

FROM “WE SHALL OVERCOME” TO “FORTUNATE SON”: THE EVOLVING SOUND OF PROTEST

An analysis on the changing nature of American protest music
during the Sixties



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Abstract

Drawing on Denisoff's theoretical framework - based on his analysis of the magnetic and rhetorical songs of persuasion - this thesis will examine how American protest music evolved during the Sixties (1960-1969). Songs of protest in relation to the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War gave a sound to the sociopolitical zeitgeist, critically addressing matters that were present throughout this decade. From the gentle sounds of folk to the dazzling melodies of rock, protest music became an essential cultural medium that inspired forms of collective thought. Ideas of critique and feelings of dissent were uniquely captured in protest songs, creating this intrinsic correlation between politics, music, and protest. Still, a clear changing nature can be identified whilst scrutinizing the musical phases and genres – specifically folk and rock - the Sixties went through. By taking a closer look on the cultural artifacts of protest songs, this work will try to demonstrate how American songs of protest developed during this decade, often affected by sociopolitical factors. From Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" to The Doors' "The Unknown Soldier", and from "Eve of Destruction" by Barry McGuire to "Superbird" by Country Joe and The Fish, a thorough analysis of protest music will be provided. On the basis of lyrics, melodies, and live performances, this thesis will discuss how protest songs reflected the mood of the times, and provided an ever-evolving destabilizing force that continuously adjusted to its social and political surroundings. Ultimately, this MA thesis brings forth the argument that music did not only embody the feeling of protest apparent in the public arena, but also offered valuable insights into how the American songs of protest altered in both style and messaging over the years.

Keywords: Music, Politics, Protest, Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War, Denisoff, Sixties, United States, Lyrics, Social Movements.

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American music and politics have always been a tremendous passion of mine. The ever-exciting popular culture and the political landscape of the United States then also inspired me to enroll for the MA North American Studies at Radboud University, with a specialization in Transatlantic Studies.

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Introduction

Out of nowhere, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, Bob Dylan released “Murder Most Foul”, his first new song in nearly a decade. Both intriguing and hypnotizing, “Murder Most Foul” unfolds like an epic poem. Starting on “a dark day in Dallas – November ‘63”, the listener is drawn into Dylan’s verbiage. It feels like a slow but damning rollercoaster ride, as Dylan’s aging, yet tender, voice moves from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to musical requests addressed to Wolfman Jack – a renowned disc jockey of the Sixties (Shorrock). Dylan demonstrates how President Kennedy was “Being led to the slaughter like a sacrificial lamb”, as he was “Shot down like a dog in broad daylight”, sketching this dreadful image of an essential political moment of the 1960s (Dylan “Murder”). By adding a plethora of musical references – ranging from the Beatles to Don Henley, the Eagles, and Thelonious Monk – Dylan furthermore creates a maze of allusions in which music and politics correlate in unprecedented fashion (Dylan “Murder”, Shorrock). What is even more interesting, is Dylan’s apocalyptic vision of the United States:

*The day that they killed him, someone said to me, “Son,
The age of the anti-Christ has just only begun.”
[...]
What’s New Pussycat - wha’d I say
I said the soul of a nation been torn away
It’s beginning to go down into a slow decay
And that it’s thirty-six hours past judgment day (Dylan).*

Whilst listening to “Murder Most Foul”, you can sense the fear and political unrest Dylan tries to portray. During a time of crisis, Dylan refers to how the “soul of a nation” was torn away by the assassination of President Kennedy. The singer-songwriter paints an elegiac and damning picture of the world, mirroring the sound of protest and zeitgeist of the Sixties he so famously introduced in songs as “Masters of War”, “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” (Kamer). By way of all these feelings of societal and political dissent, there is, however, one constant: the music. A sound of protest, or a melody of critique, anchored in the songs of sociopolitical protest that famously shaped the 1960s (Shorrock).

In general, music is often recognized as being soundwaves. A cultural activity that has been created for entertaining purposes by way of sound and rhythm (Alperson 3). However, musicians also have the ability to address political and societal inequities. By way of song, they can reflect on the mood of the times, creating this interesting correlation between music and politics. Lyrical components and melodies can epitomize political ideas and messages of protest, which are then embodied by the

collective listening community (Seely 290). Especially during the 1960s in the United States, protest music became this unique vehicle of both expression and representation. Often labelled as the 'Age of Protest', the Sixties were a decade of political dissent, nation-wide skepticism, and social critique. It was the decade of the Civil Rights Movement, the disastrous Vietnam War, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and President Kennedy. With a willingness to reflect on this reality and express personal disdain, several American musicians fixated their attention on protest music. Consequently, protest songs entered the musical mainstream (Gitlin 4-5).

The sounds of protest in the 1960s inspired a generation, communicating the ideals and values of the American counterculture in an attractive manner. Lyrics, concerts, and album covers did not solely become passive entities that echoed the musicians political stance. Rather, the songs of protest in the Sixties tried to shed a light on societal and political challenges and provided new insights to listeners that transcended the realities as portrayed on the news. These vivid symbols within protest music formed a glue between music and the apparent social movements, evolving throughout the decade from the folk-revival to the introduction of full-out rock music (Kodosky 70-1). This changing nature of the political sound of protest during the Sixties, with a specific focus on folk and rock, will be the primary case of this thesis. It has resulted into an overarching research question: How did American protest music evolve during the 1960s in both a rhetorical and magnetic fashion, and to what extent was this influenced by societal and political factors? Additionally, sub-questions have been added as a roadmap for this thesis: How did Civil Rights and the Vietnam War have a profound impact on the changing nature of Sixties' protest songs? Was there a correlation between the apparent social movements and the produced songs of protest? And in what manner did the messages of political protest in both the folk and rock idiom differ from one another?

Within the current state of research, the correlation between the musical and the political has often been pointed out. John Street – in *Music and Politics* – argued that “[m]usic does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it is that expression”(1). And according to Kodosky, popular music “constitutes a powerful political force”, as a “song’s lyrics enable performers to ‘criticize, mobilize, express dissenting views, raise an issue, and spread counter-hegemonic discourses and ideas about rights and freedoms’” (70). Research conducted by scholars as Rodnitzky and Greenway also scrutinize the origins of the American protest song, and engage with the political critiques and ideas inscribed within these songs of protest that appeal to the ever-evolving listening community. Within their research, these scholars concur that the sounds of protest created unmissable soundtracks throughout the Sixties, commenting – either softly or aggressively – on the ongoing political and social dilemmas. Furthermore, R. Serge Denisoff, the key theoretician within this analysis of American protest music during the 1960s, stresses how songs of protest “became a means of

expressing personal disdain” (“Top Forty” 809). He perfectly exemplified the political function protest music had in the Sixties, often referring to protest songs as “songs of persuasion” (“Top Forty” 809).

Though often focusing on separate key genres within the all-encompassing protest idiom, the scrutinized scholarly research often fails to recognize the existing interrelation between the musical developments that took place during the Sixties, and the changes within the presented messages of protest and critique in song. Folk songs of protest – such as “Blowin’ in the Wind” - contained question-laden lyrics and gentle sounds. Songs of protest in the rock idiom – such as “The Unknown Soldier” - on the other hand, portrayed undisguised sociopolitical critique on the hand of blatant electric sounds. Throughout this analysis of American protest music in the 1960s, the theories of the magnetic and rhetorical protest song by Serge R. Denisoff will therefore be utilized to demonstrate this changing nature of the sounds of protest. Whereas the magnetic protest song focuses on matters as emotional appeal, social cohesion, and having the ability to be sung en masse, the rhetorical protest songs rely more on forthright ‘emphasized negativism’ and individualistic critique on political and societal matters. Especially when engaging with different lyrical substances and melodies of protest music in the folk and rock idiom, these theories are considered to be useful (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 584). Furthermore, a method of content analysis will be applied to determine how the lyrical contents of ‘60s protest music significantly changed over the years. Protest music during the Sixties namely reflected the ethos of both the Civil Rights Movement and anti-war movement, and was therefore greatly affected by both political and societal circumstances (Bindas and Houston 4, Street 49).

In chapter 1, the interrelation between politics, music and protest will be introduced. It will be scrutinized how music can epitomize political arguments and transmit messages of societal critique. As the first chapter will be used to set out the overall theoretical framework for this thesis, a theoretical introduction into the field of politics and music will also be given. Finally, several theoretical approaches to the concept of the protest song will be more closely examined. Special attention will be given to R. Serge Denisoff’s theories on the magnetic and rhetorical songs of protest.

In chapter 2, the origins of the ‘Folk Craze’ in the United States will be explored, and the sociopolitical sounds of protest in relation to the Civil Rights Movement will be examined in more detail. This chapter will scrutinize how folk music became an embodiment of the Civil Rights spirit. Furthermore, it will be presented how folk songs of protest focused on collective statements of dissent, representing their ‘magnetic’ traits. The March on Washington will be utilized as a central case study to exemplify how political critique and themes of racial injustice were ubiquitous in folk songs of protest.

In chapter 3, the interplay between folk-rock and political protest will be analyzed. Songs as “Lyndon Johnson Told The Nation” and “I Ain’t Marching Anymore” will prove how Sixties’ music further evolved into a thought-provoking weapon, full of cynicism and rhetorical puns that related more and more to the American involvement in the Vietnam War. It will be demonstrated how rock instrumentation, vocal outbursts, and razor-sharp comments were added to the musical and political mix. Case studies on Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction” and Bob Dylan will exemplify this evolving – and rather rhetorical - sound of protest music in comparison to the songs of protest in the folk idiom.

In chapter 4, a closer look will be taken at protest music in relation to the Vietnam War, with a specific focus on psychedelic-rock. Firstly, however, special attention will be given to “The Ballad of the Green Berets” by Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler. Having identified Sadler’s “Ballad” as a notable pro-war exception, songs as Pete Seeger’s “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” will exemplify the rhetorical nature of folk music produced during the Vietnam War. This rhetorical sound of protest will also be identified as omnipresent in the mysterious, yet thought-provoking, sounds of psychedelic rock as performed by Country Joe and The Fish.

In chapter 5, the sounds of sociopolitical protest in the rock idiom will be thoroughly analyzed. As argued by Orman, rock had “developed to become the top entertainment medium, in which political messages and ideas of protest were perfectly shared with a large audience” (Orman 63). Direct sonic imageries of the Vietnam War, feelings of anger, and the inherent inequities within American society, were attractively presented in a rather remorseless and direct manner. Case studies on “The Unknown Soldier” by The Doors and “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival will test this. Chapter 5 will be finalized by focusing on Jimi Hendrix’s performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock, being one of the most unique symbols of protest music during the 1960s.

Chapter 1

Politics, Protest, and Music: A Theoretical Approach

Protest songs have been intrinsic to political music in the United States. From the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement and the current Trump presidency, protest songs are inseparable from the American political landscape. However, as argued by Garratt, the “[p]rotest song has come to be indelibly defined by the music of the 1960s” (129). The sound of protest reflected the American zeitgeist of the Sixties. Music gave a voice to the critique on issues as racial inequality, the Vietnam draft system, civil rights, and political mismanagement. It was a period of artistic and musical flowering, during which the political protest song became part of the musical mainstream. Songs as Pete Seeger’s “We Shall Overcome”, Country Joe and The Fish’s “Superbird”, and Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son” reveal how the sound of protest correlated with the 1960s political landscape. By way of their politically-inspired lyrics and protest message, these songs inspired a generation. Protest music communicated the ideals and values of the counterculture movement in an attractive manner, becoming advertisements that could influence the American population as a whole (Kodosky 77). It is therefore no surprise that folk artist Oscar Brand argued that “protest songs move the body, move the mind, and move the government” (qtd. in Garratt 130).

This chapter will introduce the correlation between politics, protest, and music. It will argue that music reflects on the sociopolitical landscape by way of its lyrics, album covers, and even live performances. Furthermore, it will be scrutinized how music has the ability to epitomize political ideas, and bring to light forms of collective thought and public deliberation. By way of analyzing works by Greenway, Rodnitzky, and Orman, a precise overview of theoretical approaches to the sound of protest will be provided. Finally, Denisoff’s theories on the magnetic and rhetorical protest song will be thoroughly explained, and the theoretical framework for this thesis will be clarified.

1.1 Music and Politics: A Theoretical Introduction

Music and politics are often regarded as two separate entities. Whereas politics focuses on the activities within the polity, music concentrates on the creative environment of sound and rhythm. The amalgamation of music and politics would then solely be confined to matters as national anthems or campaign music (Street 1). However, as John Street argues in his book *Music and Politics*, music “embodies political values and experiences, and organizes our response to society as political thought and action” (1). Barry Shank, in *The Political Agency of Musical Beauty*, assents with Street, as “music is one of the central cultural processes through which the abstract concept of the polis comes into bodily experience” (833). Artists have the ability to both empower and disrupt the

political arena, adopting their musical sound as a striking force. Besides, political music is an accessible form of cultural expression, which has the ability to critically mirror and reflect upon the contemporary reality by way of its lyrics, album covers, and live performances (Street 43). Think about the album *Volunteers* by Jefferson Airplane, which critically engaged with their political view on the Vietnam War. Joan Baez's performance of "We Shall Overcome" during the March on Washington, that epitomized the sound of protest of the Civil Rights Movement. Or how Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" became an anthem for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Music has this intrinsic ability to engage with politics, and communicate values, feelings, and ideas within our popular culture (Garratt 11-2).

