies were very interested in broadcasting protest music.

1.5 Vocabulary Specific to That Time

These protest songs of the Vietnam war addressed various aspects of the era in their lyrics. According to Small (2002) and Yanik (2016) words and phrases which were specific to the Vietnam era are “doves”, “hawks”, “hippies”, “summer of love”, “make love not war”, “flower power”, “hardhats” and social issues such as “race, the rich, drugs, rioting, unemployment, population explosion, poverty, and environmental issues.” (Small, 2002, 21–128; Yanik, 2016, 23). According to Small (2002) the “doves” were against the war and wanted peace, while the “hawks” were in favor of the war, as were the “hardhats” (21–128). Themes such as “summer of love”, “make love not war” and “flower power” fit into the hippie movement among students against the Vietnam war. Yanik (2016) argues that the protest songs written during the Vietnam war era were rather general and vague regarding the specific issues of the era, however, recurring themes were the denial of the American government, protest against the obligatory draft and public discontent. (23–32).

1.6 Theory behind Music and Social Movements

There is a relation between music and the way people see themselves and the world. In order to understand this relation between music and social movements I should explore the history and theory behind it. Danaher (2010) explains the relation between music and social movements through four foci: collective identity, free space, emotions and social movement culture. These foci are all formed or reinforced by the use of music. According to Danaher (2010), the forming of collective identity happens when groups that seek social change share mutual normative, cultural and ideological beliefs (812). “By forming a collective identity, social movements are able to sustain themselves across time.” (Danaher, 2010, 813). As Danaher (2010) demonstrates with this quote, the forming of a collective identity is important for social movement culture to unite and stay together.

A factor which is also important to maintaining social movements is free space; an opening within society. Free space is necessary for social movements to express criticism against the dominant culture “within acceptable limits” (Danaher, 2010, 814). These free spaces are created through the advancements in technology, in the 1960s these advancements were radio and television; media through which music can be heard. As for emotions, Danaher (2010) explains that they are necessary to keep the movements together (813). Therefore, it is deemed essential to trigger them through the use of music. Music is essential in triggering emotions because it brings people together to sing the lyrics of a song, these lyrics are usually tied to the goals of the social movement, an example of this is “We Shall

Overcome” (Danaher, 2010, 812). Mehring (2017) agrees with this statement by debating that “singing provides a kind of glue between the actors [...]” (8).

Moreover, Danaher (2010) argues that “music is a central part of the cultural ‘toolkit’ used in social movements” because the participation in the music leads to emotional reactions which eventually leads to group identity (pp. 812–813). Street (2001) confirms this theory by arguing that music acts as a platform to establish social movement allies (244). As for the focus of social movement culture, Danaher (2010) argues that the culture makes up a part of social movements and is defined by “a sense of group identity, an alternative interpretational frame of cause and effect, and a sense of political efficacy.” (Danaher, 2010, 817).

Finally, music acts as a binding factor within the context of social movements, which both creates and enhances social movement culture in its entirety. Newman Knake’s (2011) approach to the role of music in social movements is similar to Danaher (2010). She debates that music is “a motivator, an explainer, and as much a binding force as ideology or program.” (Newman Knake, 2011, 109). This builds upon the statements of Mehring (2017), Danaher (2010), and to a certain extent Peddie (2006). Both Danaher (2010) and Mehring (2017) argue that protest music and singing play an instrumental role in establishing and maintaining a strong community within social movements. Peddie (2006), however, approaches the role of music in social movements from a somewhat different angle; “[...] protest songs mainly rally rather than recruit, the troops.” (Peddie, 2006, 14). As this quote demonstrates, Peddie (2006) argues that protest songs, and music as a whole, does not necessarily inspire new people to join the movement, rather these songs create or reinforce a bond within the community of protestors that already exists.

1.7 Protest Music and Politics

Aside from the theory as explained by the aforementioned sources, Street (2001;2012) and Peddie (2006) both share a rather critical approach to the concept of protest songs. Street (2001) argues that there is no immediate causal relationship between music and politics (246). Peddie (2006) reasons in line with this argument that there is no clear evidence whether songs independently influence political attitudes or social change (14). Street (2001;2012) analyses different approaches between music and politics. He confirms that music and politics share a relation, but that we must not only focus on the representation of politics in music, but also the political context behind the music (Street, 2012, 254). According to Street (2012) music did not function as a source of information, instead, it formed the framework of political action, through this approach music functioned as a means

of political participation (78). Nonetheless, the meaning of the music always depends on its political context. (Street, 2012,49). Therefore, Street (2012) argues that “music is used differently, depending on the character of the conflict.” (Street, 2012, 67) This also implies that if the political context changes, the way the music is perceived will also be altered.

Furthermore, Street (2001) and Peddie (2006) believe that the relationship between music and politics is strengthened by the people who criticize it: “Some of the strongest claims for the political importance of popular music have been made by its greatest enemies.” (Street, 2001, 243). By responding to political songs in a critical manner, critics still end up promoting the political relevance to which they themselves object (Peddie, 2006, 7).

Apart from the criticism on the relation between music and politics, Peddie (2006) does acknowledge the relationship between protest songs and social protest. He believes that protest songs are “story-telling devices or narratives that say something about social life” (Peddie, 2006, 18). However, Peddie (2006) argues that there are not many actual protest songs. He believes the people hear what they want to hear, that people listen to the voice rather than the lyrics (Peddie, 2006, 10–13). According to Peddie (2006), song lyrics that are not specifically about the context of protest will last longer and will be more popular than songs that specifically address social issues (12). Protest songs that mean “all things to all people” are songs that will last (Peddie, 2006, 19). Peddie (2006) claims that this is not only done because of artistic reasons, it is also rather commercial. The “shelf life” of generic protest songs is much longer than those that protest issues that are tied to a certain issue or context which could eventually make them no longer relevant. (Peddie, 2006, 12).

Therefore, when it comes to analyzing protest songs, the songs of the 1960s are, according to Peddie (2006), the only exception of significant protest music. Peddie (2006) argues that there are far fewer protest songs than we believe; “the truth is far more modest than the myths would have us believe.” (15). However, the folk music revival of the 1960s created a space for protest songs that were relevant to the political context of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war (Peddie, 2006, 18). Peddie (2006) debates that when there is a time of social or political change such as the 1960s, protest songs do play an instrumental role in rallying troops. However, when there is no movement to tie these protest songs to, the message of these songs seems irrelevant.

Lastly, Peddie (2006) acknowledges the social legacy of folk protest songs, since they left behind the origins of protest. He also believes that the sixties were the starting point of the relationship between music and the American youth (Peddie, 2006, 19). Peddie (2006) and Street (2001;2012) both recognize a relationship between music and its political context,

however, they are rather skeptical as to whether these protest songs actually mattered in politics.

1.8 Protest Musicians of the Era

The most prominent protest musicians of the Vietnam war and civil rights movement era according to Young (2015), James (1989), Rahn (2001), Peddie (2006), Mehring (2017), and Arnold (1991) were Phil Ochs, Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, Pete and Mike Seeger, and Judy Collins. These artists were the pioneers of the folk protest song and their music was the soundtrack to the social protest movements. These musicians wrote general and specific protest songs which were politically and socially charged. These songs were aired on the radio and they featured the headlines of many folk festivals such as the Newport Folk Festival. Apart from writing protest songs, these musicians were also politically involved with the social protest. Another very influential pioneer of the folk music revival is Bob Dylan. His music is also associated with the political unrest of the 1960s and the protest movements. However, unlike his contemporaries, Dylan was never specifically involved with any of the anti-war protests.