According to David King Dunaway, "[t]he field of political music includes everything from an electoral song of the 1730s to a punk-rock protest of the 1980s" (269). Dunaway especially focuses on the response to music by the listener, as the politics of music arises when the lyrical content or melody effectuates a political judgement by the receiver (269). John Street relates to this idea of political music, arguing that "a political song [...] is one that self-consciously recognizes the ideological content and seeks to draw the listener's attention to it" (44). Music and politics correlate when it inspires forms of collective thought by the receiver – the audience - and when it becomes a site of public deliberation. Therefore, according to Street, "music's politics is primarily a product of its political context, that in some way or another political change produces songs that reflect, and reflect upon, their times" (49). John Street specifically points his attention to folk musicians and topical-songwriters of the Sixties, as their music "chronicles contemporary reality. It is a form of news reporting, and folk musicians are a form of journalists or political commentator" (48).

Besides the political capabilities of folk music, the sounds of popular rock music also have this ability to transmit messages of political and societal critique. According to Garofalo, popular music "always interacts with its social environment", and therefore "often serves as a lightning rod for the political controversies that invariably accompany change" (qtd. in Street 48). In *The Politics of Rock Music*, John Orman, however, is somewhat more pessimistic. Orman, by way of a content analysis of rock lyrics, argues that one must acknowledge that rock songs rarely demonstrate political messages. Most rock songs namely deal with a-political topics such as love, driving a fancy car, and having a good time (154). This line of thought can also be related to political philosopher John Stuart Mill, whom regards music as a mere "amusement" which "a person may, without blame, either like or dislike" (68). The influence of music in the political arena is therefore identified as marginal, being solely consigned to the "taste" of the individual (Mill 67-8). "Yet given this inability of rock music to change a listener's political and social attitudes," as Orman points out, some (rock) music is more political and socially conscious than others (154). Orman specifically refers to the 1960s, which he deems the "golden era" of political rock music, shining light on how evident the relation between

politics and music was during this time period. Jefferson Airplane's political album *Volunteers*, protest songs as "Superbird" and "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag" by Country Joe and The Fish, and Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" are just several examples given that demonstrate the sounds of political protest within the rock idiom (Orman 154-5).

1.2 The Sounds of Politics: Political Ideas and Feelings within Music

As argued by both Street and Orman, a correlation between music and politics can be detected in both the folk and rock idiom. The lyrics and rhythm of a song can epitomize political ideas which are embodied by the collective listening community. Consequently, music becomes this vehicle of political representation and expression, which became exemplary for the songs of protest during the Sixties (Seely 290). Furthermore, in the idea of music's 'intentionality', "musical practices and texts convey the political ideologies and aims of their creators or performers" (Garratt 24). Take Bob Dylan's "Masters of War", a politically-influenced folk song that strikingly condemns the military-industrial complex of the United States. Dylan denounces businessmen for envisioning war as a game of chess, that they could play from a safe distance as they "hide behind desks" (Kodosky 70-1, Dylan "Masters"). Or Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son", in which John Fogerty boldly comments on the inequitable draft system of the United States during the Vietnam War (Phull 92). Within such songs of protest, R. Serge Denisoff especially identifies music's vital capabilities to showcase political ideas. Music has the ability to act on the world and act on its audience. Besides, a song's lyrics can embody these political messages of protest like none other, and address the audience on a particular political or social matter within contemporary reality (Denisoff "Protest Movements" 229). John Street even adds that when lyrics "lack any direct political references [this] is not evidence of an apolitical character" (107). Political commentary or social critique can thus be disguised in a (protest) song's lyrics, as for example can be detected in The Monkees' "Last Train to Clarksville"¹. However, Denisoff – in *Sing a Song of Social Significance* – does question what musically actually can communicate, and to whom? He continues by arguing that "[i]t becomes readily apparent that the mere hearing of protest song X will not turn the listener into being a supporter of X ideology or group. If this were the case the average listener to Top Forty Radio would be a Green Beret supporter of pacifist causes who takes drugs and beats up long-haired youths for opposing the Vietnam War"² ("Social Significance" X). Political expressions in lyrical components thus have to equal

¹ "Last Train to Clarksville" was the debut single by the Monkees, and contains a hidden reference to the Vietnam War. The lyrical line "And I don't know if I'm ever coming home" namely refers to a soldier about to leave for Vietnam.

² "The Ballad of the Green Berets" (1966) by Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler was a patriotic song about the US Special Forces that glorified the American involvement during the Vietnam War. In 1966 it became a major hit, reaching number 1 for five weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100. For more information see chapter 4.

a political participation of sorts, as the audience will only agree with the provided message as they stand behind the social or political issue being addressed (Street 42).

Lyrics are, however, but one variable in which a song's political meaning or message of protest can be deciphered. According to Street, the power of lyrics "can be exaggerated at the costs of the other elements of the musical experience", as the political may also be located in a song's rhythm, melody, or even its live performance (42). Even though the lyrical component of a song is still particularly important, they must be regarded as but one piece to the puzzle throughout this analysis of protest songs in the American 'Age of Protest'. Other influential components therefore have to be taken into account to create a clear analysis of how protest music evolved in both a rhetorical and magnetic fashion (Garratt 24-5). This can, for example, be related back to Barry Sadler's pro-Vietnam War hit "The Ballad of the Green Berets". During a live performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Sadler stands in front of the Green Beret insignia. Performing in his uniform, Sadler embodies the courage and strength of the soldiers in Vietnam, which are also clearly exemplified in the song's lyrics. By way of this televised performance, the political expression of "The Ballad of the Green Berets" only gets starkened, and creates a more distinct connection between politics and music (Sadler 0:07-2:27). The visual components of a song are thus also important when expressing a political message. Live performances became of exceptional significance during the Sixties. Besides stressing their political opinion, musicians were namely able to attract a much wider audience. And not only during live performances at major events – such as the March on Washington or Woodstock – but also by simply appearing, and performing, on television. Within this thesis, visual components and live performance will therefore often be added to strengthen the arguments given.

Throughout this research, however, it is also necessary to understand that music can wrongfully be deemed as political. As argued by Street, "[m]usic can become 'political' through the interpretations put upon it, [...] irrespective of the performers' intentions or the apparent content of that music" (45.) Ray Pratt, in his book *Rhythm and Resistance: Explorations in the Political Uses of Popular Music*, also pays attention to this debate if political expression or meaning is accurately received by the audience. He stresses that the "meaning of any song, indeed any artifact in popular culture, is determined by the multiplicity of uses it receives", and that music "speaks to wider publics who may experience the information, feelings, and situations in it as their own" (5). In relation to this thesis, the audience can thus decipher a political undertone in a, presumable, protest song, whilst the songwriter or artists actually wished to communicate and represent a different meaning. Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" was, for example, identified by some listeners as a striking anti-war song, whilst Dylan only wished to condemn America's military-industrial complex. And even though "Masters of War" fits within the narrative of a Vietnam War protest song, as it is critical of teenagers fighting a war they did not agree with, Dylan does argue that the meaning given to "Masters of War"

parted from his original intentions (Phull 31). “Masters of War was namely “supposed to be a pacifist song against war [...] speaking against what Eisenhower was calling a military industrial complex as he was making his exit from the presidency” (qtd. in Phull 31). Deciphering the intended political message or sound of protest in a song can thus remain a difficult practice. However, when analyzing the “golden era” of protest music in the Sixties, one can recognize that most music with a political tone did articulate their messages of critique in an expressive and clear manner.

1.3 Politics + Music + Protest: Research Overview

During the Sixties, music and politics became intertwined as never before, creating an “era of swirling change and social protest” (Bindas and Houston 1). Musicians took center stage with their expressive topical music, performing ideas of protest and reform that represented a generation. Though American protest music erupted to massive popularity throughout the 1960s, the origins of its popularization can be found in the early folk ballads of the 1940s, most notably those by Woody Guthrie (Rodnitzky “Evolution” 13). According to Pratt, Guthrie “virtually reinvented a traditional form, the folk ballad, transforming it into a powerful instrument of political cultural commentary” (114). His songs of protest – such as “This Land is Your Land” – reflected on the United States in an anomalous manner, echoing both the decay and future opportunities of the American nation (Rodnitzky “Evolution” 38). In adopting these elements of protest, Guthrie created a relationship between music and politics that endured all throughout the Sixties (Pratt 114). However, to better understand how protest music created a wholesome image of the ‘Age of Protest’, the theoretical approaches to the concept of the protest song have to be more closely examined.

In 1953, John Greenway – in his pioneering work *American Folksongs of Protest* – laid the first foundations for the study on the correlation between American music, politics, and the sound of protest, specializing on the folk idiom. As Greenway argued, folk protest songs “are the struggle songs of the people. They are outbursts of bitterness, of hatred for the oppressor, of determination to endure hardships together and to fight for a better life” (10). Folk songs of protest are recognized by Greenway as voices of critique and despair for the oppressed groups in society, though they often lose their critical meaning when “displaced by greater crises” (Greenway 6). Jerome L. Rodnitzky – in *The Evolution of the American Protest Song* – partly concurs with Greenway’s view, as he argues that American protest songs are “rigid period pieces” that “are by definition custom-made for a particular time and place” (“Evolution” 35). Rodnitzky, however, refutes Greenway’s thesis that all songs of protest are within the folk idiom. Protest music indeed became a central pawn of the ‘Folk Craze’ in the Sixties, but Rodnitzky also points out that folk music and songs of protest remained two separate entities. As a result of the Civil Rights struggle, a constant interplay between political protest and folk music can be detected, as these sounds echoed social critique and political realities in a unique

manner. Although the research within this thesis will exemplify the sounds of political protest within folk music, it will also stress the interplay between politics, protest, and rock music (Rodnitzky "Evolution" 42-3).

According to Orman in *The Politics of Rock Music*, "[r]ock has been influenced by the politics in America and some rock has influenced American political life" (IX). Furthermore, rock music really developed into "a destabilizing force against the political system by raising serious questions about the values, goals, and methods of that system's political leaders" (Orman XI). In *"Takin' Care of Business": Rock Music, Vietnam and the Protest Myth*, Bindas and Houston, add that rock music in the '60s was often considered as "rebellious" and "conflicted with society norms", being this elevation of the folk sounds of protest (1). The messages of critique within the rock idiom contained a sense of urgency, reflecting on the political and societal reality in a rather direct and strident manner. Artists as The Doors, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Country Joe and The Fish epitomized these protesting values, becoming musical protest agents of significant importance. This was especially the case in relation to the Vietnam War, as "[a]nti-war rock music was in the vanguard of the 1960s political consciousness" (Bindas and Houston 5).

This analysis demonstrated the lively relationship between American music, politics, and protest in the 1960s, in which a clear distinction between folk and rock was already made. In creating a more precise theoretical approach, a closer look will now be taken at R. Serge Denisoff. His work on the magnetic and rhetorical songs of persuasion will be key for the theoretical framework of this thesis' analysis, as his theories and insights paint a clear picture of the political and societal functionalities of protest music.

1.4 Denisoff's Songs of Persuasion

R. Serge Denisoff (1939-1994), former Bowling Green State University sociologist and founder of the journal for *Popular Music and Society*, clarified and expanded the research on protest music indefinitely. He defined protest songs as being "songs of persuasion". These songs are designed "to communicate an idea, a concept, or a total ideology to the listener", often employing the structure of a folk song (Denisoff "Protest Movements" 229). In articles such as *Protest Songs: Those on the Top Forty and Those of the Streets* and *Popular Protest Song: The Case of "Eve of Destruction"*, Denisoff, however, also implements his theories in relation to popular (rock) songs that bear a sociopolitical message of protest. Songs of persuasion translate the wrongs in society and harsh contemporary reality in emotional terms, often seeking to "arouse outside support and sympathy for a social or political movement" (Denisoff "Songs of Persuasion 582). Furthermore, as Denisoff argues, a song of persuasion "reinforces the value structure of individuals who are active supporters of the social movement or ideology", creating this sense of solidarity, or "we" feeling, within the audience to

whom the protest song is direct to ("Songs of Persuasion" 582). Think of protest songs as "We Shall Overcome" in relation to the Civil Rights Movement, and "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag" within the anti-war movement (Denisoff "Songs of Persuasion" 582). Although this definition of songs of persuasion already sheds some light on the functions of protest music as a political tool, Denisoff created as distinction between the magnetic and rhetorical songs of protest.

According to Denisoff, the magnetic protest song "appeals to the listener and attracts him to a specific movement or ideology within the ranks of adherents by creating solidarity in terms of the goals expressed in the propaganda song" ("Protest Movements" 230). The magnetic songs of protest are created to bolster cohesion, and address sociopolitical problems in an arousing manner that reinforces the a priori beliefs of the listener. Besides, magnetic protest music gives the listener new insights into the wrongdoings of society, and often provide a 'resolution' for the struggle to come. This is often accomplished by using a catchy melody and lyrics that can be sung en masse, grasping the attention of the audience, and encouraging them to sing along (Denisoff "Protest Movements" 230). A clear example of a magnetic protest song is "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize", which Pete Seeger – one of the spearheads of the American folk revival - performed in New York City's Carnegie Hall (June, 1963). Evoking a feeling of solidarity amongst the audience, "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" became connected to the Civil Rights Movement as a magnetic force. With the repetition of the simple chorus – consisting out of the title phrase and "Hold On" - the audience was stimulated by Seeger himself to sing along (Seeger "Prize" 0:48-3:25). As a result, a unifying message was created, with the recurring directive "Hold On" as primary guidance. This reflects the unity within the Civil Rights Movement, sharing the same political and social struggles, and supporting other Americans to join their cause through the medium of music (Seeger "Prize" 0:48-3:25; Denisoff "Evolution" 17).

The rhetorical variant of the protest song, on the other hand, is "designed to point to some condition and describe the condition, but offers no ideological or organizational solution such as affiliating with a social movement" (Denisoff "Protest Movements" 230). These songs critically engage with societal problems and political mistrust in a persuasive, emotional, and straightforward manner. Though, the rhetorical songs require little commitment from the audience, as they often already concur with the message of protest being provided. "The structure and composition of the rhetorical song", as argued by Denisoff, is therefore "primarily 'emphasized negativism' to a societal situation" ("Songs of Persuasion" 587). Often in individualistic terms and not offering a sense of hope, these songs of protest therefore mainly imply: "I protest, I do not concur". Such emotional outbursts of dissatisfaction, burying any message of future action, can often be identified in the rhetorical folk songs of persuasion performed by Bob Dylan – such as "Masters of War" and "Blowin' in the Wind" (Denisoff "Evolution" 18). Another example is "Only A Pawn in Their Game", in which Dylan deals with the death of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. "Rather than putting the blame

exclusively on the white Southerner,” as Mehring argues, Dylan “identifies the real criminals behind the deed in the political and social milieu responsible for propagating racial hatred and violence” (12). By way of divide-and-rule tactics of the political system, Southerners are incapable of their own moral choice and are manipulated into their hatred of African Americans. According to Green, “Only A Pawn in Their Game” therefore “carries within it the unmistakable pathos of the desire for social change” (130). It is a protest song that criticizes the inhumane racial policies in a straightforward manner, without offering a sense of hope. Within the (folk-)rock idiom, however, these emotional appeals to rational accounts of injustices can also be detected in songs as “Eve of Destruction” and “Fortunate Son” (Denisoff “Evolution” 18).

1.5 Methodological Approach

In his research on protest songs in the United States between 1910-1964, Denisoff already identified a “drastic decline in magnetic song, and a rise in rhetorical songs” (“Evolution” 18). However, Denisoff did not focus so much on psychedelic-rock protest songs as “Superbird” by Country Joe and The Fish or rock songs as Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son”. These songs of protest actually signify the changing political nature of protest music, as they inspired the American youth in an unprecedented fashion. Denisoff’s theories on the magnetic and rhetorical songs of protest will therefore be utilized to scrutinize this development of American protest music during the 1960s, focusing specifically on folk and rock. On the hand of this theoretical approach, a bridge will be created between the ever-evolving songs of persuasion and the apparent political circumstances in Sixties – often in relation to the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement. Besides, analyzing protest music from a magnetic or rhetorical perspective is deemed to be useful when closely examining the essence of a particular protest song and what sociopolitical themes they address. This will be particularly beneficial when comparing political protest music within differing genres – such as folk and psychedelic-rock music – with one another. The protest songs themselves will be analyzed by way of case studies, specifically focusing on artists/bands who defined and shaped the sounds of protest throughout the Sixties. Matters as key political events, the development of musical genres, and the prominent social movements, will be taken into account to strengthen the case of this thesis. Music is namely often related to its context.

Furthermore, to obtain a better understanding of political protest music in the 1960s, a method of content analysis will be applied. The political meaning and narrative is namely often embedded within the lyrics of the protest song, which makes close-reading these lyrics an interesting tool to apply. When applicable, visual content – such as live performances - will also be added, as these can add an additional layer of meaning to the lyrical content. Because protest music was abundant in both number and style throughout the “Age of Protest”, it has to be noted that the

songs touched upon throughout this thesis just scratch the surface of all the musical critique that was released during the 1960s. The focus therefore is specifically put on the changes of political protest music from folk to rock, including several swings to genres as folk-rock and psychedelic-rock.

Chapter 2

The Folk Revival: Sounds of Protest in the Civil Rights Movement

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, gimmick songs and doo-wop love ballads as Brian Hyland's "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini" and Frankie Avalon's "Venus" were on top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts. And artists like Elvis Presley, the Fleetwoods, and Chubby Checker shaped the American airwaves, bringing new and ground-breaking sounds to the people all over the United States. The music of the early Sixties, however, is often marked as being shaped by iconic folk sounds and its interrelations with the American political landscape (Unterberger "Turn" 2) According to Richie Unterberger in *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, folk music in the early 1960s was "crossing over to the pop charts in unprecedented fashion" (2). The folk sound resembled the authenticity of music - as musicians often performed solely with an acoustic guitar - and created a community that enlightened the Sixties with their hunger for change. By way of their political protest music and activist anthems, folk musicians expressed their concern with America's society and supported the Civil Rights Movement and anti-war movement. As a result, Sixties' folk music shaped "a kind of exchange of hearts connection that really energized and reflected the feeling of people, and ultimately their determination to forge a fairer and more just society" (Unterberger "Turn" 51).

This chapter will explore the origins of the folk revival in the United States, and the sociopolitical sounds of protest in relation to the Civil Rights Movement. The early Sixties were a renaissance for folk ballads, and this chapter will demonstrate how music and politics correlated during this period of time. A closer look will be taken at folk protest songs that imbued the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement in both a rhetorical and magnetic fashion. Furthermore, the function of protest music during the March on Washington will be analyzed, as the sound of folk provided a subtle, yet outspoken message of critique. Songs as "If I Had a Hammer", "Blowin' in the Wind", and "We Shall Overcome" are chosen as case studies to signify this lively relationship between folk, politics, and protest.

2.1 The Kingston Trio and the Folk Revival

During the Sixties, folk music was introduced to a mass audience. It developed to become a musical building block of the Civil Rights Movements, and slowly evolved into a clear sound of protest against the war in Vietnam. Musical luminaries as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez are often considered as being the founders of this folk sound. Folk musicians namely provided an intriguing soundtrack of the times

that was often more authentic and meaningful than the rock 'n roll hits on the *Billboard* Hot 100 (Cohen 157-8). They were critical on the sociopolitical landscape, seeming to be “designed for the cultural and sociologic reawakening” (Hopkins 66). The youth in the United States was especially drawn to these folk sounds, feeling disgruntled with American politics and alienated from society. Folk music provided a sound of political protest, filled with melodious and gentle outbursts of bitterness and voices of critique (Hopkins 58). The origins of this ‘Folk Craze’ in the United States, and the correlation between politics and folk music, can often be pinpointed to the early success of the Kingston Trio (Cohen 157-8).

The Kingston Trio – Bob Shane, Dave Guard, and Nick Reynolds – was formed in Palo Alto, California, and was inspired by the authentic folk-sound of the Weavers and the Almanac Singers. With their rendition of the traditional Appalachian folk ballad “Tom Dooley”, about the impending execution of a man who supposedly murdered his loving sweetheart, folk entered the musical mainstream in the United States (Gonczy 15):

*Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Hang down your head and cry.
Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Poor boy, you're bound to die* (Kingston Trio).

The Kingston Trio’s version of “Tom Dooley” reached no.1 in the *Billboard* Hot 100 in November, 1958, and remained in the top listing of singles for twenty-one weeks (Gonczy 15). Because of this success, the Kingston Trio “popularized – and introduced – folk music to millions of people who would never have listened to a Folkways LP” (Unterberger “Turn” 30). Other hit singles as “Tijuana Jail” and “M.T.A” brought the sound of folk deeper into America’s living rooms. And later albums as *The Kingston Trio at Large* ('59), and *Sold Out* ('60) all reached the top of the *Billboard* charts (Cohen 132).



Figure 1: The Kingston Trio at “The Jack Benny Program” in 1965 (Picture: NBC/NBCUniversal/Getty Images)

Although the Kingston Trio is “often roundly disparaged, or even despised, for its whitebread brand of carefully harmonized folk; its clean-cut image, down to the striped shirts; and its commercial success”, Unterberger doesn’t deny that “[i]t took the Kingston Trio to truly make folk music a fad” (“Turn” 30). The Trio revitalized folk-music, introducing the traditional folk sound to a large public in an attractive and innocuous manner. As a result, the Kingston Trio started a folk mania

that would cover the complete 1960s. Their influence on the 'Folk Craze', however, did not include any political or protest songs, even though they recorded an up-tempo pop-folk version of Pete Seeger's "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" in 1961 (Bush 25-6). As a result, "[t]he Trio may not have delivered the message" of protest, as argued by Bush, "but they definitely delivered the medium" (25).

2.2 The Sound of the Civil Rights Movement

By way of the Kingston Trio, folk music thus caught the public fancy. This momentum of folk music in the Sixties became known as the folk revival, which focused on both authenticity and political matters. Artists like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul and Mary rose to stardom. Furthermore, the folk revival opened up a musical space for protest songs, and became a renaissance for political ballads all over United States. As a consequence of this re-emergence of folk music, political and societal ideas were implemented in lyrics like never before, creating this unique interrelation between politics, music, and protest. Folk songs started to criticize America's warmongering attitude, its unjust social agenda, and its lack of attention to the environment (Eyerman and Jamison 122). Thus, as argued by Eyerman and Jamison, a dialect of music was created that protested against "racism and war and injustice", creating songs that "helped shape a new kind of politics which was as much a longing for community as it was a protest against the conformity and 'one-dimensionality' of the modern United States" (123). In "The Death of Emmet Till" – released in 1962 – Dylan, for example, criticizes the ongoing racial violence and segregation in the United States (Boucher 152):

*This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man,
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan.
But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give,
We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live (Dylan).*

In this folk song of protest, Dylan directs his attention to the gruesome murder of Emmet Till – a 14-year-old African American boy – after he had reportedly flirted with a white woman at a local grocery store in Money, Mississippi. Acting overtly political, Dylan resembles the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement, questioning the sociopolitical wrongs within American society. Being a rhetorical song of protest, Dylan is able to emotionally appeal to the audience. The singer-songwriter gives a rational and straightforward account of injustice that emphasizes on overt negativity, being a "reminder" to the American people (Boucher 152).

The folk music that was imbued with the spirit of protest and ethos of the Civil Rights Movement especially grabbed "the attention of the youth market" (Cohen 157). It was a youthful generation, ready to shape the field of music and politics in the 1960s. They were re-signifying the political and cultural heritage of American folk music, using it as a sound of protest against the

militarized values of the US and rebel against the racial injustices within American society. Especially with their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, this cumulation of music and politics would become apparent. It shaped a collective identity of protest and togetherness that was articulated, among other things, through folk music (Cohen 159).

As argued by Eyerman and Jamison, “[i]f it were not for the political movements there would not have been a folk music revival in the United States in the early 1960s” (119). Political ideas and feelings were purposely implemented in popular music as never before. Musicians could solely take a guitar, and chronicle about their angst and hopes. Folk music’s lyrical substance, furthermore, amplified the need to end segregation throughout the US, and often critically engaged with ongoing events and struggles as a ‘singing newspaper’. Music thus developed to become a sounding text, expressing collective emotional experiences through song – as with “We Shall Overcome” (Denisoff “Protest Movements” 232-3). As also argued by Gonczy, “music of the civil rights movement was, first and foremost, collective: it was congregational” (24). The magnetic songs of protest – as defined by Denisoff - resembled a feeling of togetherness that was inherent to the folk sound and so-called Freedom Songs. They could be sang en masse during demonstrations and sit-ins, and often contained a critical political message (Cohen 184-5). This magnetic force of folk protest songs became particularly clear during the March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. Nearly 250.000 people gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C to support the civil rights cause (Dunaway 288).

By 1963, civil rights had entered the forefront of politics in the United States. The situation in the South was boiling, as the racial policies and discriminatory practices – by way of the Jim Crow Laws - were still the gruesome reality. Martin Luther King Jr. was becoming the most visible leader of the Civil Rights Movement to change this reality, giving voice to a strong civil rights legislation (Gitlin 136-7). The political voice, on the other hand, came from John F. Kennedy, whom compellingly argued that “every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case” (Kennedy “Report”). Although the United States portrayed itself as the ‘Land of the Free’, he questioned his fellow Americans why the black population is still treated as “second-class citizens”³ (Kennedy “Report”). Kennedy’s televised address became the first stepping stone towards the Civil Rights Act. The March on Washington that followed, became the ultimate supporting tool for Kennedy’s legislative plans. An eye-opening event during which the correlation between music and politics became more visible than ever before, as folk music was adapted to imply current political action. Although political remarks were widely

³ President Kennedy made this statement as he addressed the American people on June 11, 1963. This ‘Report to the American People on Civil Rights’ became the shift in Kennedy’s civil rights policy, and the stepping stone towards the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

covered by the media - particularly those by Martin Luther King Jr. – the musical force was unmistakably present. Songs performed during the March on Washington contained vigorous lyrics that echoed the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement. Artist reflected on the political and social landscape in an inspiring manner, amplifying both the sound of despair and togetherness amongst those present (Dunaway 288, Mehring 2).

2.3 The March on Washington: A Soundscape of Freedom

As argued by Mehring, “[f]olk music played a crucial role in the civil rights movement and featured prominently on the stages during the March on Washington” (7). Mahalia Jackson, soprano Marian Anderson, and the Eva Jessye Choir were the only artists announced on the official program, but the folk sound would dominate the March on Washington. Folk musicians as Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan and Odetta would appear on stage, propelling folk music even further into the national spotlight (Cohen 205). Political criticism and themes of racial justice were ubiquitous in their performed folk songs, such as Peter, Paul and Mary’s performance of “If I Had a Hammer” and “Blowin’ in the Wind”.