1.9 Bob Dylan's Place in Protest Music

What is then Dylan's place in the protest movement? "When Bob Dylan burst on the folk scene, protest music really took off." (Young, 2015, 462). As this quote by Young (2015) demonstrates, Dylan set in motion the movement of protest music in the 1960s. His place in the folk music revival and the sixties social movements is therefore an instrumental one. According to Starr and Waterman (2003), Dylan stood out in the folk protest movement because of two reasons. One of these reasons was the way he used metaphors, intensity and sometimes a sense of irony in his songs. The other reason was his personal style of performance which made him stand out from the other folk artists of his time (Starr and Waterman, 2003, 278). The social movements of the sixties used Dylan's songs such as 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Masters of War' and 'A Hard Rains A-Gonna Fall' to fight for their causes. Thus, according to James (1989), Bob Dylan was one of the reasons why folk music came to represent social protest (131).

The fact that Dylan's music suited social protest so well is partially due to the way he wrote his lyrics. Whereas at first he recorded mostly topical and traditional folk songs about civil rights and anti-war themes, however, he then suddenly shifted away from recording these topical lyrics and wrote generic songs instead. As argued by Young (2015), James (1989), Peddie (2006), and Starr and Waterman (2003) Dylan's songs indeed avoided topical

reference which resulted in “do-it-yourself” protest songs because people could fill in the blanks themselves; “by saying everything, they in effect said nothing.” (Peddie, 2006, 18–19). Since people were able to fill in the blanks themselves, these songs could be used for any cause during the social protest movements of the sixties and even after the sixties, this resulted in a longer “shelf life” (Peddie, 2006, 12). Consequently, Dylan’s songs had an iconic role in the protests of the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement against the Vietnam war and Dylan himself came to be seen as the pioneer of political dissent.

Yet, when the anti-war protests reached its climax in 1965, Dylan abandoned his spot as pioneer of the folk music revival and political dissent; he “went electric” (Starr and Waterman, 2003, 282). “Dylan had no desire to be part of a left political agenda and no wish to be treated as a public spokesman, even less a prophet.” (Street, 2012, 51). As Shelton (2011) states, Dylan believed that “songs aren’t going to change the world” (201). Then going electric, and replacing his acoustic guitar with an electric guitar, was Dylan’s first move in rejecting folk protest music in general and he “declared his artistic independence from movements and national issues.” (Peddie, 2006, 17). According to James (1989), changing his music meant changing his political involvement and replacing his acoustic guitar meant creating a separation between audience and performer (132).

Apart from replacing his acoustic guitar with an electric one, Dylan also changed his lyrics. According to Young (2015), Dylan’s lyrics rejected political dissent and adopted “countercultural dissent” (463) through surrealistic themes. As argued by Peddie (2006), Dylan makes his change of attitude rather clear in his song ‘My Back Pages’ in which he proclaims that he “had become what he hated most —a preacher.” (17). Moving away from the specific and topical themes in folk songs was something that was initiated by Dylan and eventually followed by other folk musicians of the folk music revival.

Another trend which Dylan introduced was merging folk with rock ‘n’ roll. While this was perceived as shocking at first, eventually every folk musician adopted this change. As illustrated by Starr and Waterman (2003), Dylan “was the man who virtually single-handedly, dragged urban folk music into the modern era of rock.” (277). This merge was almost inevitable according to Starr and Waterman (2003), since both genres were immensely popular during the early sixties (282). The aspect that made it so shocking to the people who lived in the sixties was the image of both rock ‘n’ roll and folk. Whereas folk emerged as socially conscious and politically involved music, rock ‘n’ roll was associated with teenagers, fun, and dancing. Both genres required different instruments: folk used acoustic instruments which could be carried, whereas rock ‘n’ roll used electric instruments that needed to be

amplified. Nevertheless, Dylan managed to combine the two and single-handedly introduced folk-rock to the world. Folk-rock swallowed the genre of early sixties folk music revival, this has become a lasting change and folk-rock still exists to this day.

1.10 Conclusion of Context Analysis

To conclude, the answer to the question of what qualifies as a protest song against the Vietnam war can clearly not be answered without addressing Dylan's music. The social movements of the sixties were accompanied by folk musicians and, partially because of Dylan's music, folk became the soundtrack of the anti-war movement led by the baby boomer generation that had now reached college age. The sixties marked the era of an undeniable relationship between music and social protest. The folk music revival brought many songs about racial, political, environmental, and social issues which were written and sung by, among others, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Phil Ochs and Pete Seeger. Even though Dylan himself rejected his label as an anti-war prophet, the masses of the anti-war resistance still perceived him as one of the most influential protest songwriters that provided the movement with songs that rallied the troops and fueled the resistance.

III. Chapter 2

2.1 Why These Songs?

In this chapter a number of Dylan songs is analyzed through a narrative analysis as described by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). The songs that will be analyzed are ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’, ‘Masters of War’, ‘With God on Our Side’ and ‘Talking World War III Blues’. I chose to analyze these specific Dylan songs for various reasons. I chose to analyze ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ because this is the most iconic protest song which is addressed by almost all sources about Dylan’s role in 1960s protest music. I chose to analyze both ‘Masters of War’ and ‘Talking World War III Blues’ because both titles already mention the word ‘war’. So since I will be analyzing them through the context of the Vietnam war, these songs seem relevant to me. Then finally I chose to analyze ‘With God on Our Side’ because it is generally regarded as an anti-war song. Therefore, it seemed useful to link the lyrics of this song to the context of the Vietnam war.

While these songs may all have been released before the Vietnam war had fully reached the public consciousness in 1965, they were still used to protest the war at the time when Dylan himself had already rejected his image as a political dissenter. James (1989) confirms this by saying that “Dylan never mentions Vietnam specifically in any of his lyrics, and by the time the war was the major issue, he had rejected topical reference and folk music generally.” (131). I therefore find it interesting to look into these songs, because, even though they were released before the anti-war movement burst onto the national scene, they were still picked up as protest songs. This makes me wonder to what extent his songs will fit into the context of the Vietnam war. One reason for this might be because of Peddie’s (2006) theory that generic protest songs will have a longer “shelf life” (12), as has been mentioned before, and Dylan mastered this technique.

2.2 Narrative Analysis

“In order to understand the context of a song, we must go beyond examination of lyrics alone and examine the context the audience provides.” (Yanik, 2016, 7). As this quote demonstrates, it is not only the intentions of the songwriter but also the value of the song within the social context, which helps us understand the meaning of a song. Therefore, Dylan’s songs will be analyzed through a narrative analysis based on the theory of narrative analysis research by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) and its application by Yanik (2016) to

examine to what extent these songs fit the Vietnam war context and to what extent they can really be perceived as protest songs. I chose to use a narrative analysis instead of a content analysis because it is important to link the musician's intentions to the historical and cultural context in which these songs were written and interpreted.

A narrative analysis can be used to comprehend and identify concepts and themes which are relevant to a certain experience, in this case the antiwar movement against the Vietnam war and the need for antiwar protests. It can be valuable to be able to understand the experiences of the antiwar movement of the sixties and its folk music pioneers through the songs, since analyzing the way music is used in a certain era is sometimes more valuable than purely analyzing the lyrics themselves. Yanik (2016) also argues that "the narrators of these stories bring light to the meaning present in lived experience." (24). In other words, the stories which are told through the lyrics of songs could be linked to the social context of the experience of the protestor against the Vietnam war.

In order to be able to identify the possible narratives of protest against the Vietnam war in Dylan's lyrics, I will use a "problem-solution approach" based on the theory of narrative analysis research offered by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), which inspires to find a solution in the problems offered by the narrative in the lyrics. Since protest songs in the context of the antiwar movement were generally about contextualizing reasons for the masses to be against the war, it is important to look for this in Dylan's songs.

Yanik (2016) recognizes several recurring narrative themes in protest songs against the Vietnam war: the obligatory draft, the government denying the war, and public discontent (32). These themes are essential to keep in mind while analyzing Dylan's songs.

2.3 Analysis of "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962)

A complete copy of the lyrics of "Blowin' in the Wind" is included in the Appendix on page 44. "The song is delicately poised between hope and impatience." (Newman Knake, 2001, 109). As this quote illustrates, the narrative of "Blowin' in the Wind" seems to call for action by expressing its impatience and it feeds the protestors of the sixties with hope. Even though this song launched Dylan as the spiritual leader of the civil rights movement, I would like to demonstrate why it could also be perceived as a protest song against the Vietnam war.

The chorus of the song, and one line in particular: "The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind", expresses how the answer is both there and not there: it is "a force felt all around us, but remains elusive" (Newman Knake, 2001, 109). The song revolves around a call for freedom and change. The problems which are addressed throughout the lyrics are

phrased in questions, Dylan is literally asking people to think for themselves and get involved. The problems which can be identified through the “problem-solution approach” (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, 333), are the denial by the people, and perhaps the American government especially, and the call to get involved instead of turning a blind eye. These problems fit the historical and cultural context of the anti-war movement and they voice the opinion of the narrative of public discontent. These problems are voiced in the following lines: “How many ears must one have / before he can hear people cry?” and “How many times must a man turn his head / pretending he just doesn’t see?”. These lines address the problem of turning a blind eye to the major problems in American society and denying that they need to be solved. The solution which can be drawn from the problems presented throughout the lyrics is that people should get involved. Getting involved within the historical context of the sixties meant protesting against the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement.

While civil rights protestors and researchers such as James (1989) and Young (2015) argue that the lyrics predominantly apply to the civil rights movement, I want to argue that the lyrics could also apply to the anti-war themes of public discontent and denial by the government during the Vietnam war era. In the first stanza the line “Yes ‘n’ how many seas must a white dove sail”, the white dove represents peace which can also apply to the fight for peace in the Vietnam war. The term “dove” fits the vocabulary of the Vietnam war as mentioned in chapter one. “Doves” (Small, 2002, 21) were people who were against the war and wanted peace. Through the narrative of public discontent in the historical context of the Vietnam war this line would apply to the protestors’ wishes of peace and making an end to the war.

Additionally, in another line from the first stanza; “Yes ‘n’ how many times must the cannonballs fly / before they’re forever banned”, the “cannonballs” could refer to the weapons of the Vietnam war. The question which is asked by Dylan fits into the narrative of public discontent with the war as well in the sense that he asks himself how long this must go on until it can finally stop. This fits the historical context and the narrative of the anti-war protestors since they wanted nothing more than putting an end to the war and banning the weapons.

The final line which in my opinion fits the anti-war narrative of denial by the American government is: “Yes ‘n’ how many deaths will it take till he knows / that too many people have died”. In this line, Dylan specifically addresses a “he”, which I believe could be the American president. This fits the anti-war narrative in the sense that the protestors

believed that Johnson denied the fact that too many young American soldiers died in the war.

Even though “Blowin’ in the Wind” seems to fit the anti-war narratives and the framework of anti-war protest songs in the sense that the lyrics contextualize reasons to be against the war, the song still avoids any topical reference to the Vietnam War or the civil rights movement. The fact that the song avoids any topical reference gives it a longer “shelf life” as explained by Peddie (2006, 12). This song can still be relevant, for example, to the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Nonetheless, this song can still be identified as a protest song that fits the narrative themes and the social and historical context of the anti-war movement against the Vietnam war as well as the civil rights movement.

2.4 Analysis of “Masters of War” (1963)

A complete copy of the lyrics of “Masters of War” is included in the Appendix on page 42. The narrative of “Masters of War” seems to be criticizing the government and throughout the final two strophes perhaps even only one person, most likely the president, because of the use of singular pronouns: “you, your soul, your grave, your casket.” The song seems to criticize sending teenagers off to fight in the Vietnam war, even though Vietnam is not mentioned throughout the lyrics. Yet, the song was written within the historical context of 1963, so the only American war that was going on at that moment was the Vietnam war. Within the cultural context of the sixties this song matches the narratives as described by Yanik (2016) about the obligatory draft, public discontent with the war and the government denying the war.

These lyrics address a theme almost every American protesting against the Vietnam war could identify with, since they all distrusted the American government and protested against the rising “death count” and the flowing of “young people’s blood”. The narrative also expresses his hope for the “masters of war” to die too, this is something which probably also represents the hope of many anti-war protestors mourning the loss of their own sons, brothers, or friends. The repeated use of the pronouns "you" and "I" makes the narrative rather direct and personal, the audience within the historical context of the anti-war movement could apply these pronouns as if they themselves were addressing the government.

Another aspect of the song that helps to portray the message of the narrative is the use of metaphors and comparisons. In the fourth stanza, Dylan writes about the way the “masters of war” “hide in” in their mansions “as young people’s blood flows out of their bodies and is buried in the mud”. This metaphor addresses the cowardice of the generals and the government who hide away securely and safely while the young soldiers fight for their lives

and are brutally murdered. A comparison which Dylan makes is the use of the religious imagery of Jesus and “Judas of old”, who was one of the apostles. Judas betrayed Jesus by giving him up to his enemies in exchange for money. The American government is portrayed as “Judas of old”.

Furthermore, through the “problem-solution approach” (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, 333) it seems that the problems that are presented by the narrative in the lyrics are the denial of the government and their role in weapon supply, the deaths of young soldiers dying in the war, public discontent and fear of the war and the corruption and greed of the government. The solution that the problems provide within the social context of the Vietnam war is protesting the government and resisting against the draft to bring an end to the war.

Although "Masters of War" seems to fit the historical and cultural context of the Vietnam war and its anti-war movement, the song is also relevant to more recent wars that have been going on. The fact that the themes and aspects of the lyrics are so generic, fits Dylan's image of avoiding any specific reference to political issues or topics. It also fits the longer “shelf life” as illustrated by Peddie (2006, 12). The song has not lost its relevance or identity because of its avoidance of topical reference. The narrative analysis of addressing the social and historical context of the sixties, however, proves that this song can be perceived as a protest song against the Vietnam war.

2.5 Analysis of “Talkin’ World War III Blues” (1963)

A complete copy of the lyrics of “Talkin’ World War III Blues” is included in the Appendix on page 45. The narrative of “Talkin’ World War III Blues” seems to address the fear of world war three breaking out and it criticizes the paranoia caused by the Communist witch hunt during the fifties and the sixties.

The narrative of the song fits into the historical context of the sixties and the narrative of public discontent with the American approach to Russia and Vietnam. The fear of war is described in the following line: “I dreamt I was walkin’ into World War Three”. The paranoia and hysteria surrounding communists is described in the following lines: “He screamed a bit and away he flew / Thought I was a Communist”. Within the historical context of the sixties the people were afraid that the world would eventually blow up and that everybody around them would die, especially during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. This fear of loneliness is expressed by Dylan's lyrics: “Everybody's having them dreams / Everybody sees themselves / Walkin’ around with no one else”.