Peter, Paul and Mary was an unquestionably popular folk group in the Sixties, created in 1961 to counter the clean-cut image of the Kingston Trio. According to Unterberger, the harmonies of Peter Yarrow, Noel Paul Stookey, and Mary Travers were “ebullient, with a far greater sense of rhythmic joie de vivre than the standard pop-folk act” (“Turn” 47). They attracted an audience with their mystical material and developed a stage charisma that would become exemplary for their performances. In March 1962, the self-titled record *Peter, Paul and Mary* was released, with songs as “500 Miles” and Pete Seeger’s “Where Have All the Flower’s Gone”. The album was a massive success, remaining on the *Billboard* charts for over 2 years (Cohen 190). Peter, Paul, and Mary even made a hit out “If I Had a Hammer” – a folk song written by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays:

*It’s the hammer of justice
It’s the bell of freedom
It’s the song about love between,
My brothers and my sisters
All over this land (Seeger)*

Although regularly referred to as a song with Communist undertones, it became a rallying cry for brotherhood and justice that was unmistakably related to the Civil Rights Movement. The song reflected the mood of the times. It was a musical vehicle for expression that gave a voice to the civil rights struggle, declaring that freedom and equality would be achieved. In this sense, the folk song of protest perfectly resembled the ongoing political and social matters that influenced the early 1960s. Peter, Paul and Mary therefore performed “If I Had a Hammer” also during the March on

Washington, as they had the ears of the world to express their solidarity (“Peter, Paul and Mary” 0:48–5:52).

Whilst Peter, Paul, and Mary walked on stage, Ossie Davis announced that their performance would “help to express in song what this great meeting is all about” (“Peter, Paul and Mary” 1:08–1:30). A loud applause followed, and the folk trio started to play “If I Had a Hammer”. A feeling of togetherness and solidarity was visible among the audience on the National Mall, as their music resembled a tool to protest against the racially unjust practices in the United States of America. “If I Had a Hammer” therefore formed this magnetic bridge between politics, music, and protest. The folk song signified a collective feeling of belonging and shared message of protest amongst the audience, exemplifying what R. Serge Denisoff had envisioned with his idea of the magnetic song of persuasion. “If I Had a Hammer” therefore perfectly supported the cause the Civil Rights Movement stood for: equality. Maintaining this momentum, Peter, Paul, and Mary performed “Blowin’ in the Wind” – an unquestionably strong protest song written by Bob Dylan (Green 118; “Peter, Paul and Mary” 0:48–5:52).

2.5 “The Answer is Blowin’ in the Wind”

In *Peter Paul and Mary: Fifty Years in Music and Life*, the folk trio exemplifies how they “were overwhelmed by the remarkable and powerful ways “Blowin’ in the Wind” spoke to the social/political movements of our time” (33). For Peter, Paul and Mary, the folk song “became a part of changing the emphasis of pop-charted music from ‘moon, spoon, June’ lyrics to messages that spoke to America’s conscience, and its dreams” (33). Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” covered *Broadside #6* in late May 1962, and was later recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary for their album *In the Wind*. The acoustic performance of the trio during the March on Washington perfectly represented the gentle and question-laden folk sound in which politics and music intertwined. According to Mary Travers, “[t]he song speaks of caring, of listening to another,” affirming how they interpreted the protest song as an enlightening feeling of kinship on the National Mall (qtd. in Ward 30). Their interpretation would inspire a



Figure 2: Peter, Paul and Mary performing at the March on Washington (Barry Feinstein)

nation, and resemble the Civil Rights Movement present that day in Washington D.C. (Yarrow et. al 33-4).

When reading the lyrics of “Blowin’ in the Wind” closely, one can, however, recognize how Bob Dylan criticizes the feeling of triumphal hopefulness. The question-laden song is asking what has to happen to mankind before he will put a stop to wars. The singer-songwriter is relentless, posing nine questions – with the answer always being “blowin’ in the wind” – about war, peace, and inequality. Dylan urges people to act just, and he captures the omnipresent feeling of frustration amongst most African Americans. Being a rhetorical song of protest, “Blowin’ in the Wind” strikingly points out matters of political struggle and stresses the need for racial equality to occur in quite a persuasive manner. As a result, the lyrics were taken up by the audience at the March on Washington (Green 119):

*How many roads must a man walk down
Before they call him a man?
...
How many years can some people exist
Before they’re allowed to be free? (Dylan)*

Sections like these resemble the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement. They are in the midst of a struggle towards meaningful and societal change, longing for equality and freedom. Resultingly, it is no surprise that “Blowin’ in the Wind” became one of the anthems of the movement. The audience felt connected with the message being provided, also exemplifying the song’s magnetic traits (Perone 21-2). Additionally, Dylan’s song of protest also uses several metaphors to address issues of violence:

*How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
How many times must the cannon balls fly
Before they’re forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind
The answer is blowin’ in the wind (Dylan)*

In a rhetorical manner, Dylan thus discloses a subtle anti-war message, urging people to be pacifist. The “white dove” obviously symbolizes peace, standing in stark contrast to the “cannon balls” that resemble the American war machines. “Blowin’ in the Wind” therefore also has this connection to the Vietnam War, as Americans who opposed the war were often referred to as “doves”. Dylan’s folk song thus did not solely focus on the struggle over civil rights, but reflected an all-encompassing mood of the United States present in the early Sixties. It combined a feeling of alienation with outrage, providing a rhetorical protest song in a melodious, yet candid, manner (Green 122).

According to Mary Travers in an *Off the Record* interview, “Blowin’ in the Wind” provided a realization of the importance of the Civil Rights Movement. “If you could imagine the March on Washington with Martin Luther King and singing that song in front of a quarter of a million people,

black and white, who believed they could make America more generous and compassionate in a nonviolent way, you begin to know how incredible that belief was” (qtd. in Yarrow et al. 34). Whilst presenting these pacifist and pro-civil rights notions, a message of future action, however, cannot be discerned. Therefore, “Blowin’ in the Wind” can be analyzed within the theoretical framework of Denisoff’s songs of persuasion, as it “stressed individual indignation and dissent but did not offer a solution in a movement” (“Evolution” 18). In other words, Bob Dylan – and Peter, Paul and Mary during the March on Washington – stresses his emotional dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the ongoing racialized society, but doesn’t point towards a solution, such as Kennedy’s proposed civil rights legislation. The solution is namely still “blowin’ in the wind”.

2.5 “We Shall Overcome”: The Anthem of the Civil Rights Movement

Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” thus had a formidable impact on the March on Washington, resembling the political panoply in music during the heyday of the folk tradition and Civil Rights Movement. By way of their performance, Peter, Paul and Mary showcased their faith in political change and social justice (Green 119). There was, however, one folk song that would become the absolute anthem of the Civil Rights Movement: Pete Seeger’s “We Shall Overcome”. According to Bob Dylan – in his autobiography *Chronicles Volume 1* – “We Shall Overcome” was the “spiritual marching anthem of the civil rights movement. It had been the rallying cry for the oppressed for many years” (90). During marches and demonstrations, people – both black and white – would join hands and sing the song en masse. “We Shall Overcome” was the perfect magnetic protest song, showcasing a sign of unity and togetherness that was notorious for the Civil Rights Movement (Phull 4). According to Frank Mehring, singing “We Shall Overcome” would then “provide a kind of glue between actors in order to express joint commitment of resistance and the will for change” (8):

*We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome, some day*

*Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day* (Seeger)

As argued by Gonczy, “We Shall Overcome” “epitomizes both the spirit of the movement and the use of music to communicate that spirit” (25). On the official poster for the March on Washington, “We Shall Overcome” even functioned as the overarching theme for the gathering on the National Mall (Phull 4). It, however, has to be noted that Pete Seeger’s version of the protest song was a reworking of a Baptist hymn: “I’ll Overcome Some Day”. As “I” was noted to individualistic, the title was transformed into “We Will Overcome” to echo the sense of a communal feeling that the song

expresses. The folk song was eventually recast to “We Shall Overcome” by Pete Seeger and Guy Carawan – of the Highlander Folk School. This version gives it the pulsing slow triple-eight note rhythm, straightforward melody, and repetitive lyrics which became inextricably linked to the famous magnetic song of persuasion. Consequently, “We Shall Overcome” provided a musical vehicle that attendants could sing along almost instantly, and reflected the universal struggle for social justice and racial equality. “We Shall Overcome” therefore became the sounding motto of the Civil Rights Movement. An anthem in which the interrelation between music, politics and protest was unmistakably identifiable (Rose 63).

During the 1963 Newport Folk Festival, this correlation between music and politics that “We Shall Overcome” brought forward was already perfectly showcased. Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Theodore Bikel, Pete Seeger, and the Freedom Singers joined together on stage, and brought forward the spiritual anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. The folk luminaries performed the protest song hand-in-hand in a way that resembled a united front against the racial injustices apparent in the American South (Mehring 9). Images and reports of the March on Washington provide the same representations of the present audience, as Joan Baez sang “We Shall Overcome” (See Figure 3). One can identify the indisputable sense of togetherness, as people – black and white – joined ranks and sang “We Shall Overcome” in harmony. Its recognizable lyrical structure – often including a call and response pattern – and optimistic forecast for the future further echoed this feeling of belonging amongst the attendants of the March (“Baez” 0:00-1:30). As a result, “We Shall Overcome” can be diagnosed as a magnetic protest song by gear, having the ability to bolster social cohesion whilst being an expression of critique on the harsh reality in place (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 583). As Denisoff argues, “We Shall Overcome” emphasized “the strength-in-unity pattern of the movement” during the March on Washington, embodying that “the participant is not isolated but a segment of a group” (“Social Significance” 4).

“The unforgettable sight of 200.000 marchers, their arms linked and their hands clasped, swaying in rhythm to the galvanic anthem ‘We Shall Overcome’” made the March on Washington remarkable, wrote journalist Robert Sherman (qtd. in Garrow 26). The folk revival of the early Sixties had brought political ballads as “We Shall Overcome”, “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “If I Had a Hammer” to large audiences in support of the Civil Rights Movement. This created an interplay between music and politics that would shape the ‘Age of Protest’. Solely with a guitar in hand, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan could demonstrate against the Jim Crow laws and vigorously express their concerns in relation to social inequality. They were able to move and influence an audience with their authentic music, performing a sound of protest that would critically engage with the crude political and societal reality discernible in the United States (Unterberger “Turn” 51). Even President Kennedy identified the importance of protest music in a speech at Amherst College in October 1963: “If sometimes our great

artists have been the most critical of our society, it is because their sensitivity and their concern for justice, which motivate any true artist, makes him aware that our Nation falls short of its highest potential” (Kennedy “Amherst”). Moving into mid-1960s, however, the authentic folk songs of protest began to fade. Their uniqueness dwindled away, as a new sound entered the playing field: folk-rock (Dunaway 284).



Figure 3: Attendees holding hands – in front of the Lincoln Memorial – during the March on Washington (Leonard Freed/Magnum Photos)

Chapter 3

“Eve of Destruction”: Folk-Rock and the Sound of Political Protest

On August 21, 1965, *Billboard* Magazine opened its frontpage: “Rock + Folk + Protest = An Erupting New Sound”. Aaron Sternfield trumpeted the invasion of a groundbreaking music style that would disrupt the sound on the American charts. Folk-rock would create an interrelation between the authenticity and lyrical substance of folk music and the visceral force of rock (Sternfield 1). It would provide a musical genre for both body and mind, as students danced to blatant anti-war songs and integrationist songs of protest. As a result, a new interplay between politics and music was created that demonstrated the evolving sound of protest. In comparison to the folk revival, music in the mid-1960s became an explicit vehicle for political expression that was amplified by electric instruments. The songs of protest focused more on direct outbursts of desperation and razor-sharp comments – often related to the Vietnam War (Rodnitzky “Evolution” 43). Furthermore, a decline in the magnetic songs of protest and a surge of the rhetorical, as Denisoff had argued in *The Evolution of the American Protest Song*, was indeed apparent. And this changing nature of protest music only became starker when “Eve of Destruction” was released (18). “Folk-rock was”, as argued by Unterberger, “particularly effective at spreading [these] messages because it marked one of those rare instances where social activism and mainstream commercial interest merged, each furthering the agenda of the other” (“Turn” XII). The protest songs in the folk-idiom were outmatched by the raging sound of electric guitars, something that “was envisioned by virtually no one in 1963” (Unterberger “Turn” XIII). However, after “unforeseen thunderbolts like the JFK assassination, the arrival of the Beatles in the US, the British Invasion, and the Byrds drawing overflow crowds with their folk-based music played on loud electric guitars”, a marriage between folk-rock and political expressions was created that would shape the sound of the mid-1960s. An evolution in the sound of protest was in the making (Unterberger “Turn” XIII).

This chapter will analyze the interplay between folk-rock and political protest music, and explore how the sound of protest evolved in relation to the folk idiom. It will be exemplified how the focus of protest songs started to concentrate more on the Vietnam War and how these songs grew into forthright outbursts of dissatisfaction, as portrayed in “Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation”. Furthermore, a closer look will be taken at Bob Dylan – the key musical voice of the Sixties – and how his music connected with the sociopolitical landscape as a whole. Special attention will be given to Dylan’s turnaround towards folk-rock, with a particular focus on “Like A Rolling Stone” and the

Newport Folk Festival. Finally, Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" will be thoroughly scrutinized to demonstrate how political protest and societal commentary had altered significantly with the introduction of folk-rock.

3.1 "And we shall overcome": Political Changes with Musical Affects

The assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, shocked the world. The Civil Rights Movement was dazzled, as a mainstay for their strive towards racial equality had brutally been taken away. Songs as "He Was a Friend of Mine" by the Byrds, "Crucifixion" by Phil Ochs, and even Dylan's recent release of "Murder Most Foul", proved the unique relationship music had with the lost President (Cooper 57-8). Yet, Lyndon B. Johnson demonstrated to be "committed to Kennedy's domestic policies, if anything with greater vigor and a more sweeping popular mandate" (Gitlin 150). Kennedy's proposed Civil Rights Act was signed into law in 1964, creating a landmark legislation that would bring an end to segregation throughout the United States. Interestingly, however, the implementation of the Civil Rights Act also marked a change in the political nature of American music, as it "caused a certain cessation of musical messages on behalf of the struggle" (Hill 51).

Folk protest musicians as Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Bob Dylan had given a voice to the voiceless, but their influence slowly dissolved as the initial goals of the movement had been realized. Furthermore, the unprecedented musical value and political force of "We Shall Overcome" had changed as a result of a single speech given by President Johnson on March, 19 - a week after "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama (Rodnitzky "Microgrooves" 108). Addressing Congress to outline his proposal to ensure voting rights for all Americans, Johnson stated that it was "wrong – deadly wrong" to deny African Americans the right to vote, as it was part of a "crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice" (Johnson "Special Message"). Then, President Johnson uttered: "And we shall overcome", borrowing the spiritual title phrase of the Civil Rights Movement to accentuate his sociopolitical message (Johnson). Even though "We Shall Overcome" resultingly lost part of its meaning for the Civil Rights Movement and the folk music idiom in general, several artists continued to confine the struggle of African Americans in their songs. Janis Ian's "Society Child", for example, focused on the problem of interracial dating in American society, exemplifying how "a white girl capitulates to society's bigotry and breaks off a relationship with a Negro boy" (qtd. in Rosenstone 134). But also songs like "We're A Winner" and "People Get Ready" by the Impressions proved how music related to the Civil Rights Movements – and black pride – remained clearly apparent (Denisoff "Songs of Persuasion" 587). Music, thus, continued to relate with societal and political matters, although the sounds of protest themselves started to 'mature'. The main attention was shifted from the Civil Rights Movement to the American involvement in the Vietnam War. And where songs of protest in the early-folk idiom were often considered to be gentle and more question-laden, protest

music in the mid-Sixties started to point more often to the perpetrator - President Johnson - and obtained more raucous sounds and blatant lyrics.

3.2 Music's Political Cynicism and the Escalating Vietnam War

In 1965, American involvement in Vietnam had intensified. Operation Rolling Thunder had commenced after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. And the number of draft calls more than doubled due to the Americanization of the War. As a consequence of this escalation, the Vietnam War had started to become a major source of debate and protest amongst Americans – most prominently amongst students. It greatly fueled the development of the anti-war movement, in which music became a thought-provoking weapon (Phull 48). A first escalation of these songs of protest occurred when Tom Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation" was released in 1965. Also published in the #62 September issue of *Broadside* (See Figure 4), Paxton ridiculed the double talk of President Johnson and criticized the foreign policy decisions of the United States (Rodnitzky "Microgrooves" 111):

*Lyndon Johnson told the nation
Have no fear of escalation
I am trying everyone to please
Though it isn't really war
We're sending fifty thousand more
To help save Vietnam from the Vietnamese (Paxton)*

Vocalizing that the Americans were going to war to "save Vietnam from the Vietnamese", Paxton sheds light upon the hypocrisy of Johnson's policies. This mockery in Paxton's lyrics is also identifiable in a later verse, in which the quick escalation of the Vietnam War becomes clear: "Yet how sadly I remember/Way back yonder in November/ When he said I'd never have to go" (Paxton). Songs as "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation" continued the legacy of protest songs that found their birth in support of the Civil Rights Movement. Still, a slow change can be noted. Protest music started to become laced with cynicism and political innuendoes, evolving into rhetorical songs of dissatisfaction that were more critical than the songs performed at the heart of the folk revival.

LYNDON JOHNSON TOLD THE NATION

Words & Music by TOM PAXTON

VERSE

I got a letter from L.B.J., It said, "This is your lucky day, It's time to put your khak-i trous-ers on. Though it may seem ve-ry queer, We've got no jobs to give you here, so the We are sending you to Vi-et- nam." And Lyndon Johnson told nation, "Have no fear of es-ca-lation, I am trying ev'-ryone to please. Tho' it isn't really war, We're sending fifty thous- and more to help save Vi-et- nam from Vi-et-nam - ese."

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NEW YORK TIMES, AUGUST 27, 1965.

Draft calls have more than doubled in recent months to provide the manpower for the 340,000-man increase in the military services ordered by the Administration earlier this month in connection with the Vietnam crisis. From a monthly level of from 8,000 to 8,000 men, draft calls have jumped to 17,500 in August, 27,400 for September and 33,800 for October.

The increase in draft calls has placed a strain on some draft boards, which have found themselves forced to induct younger and younger men. In August, for example, the average induction age fell to just below 21. It is expected that the average will shortly fall to 20, with 19-year-olds being called in some areas.



BROADSIDE #62

I jumped off the old troop ship,
I sank in mud up to my hips,
And cursed until the captain called me down,
"Never mind how hard it's raining,
Think of all the ground we're gaining,
Just don't take one step outside of town."
(Cho.)

Every night the local gentry
Slip out past the sleeping sentry
They go out to join the old V.C.
In their nightly little dramas,
They put on their black pajamas
And come lobbing mortar shells at me.
(Cho.)

We go 'round in helicopters
Like a bunch of big grasshoppers
Searching for the Viet Cong in vain.
They left a note that they had gone,
They had to get back to Saigon,
Their government positions to maintain.
(Cho.)

Well, here I sit in this rice paddy,
Wondering about Big Daddy,
And I know that Lyndon loves me so
Yet how sadly I remember
Way back yonder in November
When he said I'd never have to go.
(Cho.)

Figure 4: Tom Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told The Nation" in Broadside #62 – released on Sept. 15, 1965

The damning escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965 thus resulted in a continuation of the marriage between music and politics. More and more satirical anti-Vietnam War songs entered the musical landscape of protest (Perone 30). Phil Ochs' "Draft Dodger Rag" and "I Ain't Marching Anymore" stood out, and became "essentials of the record libraries of activist students and early opponents of the war" (qtd. in Perone 30). Though on the edge of the folk-rock escalation, "I Ain't Marching Anymore" is an authentic folk song in which Ochs comments on the futility of wars the United States fought in – ranging from the Battle of New Orleans to the dropping of the atomic bombs (Perone 31):

*Oh, I marched to the battle of New Orleans
At the end of the early British War
The young land started growing
The young blood started flowing
But I ain't marching anymore*
....
*It's always the old to lead us to war
It's always the young to fall
Now look at all we've won with the saber and the gun
Tell me is it worth it all? (Ochs)*

However, when listening to the "I Ain't Marching Anymore" single that was released in 1966 by Elektra, one is surprised to find an almost hidden folk-rock version of Ochs' protest song. Only released as a UK single and as a flexi-disc for Sing Out!, this version introduces bagpipes and a striking rock instrumentation by the Blues Project – a New York-based rock band. Suddenly, the lyrical components came out with a dazzling force. It lost its 'folk gentility', creating this rhetorical folk-rock protest song that could imminently hit the charts (Unterberger "Turn"

194). "It thundered along with ten times the impact of the original recording", Unterberger even argued ("Turn" 194). Sadly, "I Ain't Marching Anymore", failed to make a serious impact on the musical landscape in place (Unterberger "Turn" 194). But, Ochs' song of protest proved how the gentle sound of folk was being reworked into dynamic electric songs. "I Ain't Marching Anymore" perfectly exemplified the idea of "I protest, I do not concur" in song, relating closely to Denisoff's theory of the rhetorical song of persuasion (Denisoff "Evolution" 18). To further understand these changes within songs of protest in the mid-Sixties, and understand how folk-rock related with protest and politics, I would like to take a closer look at the pioneer himself: Bob Dylan.

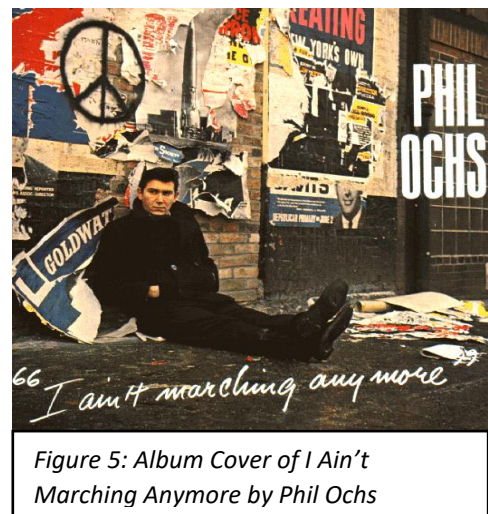


Figure 5: Album Cover of *I Ain't Marching Anymore* by Phil Ochs

3.3 The Political and Musical Influence of Bob Dylan

As argued by Starr and Waterman, Bob Dylan was the artist “who, virtually single-handedly, dragged urban folk music – with some people kicking and screaming – into the modern era of rock” (139). However, before ascending into the folk-rock scene, Dylan – born Robert Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota – started his career as a singer-songwriter in New York’s Greenwich Village. The Village was the epicenter of the popularizing folk sound. A stronghold in which leftist political traditions and cultural experiences perfectly collided (Unterberger “Turn” 22). Here, Dylan developed himself “to take on the role of mouthpiece for his generation” (Garratt 136). By way of using poetic metaphors and provoking intense emotional feelings, Dylan expressed his personal aversion to American society in song. Whilst analyzing Dylan’s discography, there is almost no denying that this sound of protest is anywhere better reflected than on his record *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963). It is an album on which folk, political commentary, and critique on the warmongering attitude of the United States all came together (Gonczy 21).

Although also containing romantic songs as “Girl from the North Country” and “Corinne, Corrina”, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* is by far one of the most valuable records of the Sixties on which politics and protest music correlate (Unterberger “Turn” 43). “Oxford Town” deals with the racial bigotry in the state of Mississippi, being an earnest song in support of the Civil Rights Movement. It was a reaction to the riots that broke out after James Meredith enrolled at the segregated University of Mississippi, as Dylan sings: “He went down to Oxford Town/Guns and clubs followed him down/All because his face was brown” (Varesi 29). “Masters of War” saddled Dylan with the image of protest singer. Providing a damning critique on the military-industrial complex and American patriotism, Dylan verbally attacks the faceless men that wage war against any price. Notably, “Masters of War” was no musical protest about Vietnam, as the war in Southeast Asia was not yet on the radar of most Americans. “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, on the other hand, provides a hilarious engagement of the ongoing Cold War paranoia through an absurd dream, blending reality with illusion. An extension of this desperate ambience is “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” (Varesi 28). A surrealistic and apocalyptic song of protest, “which lamented nuclear fallout in far more poetic terms” than ever done before (Unterberger “Turn” 42):

*I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains
I've walked and I've crawled on six crooked highways
I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests
I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans
I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard
And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall (Dylan).*

Considering Denisoff's argument that protest songs in the folk idiom often "communicate a specific 'sense of reality'", "Hard Rain" perfectly relates to this. The United States was namely at the brink of a nuclear war (Denisoff "Songs of Persuasion" 583). On the backside of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* record, Nat Hentoff accentuates this. He argues that the folk song was "written during the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962 when those who allowed themselves to think of the possible results of the Kennedy-Khrushchev confrontation were chilled by the imminence of oblivion". Dylan's poetic song encouraged listeners to imagine the vast emptiness and darkness that would be the result of a nuclear clash. It was a reflection on the political context of the early 1960s, and the lingering angst and paranoia that had the United States in its grasp (Hentoff).

The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan thus ascended Dylan to the throne of the protest sound, reflecting on the troublesome reality of the Sixties (Street 49). The singer-songwriter, however, would ultimately turn his back on the authentic and inherently political sound of folk music. He would "stun his folk contemporaries by going electric", and commence a radical development within the relationship between sociopolitical matters and music. A musical evolution key to this research (Phull 30).

3.4 "Mr. Tambourine Man" and the Electric Turnaround that Introduced Folk-Rock

"Folkswinging Wave On – Courtesy of Rock Groups" headlined *Billboard Magazine* on July 12, 1965.

"With Bob Dylan as the stimulus and the Byrds as disciples, a wave of folk-rock is developing in contemporary pop music," wrote Elliot Tiegel in the first paragraph (1). The *Billboard* article marked the onset of folk-rock as a musical genre, arguing that "the blending of folk lyrics with a rock beat is a natural extension of folk music" (Tiegel 10). That Tiegel singled out the Byrds as 'disciples' was no surprise. By adopting folk material, but adding a twelve-string electric guitar, drums, and harmonious vocals, the Byrds had created a unique and popular sound that was – most importantly – commercial. Their rendition of Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man" soared to No.1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 almost instantly, making it a landmark folk-rock hit. For Dylan, on the other hand, "Mr. Tambourine Man" had exemplified his momentous break from the protest idiom, focusing more on music related to poetic feelings and ambiguous personal expressions (Unterberger "Turn" 20):

*Hey! Mr. Tambourine man, play a song for me
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to
Hey! Mr. Tambourine man, play a song for me
In the jingle jangle morning I'll come following you* (Dylan)

As sudden as "Mr. Tambourine Man" ended with "Let me forget about today until tomorrow", Dylan concluded his interplay with political and societal themes. His record *Bringing It All Back Home* – on which "Mr. Tambourine Man" featured – even contained a complete side devoted to rock. The album

signified Dylan's farewell from politically-inspired folk music, focusing on themes that were unusually poetic and contained abstract wordplay. Dylan was done with carrying the burden of being 'the voice of a generation', and his change in musical sound exemplified that (Unterberger "Turn" 109): "I was sick of the way my lyrics had been extrapolated", argued Dylan in his autobiography *Chronicles*, "their meanings subverted into polemics and that I had been anointed as the Big Bubba of Rebellion, High Priest of Protest, the Czar of Dissent, [and] the Duke of Disobedience" (120). The interrelation of politics and music, as presented by Dylan in songs as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Masters of War", therefore slowly faded. The Dylanesque folk sound made way for a full-fledged folk-rock imago. And this only became a bigger motto when Bob Dylan released "Like a Rolling Stone" on July 20, 1965. Although 'Dylanites' continue to debate about the actual meaning behind "Like a Rolling Stone", one can recognize themes of resentment, compassion, and Dylan's view on the harsh reality of life (Starr and Waterman 144). For Unterberger, the six minute-long folk-rock single – that would eventually peak at no.2 on the Billboard Hot 100 - sparked the start of something new. It was a 'Declaration of Independence' that would change the musical – and political - landscape for the remainder of the Sixties (Unterberger "Eight" IX-X). "Like a Rolling Stone", according to Unterberger, namely supported "[f]olk rock's page from fad to something more enduring" (Unterberger "Eight" IX). And this enduring change of direction would only become more apparent at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965.