The themes of communist paranoia and the fear of a third world war can both fit the

Vietnam war, the Cuban missile crisis, and the bigger picture of the cold war, since the Vietnam war was a proxy war in which North Vietnam was supported by Russia and China and South Vietnam was supported by the United States. The Vietnam war was another effect of America's fear of Russia as a communist world power. Through the "problem-solution approach" (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, 333) the problems of paranoia and hysteria surrounding communism and the fear of another world war are described. The solution that can be drawn from the narrative is perhaps proposed in Dylan's final line: "I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours / I said that". The solution that Dylan proposes here is that the people need to come together and stand united instead of standing alone while fearing others and the world.

While the title of the song implies that the song addresses the issues of war, the lyrics do not explicitly address war itself, rather they address the effects of possible war such as fear and paranoia. In addressing fear and paranoia this song has a rather surrealistic narrative. Therefore, the song does not entirely fit the framework of protest songs in contextualizing reasons to be against the war, which does not necessarily make it a protest song against the Vietnam war, but rather a fear expressed by the effects of the cold war and the Cuban missile crisis that happened the year before this song was released. The song, however, does fit the historical and cultural context of the sixties and it fits the narrative of public discontent with the ongoing wars against communism.

2.6 Analysis of "With God on Our Side" (1963)

A complete copy of the lyrics of "With God on Our Side" is included in the Appendix on page 47. The narrative of "With God on Our Side" seems to ridicule the belief that God always supports Americans in their military conflicts: "And that the land that I live in / Has God on its side". The belief that God was on America's side during a war was a justification for the Americans that they were fighting for a good cause.

The narrative fits the historical and cultural context of the sixties and the Vietnam war because the Americans justified their involvement in Vietnam by arguing that it is God's will and thus a good cause that they fight for their country. This also fits the narrative of public discontent which the protestors against the war could identify with because they also criticized the reasons for American involvement in the Vietnam war. A line from the fourth stanza voices this narrative: "The reason for fighting / I never got straight". Even though this stanza is about the First World War, this can also apply to the Vietnam war.

Moreover, the problems which can be identified through a "problem-solution

approach” (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, 333) are confusion about reasons for war, the cliché of God’s support at times of war, and the fear and hatred of communism. These issues are voiced in the following lines of the song: “I’ve learned to hate Russians / All through my whole life”, “If another war starts / It’s them we must fight / And accept it all bravely / With God on my side” and “The confusion I’m feelin’ / Ain’t no tongue can tell”.

These problems resonate the issues of the sixties with the Vietnam war and the continuing threat of cold war with Russia. The solution that can be taken from the song is protesting against the war, since the problems which are addressed ridicule the fact that God is a legitimate reason to wage war and Dylan even argues: “If God’s on our side / He’ll stop the next war”. This illustrates that if God is in his right mind, he will stop the war, so war is not the answer.

Even though the song obviously protests war, it never explicitly mentions the Vietnam war. However, since this song was released in 1963 it can be argued that the narrative does have the Vietnam war and possibly the cold war at the back of its mind. Just like the aforementioned Dylan songs like “Masters of War” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” this song fits the longer “shelf life” principle of Peddie (2006, 12) too since it avoids any topical reference to the Vietnam war or the cold war. However, it could be argued that the reference to war against communists is tied to the past and does not apply anymore.

The song fits the historical and cultural context and the “problem-solution approach” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002. 333) of a protest song in the era of the sixties. Since the song protests the reasons for war it can certainly be perceived as a protest song against the Vietnam war.

2.7 Conclusion of Narrative Analysis

In conclusion, the Dylan songs which have been analyzed do, to some extent, address protest against war. Even though every song which has been analyzed avoids any specific topical reference to the Vietnam war, “Blowin’ in the Wind”, “Masters of War”, and “With God on Our Side” definitely fit the protest-song framework of antiwar protest songs and the historical and cultural context of the sixties. Each song, except for “Talkin’ World War III Blues” could contextualize reasons to be against the Vietnam war which is a crucial aspect of a protest song of the sixties. “Masters of War” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” both fit the narratives of denial by the American government and public discontent as described by Yanik (2016). Even though this public discontent in “Blowin’ in the Wind” also fits the causes of the civil rights movement. “With God on Our Side” and “Talkin’ World War III Blues” both fit the

narrative of public discontent as well. So, according to the narrative analysis, Dylan's songs do fit the framework of protest songs against the Vietnam war. However, Dylan himself had stepped away from addressing political issues in his lyrics by the time the Vietnam war had reached its climax in 1965. This demonstrates that Dylan himself was not necessarily protesting the war, and since his songs were released between 1962 and 1963 when the antiwar movement had not yet reached the public consciousness, Dylan will probably not have written these songs to protest the war in Vietnam. Nonetheless, since these songs do offer reasons to protest war and fit the "problem-solution" framework, I understand why they were picked up as protest songs.

IV. Chapter 3

3.1 Why These Documentaries?

This chapter is a discourse analysis of the media reception of Dylan's songs through three documentaries about Dylan's early years: *Don't Look Back* (1967), *No Direction Home* (2005), and *The Other Side of the Mirror: Bob Dylan at the Newport Folk Festival 1963–1965* (2007). The reason why I decided to use documentaries instead of interviews, news articles, or an autobiography is that documentaries combine the responses and interpretations of different actors such as journalists, musicians, Dylan himself, and the audience. Since documentaries offer a combination of these different actors, they are more suitable for a discourse analysis than a one-sided interview, news article, or autobiography.

In these documentaries I will specifically look for the reception and interpretation of the previously analyzed songs; "Masters of War", "Blowin' in the Wind", "Talkin' World War III Blues", and "With God on Our Side". Additionally, I will try to grasp the overarching image of Dylan which is framed by the documentaries. The aspects of media framing in the documentaries are linked to the concept of reception theory as described by Stuart Hall (2001).

Don't Look Back (1967) is mentioned by Rahn (2001) in her text about the folk music revival. According to Rahn (2001) this was one of the first documentaries about musicians and also the first about Dylan. I believe it is therefore important to analyze the framing of Dylan's image in this documentary, since it was filmed during the sixties within the context of the folk music revival and the Vietnam War era. In a review in *The New York Times* Henahan (1967) describes the documentary as authentic, since the filming seems so unplanned. In addition to this, Henahan (1967) says that the documentary illustrates an image of the people around Dylan and his life on tour, I therefore believe that this documentary is very suitable to analyze with regards to the media framing of Dylan.

No Direction Home (2005) is mentioned by Pattie (2007) in his book *Rock Music in Performance*. This is how I found out about the documentary. The documentary, directed by Martin Scorsese, is about Dylan's early years and includes interviews with Dylan himself as a narrator of his own career. I believe that this documentary is therefore instrumental in my discourse analysis, since it shows Dylan's view combined with the views of other folk musicians who were part of the folk music revival. This is something which I have not come across in other documentaries about Dylan's early years. In a review in *The*

Guardian, Williamson (2005) rates this documentary five out of five stars. He argues that this documentary offers “a compelling portrait of a fledging genius” (Williamson, 2005).

Williamson (2005) also writes that this was the first time in a few decades that a documentary could be made with Dylan’s full co-operation and narration, this is another reason why I chose to use this documentary in my analysis of the media framing of Dylan.