Figure 6: Bob Dylan – with his Fender Stratocaster – at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 (Alice Ochs/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)

The Newport Folk Festival had highlighted the folk sound of the early Sixties, with lineups that featured folk musicians as Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Ian & Sylvia, and Peter, Paul and Mary. Dylan, however, had outgrown the folk revival. The singer-songwriter had waved goodbye to his “messiah of protest” status. The recognizable correlation between political themes and folk music – as presented on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* – was no more. And when Bob Dylan entered the stage with a Fender Stratocaster in hand – alongside the Paul Butterfield Blues Band – the cycle was complete (See Figure 6). Dylan kicked-off with “Maggie’s Farm”, and the folk-purist audience was outraged. A full blown folk-rock sound echoed through the speakers. Video recordings of the performance demonstrate how the audience booed, in shock of Dylan’s first ever folk-rock performance. Others cheered in excitement, as Dylan started “Like a Rolling Stone” (Unterberger “Turn 1”). After a mere three songs, Dylan walked off stage, but quickly returned – alone – with Peter Yarrow’s acoustic guitar in hand and asking for an E-harmonica from the audience. Amidst loud cheers, he started with “Mr. Tambourine Man” - at that moment the most popular song in his discography (Unterberger “Turn” 17). However, Dylan’s performance of “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” that followed would become one of the most “galvanizing moment in musical history” (Kooper 39). According to Al Kooper, Dylan banished “the acoustic-folk movement with one song right at the crossroads of its origin” (39). It was an “ironic kiss-off” to the world, as his electric performance would greatly impact the changing nature of protest music - and political music in general – for the remainder of the 1960s (Unterberger “Turn” 17).

3.5 The Introduction of Folk-Rock and Protest: “Eve of Destruction”

Folkies felt betrayed by Dylan’s performance and his newly adopted folk-rock sound, as he “declared his artistic independence from movements and national issues” (Rodnitzky “Rebirth” 17). However, this didn’t imply that the core themes the folk idiom cherished completely vanished. They only altered. Songs in the Sixties continued to contain a political sense of reality, actively trying to grasp the listener’s attention. Yet, rock instrumentation was added to the mix. Furthermore, the American involvement in Vietnam – as earlier mentioned – became protest music’s center of attention, replacing racial equality and the civil rights struggle as core theme (Street 44). Combined, as argued by Unterberger in *Eight Miles High*, they formed the resonating sound of folk-rock. It was “powerful music that could make you dance as well as think, and lent itself to far more memorable melodies and textural possibilities” (X). Affecting the “audience’s social consciousness”, as Unterberger notes, the folk-rock sound introduced revolutionary messages – often in a rhetorical context - to the musical landscape that were rather different from those in the folk idiom: “frank sexual expression, antiwar sentiments, oblique drug references, baroque romanticism, or apolitical depictions of inner states of mind” (“Eight” X). Besides, these messages were now expressed by vocal outbursts and razor-sharp

comments. One of the earliest protest songs that marked this change in Sixties' protest music, and exemplified the correlation between folk-rock and politics, was Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction", released in August 1965.

"Eve of Destruction" is a sociopolitical protest song, dealing with racial bigotry, the Vietnam War, the Space Race, the discrepancy between the draft age and the voting age, and nuclear proliferation that was leading the world to total annihilation. Written by 19-year-old P.F. Sloan, and rejected by the Byrds, Barry McGuire aggressively addresses these different societal issues by way of a damning narrative style. Humankind had to take responsibility and become aware, otherwise nuclear extinction would occur (Denisoff and Levine 117). Although McGuire's song of protest was "blunt in its delineation of civil rights clashes, war, and nuclear proliferation leading society to the brink of apocalypse, it was nonetheless remarkable to bring even the faintest discussion of such issues to commercial radio in 1965" (Unterberger "Turn" 168). "Eve of Destruction" reached the No.1 position on the Top Sellers in Top Markets – a city-based Top 40 of 45rpm singles – in late-September, covering cities as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Cleveland (Billboard "Sep 25" 14-5). Still, the folk-rock hit received a significant amount of criticism. An early-September issue of *Billboard* published an article titled: "'Destruction' Causes Furor". The brief article argued that right-wing political groups wanted to ban the airplay of "Eve of Destruction" (n.a. "Sep. 4" 35). Furthermore, Paul Simon even declared that "Eve of Destruction" was "the most ludicrous thing I have ever heard" (qtd. in Schreiber 48). Nevertheless, Barry McGuire's folk-rock hit was hailed into the canon of protest songs, being a start of something new.

"Whereas the socially conscious members of the folk fraternity were inclined to lace their work with ironic narratives, satirical observations, and a scholarly air of intelligence to which not everyone could relate," as Phull argues, "McGuire's song merely offered an impassioned, uncomplicated, and unpretentious diagnosis of the world's ills" (Phull, 55-6). With an echoing drum and light acoustic guitar, McGuire's rasping voice kicks in and earnestly addresses the listener with what is wrong with the world:

*The Eastern world, it is explodin',
Violence flarin', bullet loadin'.
You're old enough to kill, but not for votin'
You don't believe in war – but what's that gun you're totin'?
An' even the Jordan river has bodies floatin'.
But you tell me, over and over and over again, my friend,
Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction (McGuire).*

Without explicitly mentioning the Vietnam War, McGuire addresses the American escalation of the conflict in Southeast Asia. The foreign policies of the Johnson administration are thus not as personally addressed as Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation". P.F. Sloan's lyrics rather focus

on the striking issue that young American teenagers are fighting a war in Vietnam, whilst they do not even have the right to vote – as the minimum voting age in the majority of American states was still 21 (Phull 54). After a short interlude and harmonica tone, McGuire continues his critical protest by pointing out the dangers of nuclear annihilation.

*If the button is pushed, there's no running away,
There'll be no one to save with the world in a grave,
Take a look around you, boy, it's bound to scare you, boy (McGuire).*

In comparison with the Dylanesque apocalyptic folk song of protest “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”, “Eve of Destruction” provides a much more damning outburst of dissatisfaction. Besides, McGuire’s folk-rock hit is far less ambiguous and poetical. The fears and frustrations of young Americans are cast in crystal clear and emotional terms, specifically supporting the counterculture in American society (Denisoff “Protest Movements” 230). When molding “Eve of Destruction” into Denisoff’s theoretical framework, it can be therefore be categorized as a rhetorical song of persuasion. “Eve of Destruction” stands in sheer contrast with the magnetic protest songs performed within the Civil Rights Movement, such “We Shall Overcome” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize”. “Eve of Destruction” rather focuses on Denisoff’s idea of “emphasized negativism”, as McGuire’s presents his message of protest in both a blatant and emotionally sharp manner. Furthermore, whilst providing a straightforward critique on societal and political affairs, no sense of hope or message of future action is given (Denisoff “Evolution” 18). “Eve” namely is “nothing more than a societal mirror, reflecting back at the world”, argues Barry McGuire (qtd. in Phull 56). The folk-rock genre thus maintained the protest flavor that was unmistakably connected to folk music. But it did mark the first setting in which this interrelationship between politics, protest, and music significantly changed during the lively Sixties. In the following years, political themes and societal issues continued to be addressed in popular songs. And these messages only increased in fervor as “Superbird”, “For What It’s Worth”, and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” blazed over the airwaves into American society.

Chapter 4

Psychedelia Incoming!: Folk and Psychedelic-Rock Against the Vietnam War

In an interview for Unterberger's book *Turn! Turn! Turn!: The '60s Folk-Rock Revolution*, Irwin Silber - the former editor of *Sing Out!* Magazine - commented on the birth of folk-rock in the United States by arguing that it "wasn't related to the politics" (Unterberger "Turn" 159). "Even the anti-war stuff" didn't suffice, Silber continued, as it "was lacking the political focus that I thought was important" (Unterberger "Turn" 159). Yet, folk-rock's tentacles had tightened their grip on the American musical landscape by 1966, creating a protest sound that wasn't anywhere near political shadowboxing. Songs as "Eve of Destruction" proved how protest music was becoming more emotionally explicit, especially in comparison with the more gentle folk sounds as presented in songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind". Besides, the 'political' was matched with personal experience, as the music of the counterculture expressed the immorality of the Vietnam War in the most vivid symbols. Whereas televisions already brought the Vietnam War into the American homes, music brought the indecency of the war to the people's ears by blatant protest lyrics and eclectic sounds (Unterberger "Eight" X). Take Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth", a folk-rock protest song inspired by the Hollywood counterculture riots. Even though these riots seem insignificant in comparison to the Vietnam War, "For What It's Worth" perfectly captures the uneasy mood and paranoia apparent in the mid-1960s, extending the topic of the song from Los Angeles to Vietnam (Unterberger "Eight" 43). Stephen Stills sings about "Young people speaking their minds/Getting so much resistance from behind", exemplifying how the folk-rock sound coincided with the socially conscious voice of the American counterculture (Buffalo Springfield). These sounds against the Vietnam War only intensified in 1966 and 1967. They exemplified the ever-evolving sounds of folk, and also the imminent introduction of psychedelic-rock.

This chapter will, therefore, take a closer look at these Vietnam-related songs of protest within the folk idiom and scrutinize the correlation between psychedelic-rock and sociopolitical protest. Firstly, however, the relation between the political and the pro-war sounds of the Vietnam War will be introduced, specifically in relation to Barry Sadler's No.1 hit record "The Ballad of the Green Berets". After the more rhetorical nature of folk songs of persuasion in relation to the Vietnam War have been discussed, the genre of psychedelic-rock will be analyzed. With a specific focus on the Californian music scene, case studies will demonstrate how bizarre sounds were combined with

humorous and politically influenced lyrics in songs such as “Suppose They Give A War and No One Comes” and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag”.

4.1 The Pro-war Sound: “The Ballad of the Green Berets”

The Vietnam War was escalating in a rapid pace.

President Lyndon B. Johnson had increased the draft-calls of young Americans to 35.000 a month, upping the total amount of troops in Vietnam to almost 400.000 by the end of 1966. As a result, opposition grew. The Vietnam War became the core issue of American social movements, supported by an unprecedented amount of student activism. This almost came naturally, replacing racial equality and civil rights as focal points of interest. The anti-Vietnam War movement strongly disliked the arrogant stance of the United States as a global policeman, and vigorously opposed the ongoing draft system (Eyerman and Jamison 114). According to Eyerman and Jamison, the “anti-Vietnam war movement



Figure 7: Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler singing “The Ballad of the Green Berets” on “The Ed Sullivan Show” in 1966 (Ted Russell, The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images)

was more divisive than the civil rights movement had been”, and it therefore altered “the forms of interaction between politics and culture that had been so intimate during the early 1960s” (114). Protest songs entered popular culture, transforming political standpoints and social critique into an accessible idiom of sound. Music, furthermore, had the ability to “provide a sense of belongingness,” and shape “a basis of common understanding and common experience for a generation in revolt” (Eyerman and Jamison 138). The song that was cast as *Billboard*’s No.1 single of 1966, however, was no protest song. It was namely the pro-war smash hit “The Ballad of the Green Berets” by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler that topped the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart for 5 weeks in March, 1966 (Kodosky 78).

Although American youngsters had embraced Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction”, Phil Ochs’ “I Ain’t Marching Anymore”, and Bob Dylan’s “Masters of War” as songs opposing the Vietnam War, general opinion was still in favor of America’s involvement in Southeast Asia by 1966. Gallup polls exemplify that Americans were more inclined to describe themselves as “hawks” than “doves”, and a vast majority of interviewees recognized America’s troops in Vietnam as “No, not a mistake” (Saad). “The Ballad of the Green Berets” was, therefore, “released into a fertile environment”, and became an “immediate sensation, selling two million copies in its first five weeks of sale” (Hillstrom

and Hillstrom 27). It was a flagrant anthem of patriotism and a sounding support for the bravery of American soldiers, sung and written by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler – whom himself had served in Vietnam as a Green Beret Medic. The American airwaves were dominated by the military drums and simple guitar chords, accompanied by Barry Sadler's resolute vocals that honored the US soldier. Interestingly, Sadler did not explicitly glorify the war in Vietnam. Rather, the "Ballad" focused on the bravery and exceptional skill of the Green Berets (Hillstrom and Hillstrom 27-8):

*Fighting soldiers from the sky
Fearless men who jump and die
Men who mean just what they say
The brave men of the Green Beret*

*Silver wings upon their chest
These are men, America's best
One hundred men will test today
But only three win the Green Beret (Sadler)*

As perfectly analyzed by Jens Lund, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" was "a skillful sentimentalization of the American soldier's task, full of effective clichés of *machismo*" (qtd. in Hillstrom and Hillstrom 28). Barry Sadler idolized the militarist stance of the United States. The patriotic song praised the commitment of soldiers to "die for those oppressed", portraying both the issue of military sacrifice and the continuing American struggle against communist influences in Vietnam. Saddler thus created a pro-war song, portraying the political support for the Vietnam War in a vainglorious pop-ballad (Kodosky 78). During an interview at the Jimmy Dean Show in February 1966, Sadler also critically engaged with the anti-Vietnam War movement, especially when Jimmy Dean asks him about the burning of draft cards (Jimmy Dean 5:49-8:05). According to Sadler, the social protest movement was "a small group with a big mouth". And because they were burning draft cards, he felt "that they're traitors ought to send to the pen" (Jimmy Dean 2:28-2:55). Still, patriotic songs about the Vietnam War were far from the norm. Music in the folk and rock idiom rather questioned and criticized the Vietnam War, creating a sound of protest that left any form of optimism completely on the sidelines.