Finally, the reason why I chose to use *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007) is that the Newport Folk Festival is one of the most iconic festivals that launched Dylan’s image as a protest folk singer. This documentary combines the most influential performances of Dylan in his early years: 1963, 1964, and 1965. The Newport Folk Festival, especially Dylan’s performances in 1963 and 1965, is mentioned by sources such as Rahn (2001) and Peddie (2006). In a review of *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007) in *The New York Times*, Scott (2007) mentions that this documentary paints a realistic picture of the Festival and puts you in the best spot of the audience to witness Dylan’s performances. Therefore, believe this documentary contributes significantly to an analysis of media reception of Dylan as a political dissenter.

The reason for the time jump from the sixties to the zeroes between these documentaries is that the aforementioned documentaries have been received as the best documentaries about Bob Dylan by public review websites on the internet such as IMDb (www.imdb.com) and Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com), they are all rated above eighty percent out of one hundred. Other older documentaries about Dylan were not as well-received. These documentaries were also well received by reviews of *The Guardian* (Williamson, 2005) and *The New York Times* (Henahan, 1967; Scott, 2007). Because of these positive reviews I decided to use these documentaries instead of others that were, for example, released in the seventies or eighties.

3.2 Reception Theory

As has been mentioned before, the analysis of the aforementioned documentaries will be linked to the aspects of reception theory as described by Stuart Hall (1991; 2001). I believe the application of reception theory fits this analysis best since I am analyzing media sources and Hall’s theory especially focusses on this field. Hall (1991) recognizes the reception of media as a framework of individual moments. These moments are production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction (Hall, 1991, 128). The process of “encoding and decoding” is instrumental to the interpretation and consumption of media by the audience, as Hall (1991) argues, there is no consumption without meaning (129). The audience plays an

important role in shaping meaning behind music, therefore what the audience makes of a song or a documentary through the process of “encoding and decoding” is rather essential (Hall, 1991, 129).

Hall (1991) argues that the audience is both the producer, encoder, and the receiver, decoder, of media. The process of “encoding and decoding” includes understanding or misunderstanding, identity or non-identity, and different positions between the audience and the broadcasters of media (Hall, 1991, 131). These aspects could lead to “distortions” or “misunderstandings” in the communicative exchange between broadcasters and the audience; the audience could shape a different meaning from what was initially intended by the broadcasters. An audience should therefore not be treated as uninvolved receptors.

Within the context of the encoding and decoding process of media, Hall (1991; 2001) recognizes different forms of decoding in media reception: the “negotiated code”, the “dominant-hegemonic code” and the “oppositional code” (Hall, 2001, pp. 171-173). The “dominant-hegemonic code” is a dominant-hegemonic position in which there are no misunderstandings in meaning or reception between broadcasters and the audience (Hall, 2001, 171). In the “oppositional code” there are oppositional decoded meanings of the media by the audience (Hall, 2001, 173). The “negotiated code” is a mix of the aforementioned codes in which expected or preferred meanings are accepted but oppositional meanings are formed as well under particular circumstances. (Hall, 2001, 172). In the documentaries about Dylan’s early years I will identify the process of encoding and decoding and link aspects of media reception to the aforementioned codes as described by Hall (2001).

3.3 Discourse Analysis

As has been described before, this chapter will be a discourse analysis of the different actors in the documentaries. I think a discourse analysis is the best method for analyzing documentaries since there are many different actors that frame their views of Dylan as a political dissenter. A discourse analysis will then be a valuable method to weigh the different viewpoints against one another. This discourse analysis is based on the theories and methods as offered by Wodak and Meyer (2008) based on the concept of discourse analysis by Michel Foucault.

Wodak and Meyer (2008) see discourse as a form of “social practice”, they argue that there is a dialectical relationship between a particular event, or in this case musician, and “the situations, institutions, and social structures which frame it” (5). Wodak and Meyer (2008) argue that these social representations or social structures are based on the knowledge,

attitudes, and ideologies of the actors (32). The institutions and actors in the context of this thesis are journalists, musicians, Dylan himself, the audience and fans, and the media framing of the documentary itself. The share of influence of all these different actors may vary.

Moreover, a discourse analysis focuses on the power relations between different actors through social structures or social representations. In other words; the framing of Dylan by different actors can both stabilize and change the social image of Bob Dylan as a political dissenter. Therefore I will explore the different social representations of Dylan in these documentaries and see to what extent the same representations are shared among the various actors and if these interpretations frame Dylan, and the aforementioned four songs in particular, as a protest musician and as protest music.

3.4 *Don't Look Back* (1967)

According to Rahn (2001), the release of *Don't Look Back* in 1967 was important because it had been filmed during the height of the 1960s folk music revival. *Don't Look Back* (1967) was the first documentary which was released by filmmaker D. A. Pennebaker. The documentary revolves around Dylan's 1965 tour in the United Kingdom. The documentary was filmed in black-and-white and follows Dylan while he performs on stages throughout the country. There are also scenes of Dylan in hotel suites with his manager, girlfriend Joan Baez, Alan Price and Marianne Faithfull. In the documentary there are also interviews with the BBC and Time Magazine and the opinions of Dylan's fans and the audience about Dylan's music.

The documentary is not narrated, it merely documents Bob Dylan and his United Kingdom tour. The only people who appear in the documentary are the people that contribute to Dylan's tour, they are not asked to narrate Dylan's image or give their own opinions. Since the documentary only documents what actually happens during the tour, it seems as if the media framing is limited; the footage that is used in the documentary thus seems rather authentic, especially since it was both filmed and released during the sixties. Unfortunately, the documentary only shows a short fragment of "Talking World War III Blues", the other songs which are analyzed in this chapter are not addressed.

The title of the documentary, *Don't Look Back*, could imply the fact that the documentary wants to show that Dylan claims that he does not think about the meaning behind the songs he writes, he does not want to address a bigger picture or look back on what these songs actually mean within the context of society.

During an interview with the British press at the start of the documentary Dylan is

asked by a journalist if he is a folk artist, Dylan answers: “Am I folk? No, no, not me. I’m not folk.” He is then asked what the real message of his music is. Dylan’s answer is: “My real message? Keep a good head and always carry a lightbulb.” This demonstrates that Dylan did not want to fit the folk label and did not have an explicitly political message.

In another interview, this time with the African service of the BBC, Dylan is asked about his involvement with the civil rights movement and his place in the folk genre. Before this question is answered, the documentary shows Dylan performing “Only a Pawn in Their Game” in front of African Americans. In this shot, the documentary frames Dylan in a way that he seems thoroughly involved with the civil rights movement and African American rights.

After that, further along the documentary, Dylan is interviewed by a journalist from Time Magazine. This journalist asks Dylan about the message behind his songs and image as a folk singer. Dylan seems not amused by these questions and responds by saying: “I have got nothing to say about the things I write, I just write them.”, “I do not think I am a folk singer, you will probably call me a folk singer.” and “I do not have a message, if you want to tell other people that, go ahead and tell them, but I am not going to have to answer to it.” Dylan continues by arguing that Time Magazine does not print the truth and that they do not know what they are writing about. They simply need a story that sells; “They just got too much to lose by printing the truth.”. The journalist then responds by asking Dylan if he cares about what he writes and sings. Dylan seems rather offended by this question and does not answer it. Dylan then says that the audience just wants to be entertained and that they do not come to his shows for any other reason.

Furthermore, the opinions of Dylan’s fans are also shown throughout the documentary. At one point in the documentary there is a shot of fans asking Dylan to play “The Times They Are A-Changing”. Dylan then asks them if they really like that song and what they like about it. The girls respond by saying that they think that song fits Dylan’s music better than his new songs with a band. They then go on to say that “they do not sound like you at all” in response to Dylan’s reaction that he likes playing these songs with his band. Dylan’s popularity is demonstrated in a scene when after his show his car is jumped by some of his fans while other fans are running next to the car to get Dylan’s attention. Additionally, throughout the documentary there are several moments in which Dylan and his crew read the newspaper articles about his performances. This shows the British media opinion of Dylan’s music.