4.2 "The big fool says to push on"

Protest music vigorously shaped the sound of 1967. Even though The Beatles had three No.1 singles on the *Billboard* Hot 100 – "Penny Lane", "All You Need Is Love", and "Hello Goodbye" – expressions of critique and anger towards the Vietnam War transcended popular music. Suspicion and anger grew amongst young Americans⁴, shaping an environment in support of the peace movement

⁴ American youngsters were questioning what they were fighting for, and were coping with the death toll of soldiers in Vietnam that had increased rapidly to more than 11.000.

(Rodnitzky “Popular Music” 508). Of course there were notable exceptions - such as “The Ballad of the Green Berets” and Jimmy Jack’s “Battle of Vietnam” – that made music more multifaceted than often understood. But, rather than preaching to the choir, music in relation to the Vietnam War most prominently focused on protest, showcasing the wrongs of fighting in Vietnam by way of the most vivid lyrics and sound effects (Garratt 132).

Even though the sound of protest towards the Vietnam War was obviously apparent in folk-rock and rock music of 1967, I would first like to point out how protest also continued to be unmistakably related to folk music, but in a rather different – and more rhetorical – way than during the Civil Rights Movement. Arlo Guthrie’s “Alice’s Restaurant Massacre”, for example, provided a “jovial tale that exposed the absurdities of conscription and damned the war effort with mirth rather than malevolence” (Phull 61). When listening to the talking blues monologue, one hears a totally absurd story full of extravagant descriptions and sensible irony. Yet, Guthrie’s song is actually a message of protest against the American draft system, focused on getting an exemption for serving in the Vietnam War (Phull 62). The singer-songwriter assures that “You can get anything you want, at Alice’s Restaurant”, stimulating the listener to tell his ludicrous story to the military psychiatrist office to get rejected for service (Guthrie). Even though several facets of a rhetorical song of persuasion can be detected, “Alice’s Restaurant Massacre” also has features that relate to a magnetic protest song. As argued by Harold Leventhal – on the backside of Arlo Guthrie’s *Alice’s Restaurant* record – people began “wearing ‘Alice’s Restaurant’ buttons and laugh and join in singing the hymn that binds the movement together”. The recorded version of “Alice’s Restaurant Massacre” even contains a feeling of togetherness. Guthrie namely encourages the audience to sing along “with feelin’”, and jokes that “If you want the end the war and stuff, you gotta sing loud” (Guthrie).

Another song of persuasion within the folk idiom that critically engaged with the Vietnam War in 1967 was Pete Seeger’s “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy”. With less political satire than “Alice’s Restaurant Massacre”, Seeger wrote “a cautionary tale in which misguided leadership on military maneuvers in 1942 is evoked with reference to a non-specific contemporary military adventure” (Hill 49). The protest song is allegorical for the Vietnam War, and strongly criticizes President Johnson’s optimistic foreign policy in Southeast Asia:

*The Sergeant Said, “Sir, with all this equipment
No man will be able to swim.”
“Sergeant, don’t be a Nervous Nellie,”
The Captain said to him
“All we need is a little determination;
Men, follow me, I’ll lead on.”
We were – neck deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool said to push on (Seeger)*

Whilst analyzing “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy”, the protest song can be discerned as rather rhetorical. The song of protest engages with sociopolitical problems, does not offer any sense of hope, and critically points the finger towards a single person – with the use of many metaphors. “The big fool” – being “the Captain” – clearly resembles President Johnson, whose foreign policy in Vietnam had resulted in a complete Americanization and escalation of the war. He continues to urge his soldiers “to push on”, refusing to admit the reality of the worsening situation of American troops slogging through the Mekong River. Furthermore, Johnson often nicknamed critics of the war in Vietnam “nervous nellies”, creating another correlation between the American political situation and music (Rodnitzky “Microgrooves” 110). The tone of political protest presented in Seeger’s “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” stands in stark contrast with songs of persuasion performed during, for example, the March on Washington. And this tone would only intensify in 1967, especially when psychedelic-rock made its entrance in to the Californian music scene (Schreiber 65).

4.3 “Eight Miles High”: The Start of Psychedelic-Rock

In 1966, Brian Wilson – co-founder of the Beach Boys – told *Teen Set* magazine that “Psychedelic music will cover the face of the world and colour the whole popular-music scene”. “Anybody happening is psychedelic”, Wilson continued, emphasizing the fad of a mesmerizing new sound (qtd. in Rathbone). The musical landscape had already significantly changed since the folk revival, as the epicenter of music had moved from Greenwich Village to Southern California. An interrelation had erupted between the so-called political folkniks of New York and the more relaxed musical environment in Southern California, giving shape to the folk-rock sound of bands as Buffalo Springfield and the Byrds (Cohen 259). By the mid-1960s, however, another significant alteration occurred within the American landscape of politically inspired music. The creativity of folk-rock was being mixed with psychedelics - most significantly by the artistic and conscious enhancing drug LSD. It established a hybridized and unorthodox idiom full of jazz, electric jug, and classical Indian sounds, and connected it with the hippie ideals of ‘Make Love Not War’. The lyrical components were mysterious and surreal, often only decipherable when in a higher state-of-mind. This became known as psychedelic-rock, a sub-genre of folk-rock (Unterberger “Eight” 36; Echard 29).

According to Unterberger, “Eight Miles High” by the Byrds is “often and justly acclaimed as one of the first psychedelic rock songs”, exemplifying the “radical break from the folk and rock music that had preceded it” (“Eight” VIII):

*Eight miles high and when you touch down
You'll find that it's stranger than known
Signs in the street that say where you're going
Are somewhere just being their own* (The Byrds)

The experimentality of “Eight Miles High” demonstrates how hallucinogenic drugs were utilized to expand the boundaries of rock music. A soundscape of jangly guitar rhythms and folk-like harmonious vocals was established that became inherently connected to the countercultural movement and flower power ideals. “Eight Miles High” was, however, banned by several American radio stations. It was argued that the psychedelic song would encourage the use of LSD, and that the word “high” referred to a hallucinating state of mind. Even though “Eight Miles High” resultingly did not receive a considerable amount of airtime, the Byrds’ single would mark the expansion of psychedelic-rock records: *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys, *Revolver* by the Beatles, and *The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13th Floor Elevators* (Unterberger “Eight” 4; Echard 73).

By 1967, San Francisco was the center of this evolving psychedelic sound. Filled with an ambience of peace and togetherness, the Bay Area would form the “ground zero of psychedelia”, with Haight-Ashbury as the undeniable flag ship of sociopolitical protest (Echard 126). Bands as Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Country Joe and the Fish, were making “the transition from motley conglomerations of ex-folkies to out-and-out electric rock bands”, and started to create thought-provoking sounds of psychedelic protest (Unterberger “Eight” 13). “Suppose They Give A War and No Ones Comes” by the LA-based West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band exemplified this mixture of bizarre sounds, raging guitars, and an anti-war protest message within the psychedelic-rock idiom perfectly:

*I hate war, I have seen war, I have seen war on the land and the sea
I have seen blood running in the street, I have seen small children, starving
I have seen agony of fellows and wives, I HATE WAR*

Hear the marching, hear the drums, suppose they give a war and no one comes
(West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band)

The vocals – or rather spoken word - by Bob Markley out a feeling of despair, questioning what would happen if the United States would adopt an anti-militaristic stance. It is a feeling of complete anguish towards the Vietnam War and an expression of total disillusionment that focuses on the human cost of war (West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band). When closely reading the lyrical content of “Suppose They Give A War and No One Comes”, it can therefore be recognized as an unmitigated outburst of dissatisfaction, demonstrating how the political - through the sound of protest – correlated with psychedelic-rock. As a result, the song closely relates to Denisoff’s categorization of a rhetorical song of persuasion (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 587). With lyrics as “I HATE WAR”, the protest song by the West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band namely has this implication of “‘I protest, I do not concur’ or just plain ‘damn you’” that Denisoff applied to rhetorical songs of protest. The band, however, that would stand out with its outspoken protest music that perfectly adhered to the

psychedelic-rock template, was Country Joe and the Fish (Denisoff “Evolution” 18; West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band)

4.4 Psychedelic Protest: “Superbird” and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die”

Country Joe and The Fish was formed in Berkeley, California, by Country Joe McDonald and Barry “The Fish” Melton in mid-1965. The rather obscure name refers to a nickname of Joseph Stalin – Country Joe – and a saying by Mao Zedong⁵. Together with several members of the Instant Action Jug Band, Country Joe and The Fish recorded “Superbird” and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die Rag” for a ‘talking issue’ of McDonald’s social commentary publication *Rag Baby Magazine*. Although both songs of protest still contained many folk influences, they would form the foundational stones of Country Joe and The Fish’s “quick hop, skip, and jump from ragtag folkies to psychedelic stars” (Unterberger “Eight” 26). Country Joe and The Fish namely developed a psychedelic sound that combined electric instrumentation with engaging lyrics about the hippie ethos and sociopolitical matters (Denselow 68). “I wound up in a place where cultural, political and musical fusion was taking place,” said McDonald”, and “I fitted right in” (qtd. in Denselow 68). As a result, Country Joe and The Fish became exceptionally popular within the American counterculture. And with the further escalation of the Vietnam War, Country Joe would not only be known as a “hippie pop star”, but also as “a freaky political cheer-leader” that opposed the ludicrous war in Southeast Asia and President Johnson’s policies through the powerful medium of psychedelic-rock (Denselow 68).

Electric Music for the Mind and Body (April 1967) became Country Joe and The Fish’s super-charged debut that perfectly captured the flower power feeling, just before the onset of the miraculous Summer of Love. The full-swing psychedelic-rock record resembled how the ‘San Francisco Sound’ was developing. Musical genres were fused to create a psychedelic masterpiece, including many weird and provocative lyrics. When analyzing *Electric Music for the Mind and Body* for the sound of protest in the 1960s, the full-on rock re-recording of “Superbird” really stands out (Torn 88):

*Look, up yonder in the sky, now, what is that I pray?
It’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s a man insane, it’s my President LBJ.
He’s flying high way up in the sky just like Superman,
But I got a little piece of kryptonite,
Yes I’ll bring him back to land* (Country Joe and The Fish).

“Superbird” humorously portrays President Johnson as a Superman gone mad. Alongside Melton’s captivating guitar play, Country Joe expresses a satirical message of protest about President Johnson’s failing Great Society and Vietnam policies (Rosenstone 135). Johnson - being “Superbird” -

⁵ “The revolutionary moves through the peasantry as the fish does through water” – Mao Zedong

is overthrown by several Marvel superheroes as the Fantastic Four and Doctor Strange – often understood as representing the American counterculture – and send back to his ranch in Texas: “We got you surrounded and you ain’t got a chance/Gonna send you back to Texas make you work on your ranch” (Country Joe and The Fish “Superbird”) The blatant political nature of “Superbird” is also showcased in the lines “Yeah, I found out why from a Russian spy/That he ain’t nothing but a comic book”, as the song makes a stark connection between President Johnson and the ongoing Cold War (Country Joe and The Fish “Superbird”). Though full of exuberant humor, Country Joe and The Fish’s “Superbird” thus perfectly represents the rebellious nature of hippie-rock. Music had become a “filter through which change [was] mapped and expressed” (Street 48). Dylan’s rhetorical and folksy style of protest music was adapted and revamped, creating a more flagrant type of song. It presented a kind of humorous directness. An outspoken form of protest music that only increased in fervor when the psychedelic-rock version of “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die Rag” was released a few months after the Summer of Love (Street 48).



Figure 8: Album covers of *Electric Music for the Mind and Body* and *“I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die”* by Country Joe and The Fish

At the time “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” was released on Country Joe and The Fish’s second studio record *I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die* in November 1967, the psychedelic-rock band had “become the spokespeople for a generation of young Americans expressing abhorrence of the horrors of war and resistance to American military policy” (Childs and March 216). Psychedelic-music and politics correlated superbly, as the Vietnam War “was on a never-ending ramp of escalation” (Unterberger “Eight” 28). The number of American casualties in Vietnam was namely increasing quickly. And adherents to the counterculture could not comprehend with the immorality and stupidity of fighting a war in Vietnam without any substantiated reason. These sentiments were accentuated in “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” by way of dark humor, circus melodies, and bona

fide outrage. Having moved past the magnetic cheerleader-like “The Fish Cheer”, Country Joe and The Fish begin their ridiculous, yet extremely powerful, song of protest (Unterberger “Eight” 28):

*Well, come on all of you, big strong men
Uncle Sam needs your help again
He's got himself in a terrible jam
Way down yonder in Vietnam
So put down your books and pick up a gun
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun*

*And it's one, two, three
What are we fighting for?
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn
Next stop is Vietnam;
And it's five, six, seven
Open up the pearly gates
Well there ain't no time to wonder why
Whoopee! We're all gonna die (Country Joe and The Fish)*

The weirdness of the carnivalesque sounds that support the song stand in sheer contrast with the message of protest presented in the lyrics. Country Joe criticizes the American (“Uncle Sam”) draft system by way of smart-aleck lyrics, arguing that it will be “a whole lotta fun” in Vietnam. However, when the chorus ends with “Whoopee! We’re all gonna die”, the seriousness of “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” completely overshadows its absurdity. In a later verse, Country Joe even addresses the parents of the young Americans to “Be the first ones in your block/To have your boy come home in a box”, hinting to the 11.000 young American soldiers that had already died in Vietnam (Unterberger “Eight” 28; Country Joe and The Fish “Fixin’”). This combination of dark humor, bitterness, and blatant directness, makes the anti-Vietnam War song so interesting. Even though the ‘San Francisco Sound’ of protest stood miles apart from the folk protest songs as “Masters of War” or “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy”, it perfectly mirrored the same feelings of dissent and anger towards the American political apparatus (Hill 50). Take Dylan’s “With God on Our Side”, for example. The line “The reason for fighting / I never got straight” almost stands synonymous to Country Joe’s “What are we fighting for” (Dylan “God”). The line of thought in the lyrical content of protest music during the Sixties thus sometimes remained the same, although it severely increased in fervor within the (psychedelic-)rock idiom.