During the final part of the documentary, Dylan’s manager says that the British press

calls Dylan an anarchist. Dylan seems startled by this, and asks why they call him that. His manager then responds by saying “you never offer any kind of solution”.

Lastly, this documentary seems to frame a rather authentic image of Dylan as an artist. The documentary does not offer any explicit interpretation of his songs, however, the general image of Dylan as a protest song writer is changed throughout the documentary. The image that journalists have of Dylan becomes evident by the questions they ask. As framed by the documentary, the journalists want to frame Dylan as a folk music singer with meaningful songs. Dylan then completely disregards this image by claiming that he is not a folk singer and that his songs do not have any deeper meaning. The audience and fans are framed by the documentary in a way that they much rather see Dylan’s folk songs which fit his folk musician image than his electric songs which are performed with a band.

The opinions of the aforementioned actors in the documentary fit the “negotiated code” of media reception (Hall, 2001, 172). The audience encodes and stabilizes the image of Dylan as a folk protest musician, however, this image is dethroned and thus changed throughout the documentary. The preferred meaning by the broadcasters is that the audience does not necessarily perceive Dylan as a folk protest singer. However, the meaning which is encoded by the audience is that Dylan is a protest songwriter that fits the folk scene, whereas in the documentary Dylan himself claims that he is neither while the media and the audience try to interpret him as such. The decoding process of this documentary is that the audience’s image of Dylan as a folk musician and a protest songwriter might be altered because of the preferred meanings by the broadcasters. Nonetheless, another possibility is that the audience might form oppositional meanings under the particular circumstances of social protest and thus still stabilize the image of Dylan as a protest songwriter, since the war was still going on at the time this documentary was released. Therefore, it can be argued that the “negotiated code” applies here. (Hall, 2001, 172).

3.5 *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan (2005)*

This documentary is about the early years of Bob Dylan; his childhood and his growing interest in music and his inspiration to become a musician. The documentary is directed by Martin Scorsese and is narrated by Dylan himself and the artists who also belonged to the folk music revival scene of the fifties and the sixties such as Pete Seeger, Liam Clancy, Izzy Young, and Joan Baez. Other actors that appear in the documentary are the audience and the fans. These narrations and opinions of the different actors contribute to the shaping of Dylan’s image and the question to what extent he can be perceived as a folk protest musician.

The title of the documentary, *No Direction Home*, is a line from one of his first electric songs “Like a Rolling Stone”. It can be argued that this title resembles the meaning of *Don’t Look Back* (1967) in the sense that they both imply that Dylan does not want to think about the deeper meaning behind the songs he writes and that he does not have any path to follow or message to spread.

In several parts of the documentary there are excerpts of fans’ responses to Dylan’s 1965 partially electric tours through the United Kingdom. The fans were asked to respond to Dylan’s show. They all expressed their discontent with Dylan’s new music; they believed that he “went commercial” and that he was now “prostituting himself” to fit into popular music. The fans also believed that the “spirit” of Dylan’s songs vanished in his new electric album. In another excerpt people in the crowd also called him “Judas” when Dylan performed his electric songs. This implies that they believed Dylan betrayed the folk scene and went commercial with his new electric music and his band.

Dylan himself also responds to his label as a folk music artist. He disregards this label by saying: “I don’t call them folk songs; I call them contemporary songs.” Dylan argues that he simply wrote songs that fit the time of the sixties, which in this case was the genre of folk music. During an excerpt of a radio interview a young Dylan also claims that he is not a topical songwriter. Further along in the documentary Dylan is documented while receiving the Freedom Award. In his acceptance speech Dylan claims that he “was never a topical songwriter to begin with”. Dylan’s change in attitude is also shown during his electric tour in the United Kingdom when he skeptically says “these are all protest songs” about his electric songs because he knows that the audience wants him to play his old protest songs.

Nevertheless, Dylan’s fans still perceived him as a folk protest musician because of the way the media portrayed him. In the documentary Dylan argues that people, especially the media and journalists, had a distorted and warped view of him as an artist which they published in their papers and entertainment magazines. This is also shown by the type of questions these journalists ask. In one interview a journalist says to Dylan: “Your songs are supposed to have a subtle message”, to which Dylan responds that he wonders what she based this assumption on, she responds by saying that she read it in a magazine. Another question which is in line with these views are the following questions by journalists: “could you label yourself and tell us what your role is?” and “do you think that you should be the leader of songs with a message?” Dylan could not answer these questions in a serious manner and he ignored the journalists' implications that he should have a role or a label. Furthermore, journalists call him a “symbolic figure of protest” in their articles and finally Dylan is also

asked if he is taking part in the Vietnam protests. He responds by saying that he is busy, this again shows that Dylan did not take these media questions seriously. In the narrated part of the documentary Dylan also says that he has always found these questions absurd, he thinks that other artists would also not have been able to answer these questions, so why should he?

While Dylan himself clearly criticized his image of a folk protest musician, the media tried to frame him as this political dissenter. The opinions of the other musicians narrating the documentary varies. Liam Clancy claims that Dylan was not a topical songwriter and that he was not a “definitive person”. Even though his songs were not topical according to Clancy, he argues that Dylan always managed to articulate “what others wanted to say, but could not say”. Izzy Young, however, claims that Dylan was in fact a protest singer regardless of what his own opinion on this matter was. His songs were used for protest and he voice the opinion of his generation. According to Joan Baez, who was very involved with politics and social protest herself, Bob Dylan always refused to join her in these political rallies, even though they were in a relationship back then. She claims that “Bob was not a political person” even though his songs were used in the rallies of antiwar protest and the civil rights movement.

Furthermore, the songs which are essential to answering this research question are all addressed in this documentary. The reception of these songs in the documentary is narrated by the different artists who are interviewed. Mavis Staples responds to “Blowin’ in the Wind” by saying that his song fit the thoughts and feelings of the civil rights movement. She is an African American and she claims that Dylan was writing the truth about the feelings of African Americans, even though he was a white man himself. Dylan himself says that he wrote the song simply to perform it, there was no hidden message. Paul Nelson interpreted the song as sounding “current and old at the same time”, because the lyrics would fit in the situation of society almost two-hundred years ago. This interpretation is in line with the sources by Peddie (2006) and Starr and Waterman (2003) in the sense that the song avoided any topical reference and is therefore still relevant.

While “Blowin’ in the Wind” is broadly addressed in the documentary, the other songs are addressed more generally. “Masters of War” was accompanied by a slideshow of Dylan’s performance at the town hall instead of the live performance itself. The song is not addressed specifically by any of the narrators. “With God on Our Side” is shown through footage from the Newport Folk Festival in 1963, the same excerpt which is used in *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007). However, nothing is said specifically about the meaning or the interpretation of the song. Finally, “Talkin’ World War III Blues” is also shown through a performance at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival. It is narrated as a Woody Guthrie song

because it had a similar title and a similar surrealistic theme. The only song which is interpreted as a protest song is “Blowin’ in the Wind”, however, this is interpreted within the context of the civil rights movement. Throughout the documentary, Dylan’s songs are not specifically linked to protest against the Vietnam War.

Lastly, based on the discourse analysis of the actors, this documentary seems to fit the “dominant-hegemonic code” as demonstrated by Hall (2001). The audience interprets and thus stabilizes the image of Dylan as a folk protest musician, however, the documentary overthrows this image by showing footage of Dylan himself claiming that he was never a political dissenter. Since the documentary shows footage of both interviews with a young Dylan in the 1960s and contemporary Dylan as a narrator, the image of Dylan as a political dissenter will probably be altered. The audience will decode the preferred meaning by the director and the broadcasters. Since this documentary was released in 2005, the audience will alter decode the meaning of this documentary differently than *Don’t Look Back* (1967) since the zeroes do share the same context of social unrest.

3.6 *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007)

The Other Side of the Mirror (2007) is a documentary about the early years of Dylan’s career. The documentary revolves around Dylan’s performances at the Newport Folk Festival of 1963 up until 1965. These years were vital to the change of Dylan’s image and the documentary shows this change in attitude through his performances at the festival at the time of the changing sixties society. The goal of this documentary as explained by its director, Murray Lerner, was to “strip away the encrustation of legend, lies, projection, and wish fulfillment” to make the audience see the actual outlines of Dylan’s persona more clearly (Lerner, 2007, *The Other Side of the Mirror*). As the title already implies, the documentary wants to show the audience a side of Dylan’s songs without mediation or interpretation by journalists, analysts, or other forms of media. It wants to show how Dylan went from being a crowd-pleasing folk singer-songwriter to eventually freeing himself from this image and finding his own voice with an electric guitar.

Since this documentary purely focusses on Dylan’s performances at the festival without a narrator or the opinions of others, it seems rather authentic. Of course, these performances are still sequenced and carefully chosen by the director, but the documentary does not intend to frame Dylan in a certain way. The only people who appear in the documentary are the hosts of the Newport Folk Festival, Dylan himself, Joan Baez, Dylan’s band, Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary and the Freedom Singers and some people in the

crowd of the festival. Therefore, the only actors in the documentary are the musicians, the hosts of the festival, and the audience. However, throughout the documentary Dylan does not speak directly about himself, he mainly is documented while performing songs at the festival. The audience and the hosts are the only actors who voice their image of and their opinions on Dylan.

This opinion is voiced by the hosts when they announce Dylan's performance on stage. In the introduction to Dylan's performances the festival hosts announce him as "a solution for young adults" and that "he has his finger on the pulse of this generation". This demonstrates the importance of Dylan's music to the baby boomer generation in the context of the sixties. The fans in the crowd of the folk festival are shown in the documentary when they react to Dylan's performance; they are documented when they idolize Dylan as a musician. However, it is also shown how Dylan is booed from the stage by the fans after his performance of the electric "Maggie's Farm" and "Like a Rolling Stone". The festival host then announces that "he is going to go get an acoustic guitar" and the crowd then cheers when Dylan returns with one of his earlier acoustic songs.

In response to the songs which are analyzed in the context of this thesis, there is no voiced interpretation of these specific songs. There are, however, performances of "Talkin' World War III Blues", "With God on Our Side" together with Joan Baez and the iconic performance of "Blowin' in the Wind" with the Freedom Singers, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Joan Baez. Even though there is no voiced interpretation, this performance of "Blowin' in the Wind" shows how this song was adopted by the civil rights movement as the musicians all stand together hand in hand, black and white singers alike. Furthermore, "With God on Our Side" is documented as a performance both in 1963 and 1964. There is an interesting difference between these two performances, even without narration. While the 1963 performance of this anti-war song is delivered with closed eyes and a serious tone, the 1964 performance is delivered with open, knowing eyes and a sort of smile on Dylan's face. This change demonstrates Dylan's changing attitude towards both protest music and political involvement.

Finally, based on the discourse analysis of the actors this documentary seems to fit the "dominant-hegemonic code" as described by Hall (2001). The audience encodes and thus stabilizes the image of Dylan as a very influential protest folk musician, while the documentary disregards and thus changes this image by showing Dylan's unmediated image of a musician trying to find his voice. The meaning which is then decoded after watching the documentary is possibly altered and fits the preferred meaning as intended by the

broadcasters, the social image is changed by the media actor. This differs from the first documentary because *Don't Look Back* was released within the context of the protest movement in 1967 and this documentary was released in 2007. This difference could influence the meaning which is decoded by the audience since 2007 did not experience context of social protest like the sixties did.

3.7 Conclusion of Discourse Analysis

In conclusion, Pattie (2007) argues in his book *Rock Music in Performance* that there are different layers of mediation within a performance; between the band and the audience, between the band members themselves, between the performance and technology, and between the music and the frame of the festival or event (Pattie, 2007, 38). However, Pattie (2007) reasons that these different layers of mediation do not automatically affect the authenticity of the live performance. I think this is true for all three documentaries in the sense that they all portray Dylan's live performances in an authentic manner even though these performances are mediated within the framework of a documentary. All three documentaries overthrow Dylan's image as a protest songwriter based on Dylan's own reactions to journalists and other forms of media. The audience in the documentaries, however, claims that Dylan fits the image of a folk protest musician, but his image is framed by the media and journalists. The question then remains; to what extent do these documentaries receive or interpret "Blowin' in the Wind", "Masters of War", "Talkin' World War III Blues" and "With God on Our Side" as protest songs? "Blowin' in the Wind" is interpreted as a protest song for the civil rights movement by showing the iconic 1963 Newport Folk Festival performance in *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007) and the interpretation by Mavis Staples in *No Direction Home* (2005). "Masters of War" is only shown in *No Direction Home* (2005), however, as has been said before, there was no interpretation of the lyrics or the song itself. "With God on Our Side" is shown twice in *The Other Side of the Mirror* (1967) and once *No Direction Home* (2005), all three performances are from the Newport Folk Festival. While there is no spoken interpretation, the difference between the two performances in *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007) shows Dylan's changing attitude towards political songs. Finally, "Talkin' World War III Blues" is interpreted in *No Direction Home* (2005) as a Woody Guthrie song based on the title and the surrealistic theme, the other documentaries merely show a performance of the song. So, the only song which is clearly interpreted as a protest song is "Blowin' in the Wind", however, this is linked to the social protests of the civil rights movement.

V. Conclusion

“Once an identity is fixed in the public mind or the simple memory of the media it can never be escaped”. (Marcus, 2006, 48). This quote by writer Greil Marcus offers a new perspective on this thesis. In his book *Like a Rolling Stone* Marcus writes about the changing attitude of Bob Dylan after he released his electric song and the representation of a newly found voice: “Like a Rolling Stone”. This quote fits the findings of my thesis like a glove in the sense that the media and the public opinion framed Dylan as a political dissenter, Dylan himself did not.

To summarize my points I can confirm my expectations and conclude that Dylan’s songs were never specifically protesting the Vietnam War, nor was Dylan himself a political dissenter against the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, Dylan’s music does belong to the sixties protest movements because he almost single-handedly made folk music the music of protest. Among many other protest musicians, Dylan’s lyrics inspired and rallied many protesters to protest in social movements.

Even though his music was instrumental in the antiwar movement, Dylan did not mention the Vietnam War in any of his lyrics and he did not take part in any of the antiwar protests. His songs avoided any topical reference which gave them a longer “shelf life” because most of his lyrics are still relevant today (Peddie, 2006, 12). Even though Dylan did not mention the Vietnam War specifically, I can conclude from my narrative analysis that he does mention war within the context of the sixties, which must be either the rising Cold War or the Vietnam War. Dylan also mentions the deaths of young soldiers in “Masters of War”, which is something that the Vietnam War was both known and criticized for.

From the discourse analysis of the documentaries I can conclude that first and foremost the media and public opinion framed the image of Dylan as a political dissenter, therefore the quote as written by Marcus (2006) is completely true. Throughout all three documentaries Dylan is clear about his role in the sixties protest movement: he just wanted to write songs and perform, he did not want to be politically engaged with the Vietnam War or any other form of social protest. As for the interpretation of his songs as protest songs; the media and the audience predominantly interpreted Dylan’s songs as songs about protest. “Blowin’ in the Wind” is explicitly framed as a song for the civil rights movement, however, none of the songs I analyzed are framed or interpreted as songs for the antiwar movement.

Finally, within the context of answering my research question about to what extent these Dylan songs could be recognized as protest songs against the Vietnam War, I can

conclude that his songs can be recognized as protest songs in the sense that they offer reasons to protest the war. However, as I have mentioned before, his songs avoid any topical reference about protesting the Vietnam War or even the war itself. Nevertheless, his songs can be interpreted as such, since one can read whatever they want into the lyrics. In addition to this, Dylan stepped away from his involvement with politics at the height of the anti-war movement in the war's escalation after 1965, this implies that Dylan himself did not want to be involved with politics and protest.

Now that I have explored Dylan's image as a political dissenter, it would also be interesting to explore the different personas of Bob Dylan throughout the years based on an analysis of his lyrics. Another possibility for further research would be to look into Dylan's progression as a writer throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties and analyze the similarities and differences. A final recommendation for further research is to explore more deeply how exactly Dylan's music was used in the protest movements of the civil rights movement and the antiwar movements.

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VII. Appendix

Lyrics “Masters of War” as retrieved from <https://bobdylan.com/songs/masters-war-mono/>

Come you masters of war	Then you set back and watch
You that build all the guns	When the death count gets higher
You that build the death planes	You hide in your mansion
You that build the big bombs	As young people's blood
You that hide behind walls	Flows out of their bodies
You that hide behind desks	And is buried in the mud
I just want you to know	
I can see through your masks	You've thrown the worst fear
	That can ever be hurled
You that never done nothin'	Fear to bring children
But build to destroy	Into the world
You play with my world	For threatening my baby
Like it's your little toy	Unborn and unnamed
You put a gun in my hand	You ain't worth the blood
And you hide from my eyes	That runs in your veins
And you turn and run farther	
When the fast bullets fly	How much do I know
	To talk out of turn
Like Judas of old	You might say that I'm young
You lie and deceive	You might say I'm unlearned
A world war can be won	But there's one thing I know
You want me to believe	Though I'm younger than you
But I see through your eyes	Even Jesus would never
And I see through your brain	Forgive what you do
Like I see through the water	
That runs down my drain	Let me ask you one question
	Is your money that good
You fasten the triggers	Will it buy you forgiveness
For the others to fire	Do you think that it could

I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul

And I hope that you die
And your death'll come soon

I will follow your casket
In the pale afternoon
And I'll watch while you're lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I'll stand o'er your grave
'Til I'm sure that you're dead

Lyrics "Blowin' in the wind" as retrieved from <https://bobdylan.com/songs/blowin-wind/>

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

How many years can a mountain exist
Before it's washed to the sea?
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head
Pretending he just doesn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

How many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Lyrics "Talkin' World War III Blues" as retrieved from <https://bobdylan.com/songs/talkin-world-war-iii-blues/>

Some time ago a crazy dream came to me
I dreamt I was walkin' into World War
Three

I went to the doctor the very next day
To see what kinda words he could say
He said it was a bad dream
I wouldn't worry 'bout it none, though
They were my own dreams and they're
only in my head

I said, "Hold it, Doc, a World War passed
through my brain"
He said, "Nurse, get your pad, this boy's
insane"
He grabbed my arm, I said, "Ouch!"
As I landed on the psychiatric couch
He said, "Tell me about it"

Well, the whole thing started at 3 o'clock
fast
It was all over by quarter past
I was down in the sewer with some little
lover
When I peeked out from a manhole cover
Wondering who turned the lights on

Well, I got up and walked around
And up and down the lonesome town
I stood a-wondering which way to go
I lit a cigarette on a parking meter and

walked on down the road
It was a normal day

Well, I rung the fallout shelter bell
And I leaned my head and I gave a yell
"Give me a string bean, I'm a hungry
man"
A shotgun fired and away I ran
I don't blame them too much though, I
know I look funny

Down at the corner by a hot-dog stand
I seen a man
I said, "Howdy friend, I guess there's just
us two"
He screamed a bit and away he flew
Thought I was a Communist

Well, I spied a girl and before she could
leave
"Let's go and play Adam and Eve"
I took her by the hand and my heart it was
thumpin'
When she said, "Hey man, you crazy or
sumpin'
You see what happened last time they
started"

Well, I seen a Cadillac window uptown
And there was nobody aroun'

I got into the driver's seat
And I drove down 42nd Street
In my Cadillac. Good car to drive after a
war

Well, I remember seein' some ad
So I turned on my Conelrad
But I didn't pay my Con Ed bill
So the radio didn't work so well
Turned on my record player—
It was Rock-a-day Johnny singin', "Tell
Your Ma, Tell Your Pa
Our Love's A-gonna Grow Ooh-wah,
Ooh-wah"

I was feelin' kinda lonesome and blue
I needed somebody to talk to
So I called up the operator of time
Just to hear a voice of some kind
"When you hear the beep it will be three
o'clock"
She said that for over an hour
And I hung up

Well, the doctor interrupted me just about
then

Sayin', "Hey I've been havin' the same
old dreams

But mine was a little different you see
I dreamt that the only person left after the
war was me
I didn't see you around"

Well, now time passed and now it seems

Everybody's having them dreams

Everybody sees themselves

Walkin' around with no one else

Half of the people can be part right all of
the time

Some of the people can be all right part of
the time

But all of the people can't be all right all
of the time

I think Abraham Lincoln said that

"I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in
yours"

I said that

Lyrics “With God on Our Side” as retrieved from <https://bobdylan.com/songs/god-our-side/>

Oh my name it is nothin'
My age it means less
The country I come from
Is called the Midwest
I's taught and brought up there
The laws to abide
And that the land that I live in
Has God on its side

Oh the history books tell it
They tell it so well
The cavalries charged
The Indians fell
The cavalries charged
The Indians died
Oh the country was young
With God on its side

Oh the Spanish-American
War had its day
And the Civil War too
Was soon laid away
And the names of the heroes
I's made to memorize
With guns in their hands
And God on their side

Oh the First World War, boys
It closed out its fate
The reason for fighting
I never got straight

But I learned to accept it
Accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead
When God's on your side

When the Second World War
Came to an end
We forgave the Germans
And we were friends
Though they murdered six million
In the ovens they fried
The Germans now too
Have God on their side

I've learned to hate Russians
All through my whole life
If another war starts
It's them we must fight
To hate them and fear them
To run and to hide
And accept it all bravely
With God on my side

But now we got weapons
Of the chemical dust
If fire them we're forced to
Then fire them we must
One push of the button
And a shot the world wide
And you never ask questions
When God's on your side

Through many dark hour
I've been thinkin' about this
That Jesus Christ
Was betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you
You'll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot
Had God on his side

So now as I'm leavin'
I'm weary as Hell
The confusion I'm feelin'
Ain't no tongue can tell
The words fill my head
And fall to the floor
If God's on our side
He'll stop the next war