According to Barry “The Fish” Melton, “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag”, however, “wasn’t simply political commentary” (qtd. in Unterberger “Eight” 30). Melton acknowledges that his psychedelic-rock band was “overt. Not simply politically overt, sociologically overt. [...] We were the guys who said what other people alluded to. It was right there in the lyric content. Everybody else had the message coded in there” (qtd. in Unterberger “Eight” 30). As Country Joe and The Fish didn’t mince their words, it is a perfect categorization of a rhetorical song of persuasion within Denisoff’s

theoretical framework. The lyrics are full of satire, containing this aversion towards the militaristic policies of the United States in Vietnam that relate to Denisoff's idea of "emphasized negativism" (Denisoff "Songs of Persuasion" 582). However, Country Joe and The Fish did not "conjure up the image" as Dylan had sometimes done in songs as "Blowin' in the Wind" (Boucher 152). Yes, the lyrics of "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" are overshadowed by humor and psychedelic sounds, but they still exemplify a clear interplay between the political and the musical. "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" provides a distinctive song of persuasion, promoting cohesion within the American counterculture whilst at the same time intentionally expressing individualistic critique on the ongoing social and political context of the Vietnam War without providing a clear solution. More than anything, the song became a classic protest anthem of the Sixties (Phull 72).

Along with "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag", protest music in 1967 slowly came to an end, and moved into its final gear. The continuing escalation of the Vietnam War – with no clear path to victory –, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the election of Richard Nixon, namely made way for the most edgy and full-on rock sounds since the beginning of the Sixties (Hill 47). Protest music started to contain a sense of urgency. A sense of anger, that was outed in rather different terms than in the earlier protest songs of the folk revival. Music became even more politically and socially relevant, with lyrics that completely ignored the American status quo (Orman 6). According to Ward Just in the *Washington Post*, 1968 "struck down the good and the bad indiscriminately, and at the end of it, by November, the country seemed no closer to healing the sickness – whatever it was. Querulous, dissatisfied, mad, the public looked for explanation; the public looked for leaders" (qtd. in Meacham and McGraw 179). The Doors, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Jimi Hendrix became a few of these leaders. They became the voice and sound of protest, reaching more Americans than ever before with their full-on rock music.

Chapter 5

“Golden Age of Rock Activism”: All-Out Rock and Political Protest in the Late Sixties

Bobby Darin began his career as a teen idol in the late fifties, being a mainstay on the top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts with “Splish Splash”, “Dream Lover” and “Mack the Knife”. Yet, by 1969, Darin wrote “A Simple Song of Freedom”; a stark folk-influenced protest song produced in the wake of Robert Kennedy’s assassination (Andersen 79):

*Come and sing a simple song of freedom
Sing it like you’ve never sung before
Let it fill the air
Tell the people everywhere
We, the people, here don’t want a war* (Darin)

It was a message of critique towards President Nixon, expressing his unpopularity and the increasing animosity amongst the majority of Americans towards the Vietnam War. Darin addressed the “presidents, prime ministers, and kings” who should fight wars amongst themselves as they are the ones who enjoy it the most, “and leave the people be who love to sing” (Darin). This particular message perfectly reflects how music had developed in the final years of the ‘Age of Protest’. As artists “became highly outspoken in their criticism of the war”, as Andersen argues, Bobby Darin also “expressed fears about a government reaction to their anti-war views that could result in an infringement of freedom of speech” (Andersen 79). Whereas the sound of protest before 1968 was often satirical, and occasionally ferocious, by 1968 the musical critique on the Vietnam War became remorseless, unambiguous, and rather austere. And especially in the rock idiom, these protest songs moved to the foreground.

This chapter will dive into the sounds of political protest in the rock idiom. It will be scrutinized how these rock songs of protest significantly differed from the folk revival, but unambiguously related to themes as the Vietnam War in the final years of the Sixties. By closely examining “The Unknown Soldier” by The Doors and Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son”, the blatant sound and critical lyrics of rock music will be demonstrated. The development of the protest song, and its correlation with the sociopolitical atmosphere, will be exemplified by way of these case studies and Denisoff’s theoretical framework. Furthermore, the unprecedented sounds of protest during the Woodstock Music & Art Fair will be analyzed, giving specific attention to Jimi Hendrix’s performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner”.

5.1 The Mythical Force of Rock and Protest in 1968

As the Summer of Love dwindled down, the folk-rock craze also faded. It made way for a new sound, attracting a far more diverse - and commercial - audience than hippies and peace activists (Eyerman and Jamison 108). The “great rock music explosion”, as Orman declares, resulted in that the United States were being “Sgt. Peppered, Creamed, Jefferson Airplaned, Doored, Hendrixed, and Joplined in a rapid fashion” (6). Rock music provided a medium in which feelings and ideas were brought forward with a sense of urgency, standing in stark contrast to the more gentle and question-laden folk sound by the likes of Seeger and Dylan. Americans were drawn into the melodious soundscape of rock, and were encouraged to thoughtfully listen to the lyrical message. And even though a significant amount of the popular rock music in the late Sixties was completely oblivious to this political critique and societal protest, its influence cannot simply be ignored (Orman 6-7).

Whilst taking a closer look at several key historical events in the final years of the Sixties, the presence of several sociopolitical protest songs within the rock idiom is arguably no surprise. “In terms of American political life”, as Hill namely argues, “1968 has almost mythical resonance” (47). Presidential elections often go hand in hand with cases of public activism and political turbulence. But the 1968 elections proved to be even more tumultuous than usual. As a consequence of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4 and Senator Robert F. Kennedy on June 5, the United States stood at the edge of an abyss. Violence erupted throughout the nation, cumulating up to a violent clash between anti-war protestors and the Chicago police at the Democratic Convention in August. Here, Hubert Humphrey obtained the Democratic nomination, as Johnson had decided not to seek re-election (Hill 47). Furthermore, the Tet Offensive in late-January of 1968 had shocked all of the United States, and proved to the American public that the war in Vietnam was unwinnable. Senator Robert Kennedy even argued that the Tet Offensive “finally shattered the mask of official illusion with which we have concealed our true circumstances” (“Unwinnable War”). These “true circumstances” are also portrayed by Hill, exemplifying how the impact of the war resonated on almost all aspects of American life: “486.000 American troops [were] in Vietnam at the beginning of 1968”, and “the total number of American combat deaths over the conflict’s first seven years had exceeded 30.000” (Hill 47). With images of the disastrous Vietnam War entering American living rooms on a daily basis – such as those of the Mỹ Lai Massacre - public opinion made a complete turnaround. By October 1968, the majority of the Gallup interviewees answered “Yes, a mistake” when questioned if sending American troops to fight in Vietnam was a mistake (Saad).⁶ Furthermore, the hawkish stance of American citizens – as described in the previous chapter – slowly disappeared

⁶ By October 1, 1968, 54% of the interviewees argued that sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake, whilst 37% argued that it was not a mistake.

by the end of 1969, as 55% described themselves as “doves”, and only 31% as “hawks” (Bindas and Houston 13).

Consequently, the undisguised sound of protest in rock music was looming larger by the day, as critical opinions on the hypocrisy of America’s militaristic stance were in the vanguard of America’s political – and musical – consciousness. In comparison to the folk sound of the early 1960s, rock started to provide an energetic and loud soundtrack. Political meaning and ideas were creatively combined with blatant rock sounds and forthright lyrics, resembling once more how protest music evolved in the Sixties. Rock songs differed from “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag”, as the antipathy towards the Vietnam War and the unequal draft system was overtly emphasized to yet another level of intensity (Hill 49). “2 + 2 = ?” by the Bob Seger System, for example, provided a “frightening, visceral song that stands among the best anti-Vietnam protests” (Erlewine). By way of aggressive lyrics such as “Now he’s buried in the mud/Of a foreign jungle land,” and “If I’ve got to kill to live/Then there’s something left untold”, in combination with a boisterous guitar riff, loud drums, and a tight baseline, Bob Seger portrayed the ferocious nature of protest music in the rock idiom (Seger). Rock music did not “conjure up the image”, but rather point-blank mention its sociopolitical critique (Boucher 159). “2 + 2 = ?”, however, only provides one example of the ‘rock’ response towards the Vietnam War. The rock idiom namely proved to be final stage in the development of protest music during the Sixties. “The Unknown Soldier” by The Doors and “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival further showcased how politics and music intermingled, evolved, and created a blustorous protest sound.

5.2 “The Unknown Soldier”: Rockin’ Protest and the Vietnam War

According to Rodnitzky, protest music had increasingly lost its meaning by the end of the ‘Age of Protest’ – or as he pinpoints it, “[d]uring the last five years”. In his 1971 article *The Decline of Contemporary Protest Music*, Rodnitzky namely argued that songs with a message of critique were “really do-it-yourself protest songs, since you can read your own problems into them and reap existential answers or solace in return” (45). Furthermore, Rodnitzky claimed that overt protest music had been “driven to the cultural fringes by sophisticated ridicule and dwindling commercial success”, feeling that it “is no longer stylish or profitable to sing directly about social evils” (“Decline” 44). When analyzing “The Unknown Soldier” and “Fortunate Son”, however, one can identify the continuous vitality of political messages of protest in music. Teenyboppers were dancing to the most ferocious protest songs in the late-Sixties, as these contaminated the airwaves. For these youngsters, music unequivocally defined the Vietnam War. And these songs by The Doors and Creedence Clearwater Revival only echoed the aggravating message of the anti-war movement (Hill 50). According to Weinstein, this period in the late-Sixties was therefore the “Golden Age of Rock

Activism. [...] It was during this time that the best-known, and, for most Americans of all ages, the only known rock protest songs were created" (8).

"No band in history of rock has come to define a time and place with such exactitude as The Doors⁷", argues Kubernik (83). The Doors signed with Elektra Records in August 1966, until then a record label that focused primarily on folk artists – and protest singers – as Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, and Theodore Bikel. With their hit single "Light My Fire", The Doors controlled the *Billboard* Hot 100 during the Summer of Love, reaching No. 1 for 3 weeks in late July. Lead vocalist Jim Morrison was becoming an undeniable rock icon, and their records *The Doors* (1967) and *Strange Days* (1967) proved to be a massive commercial success. In the meantime, however, the Vietnam War intensified. Graphic images of the ensuing chaos entered American households as a result of regular televised news bulletins (Phull 66-7). Consequently, "an acute awareness of the horrors of conflict began to infiltrate everyday American life", inspiring Jim Morrison to write "The Unknown Soldier" (Phull 67). Released as a first single for the *Waiting for the Sun* album, "The Unknown Soldier" reflects on these horrifying media coverages related to the Vietnam War. Even though Vietnam is not specifically mentioned, "The Unknown Soldier" is an obvious anti-war protest song. The song describes the death of an unknown soldier – being almost *any* American soldier appearing on television – sent into the fog of war at the behest of warmongering politicians and generals (Cottrel and Browne 142):

*Wait until the war is over
And we're both a little older
The unknown soldier*

*Breakfast where the news is read
Television, children fed
Unborn living, living dead
Bullet strikes the helmet's head* (The Doors).

Although Jim Morrison once argued that "The Unknown Soldier" was simply "a love song", and the violence "just a metaphor", it seems impossible for any listener not to notify the remorseless and rather direct messages of protest (qtd. in Cott). The Doors referred to the breakfast news bulletins with which almost every American household woke up: "Breakfast where the news is read/Television, children fed". And the figurative line "Unborn living, living dead" that follows provides a quite vicious dichotomy (The Doors). Young children namely had a life to live, being in the comfort of their parent's house. The somewhat older American teenagers, on the other hand, were being drafted to serve in Vietnam, with a chance to return in a casket. With the lyrical pun of a bullet striking a soldier's helmet, the deadliness of the Vietnam War is, furthermore, uttered in the most

⁷ The Doors were founded by lead vocalist Jim Morrison and keyboardist Ray Manzarek, and further included guitarist Robby Krieger and drummer John Densmore.

graphic manner possible (Phull 67). Whilst analyzing the lyrical content of “The Unknown Soldier”, one can thus discover Denisoff’s idea of the rhetorical song of protest in the most literal manner. Folk-like gentleness had made way for rockin’ outrage in the final phase of the Sixties, in which the protest lyrics emphasized sociopolitical facts: an unwinnable war in Vietnam (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 584).

The verse segment that follows further exemplifies how sociopolitical protest songs in the rock idiom strikingly differed from the compositions of folk luminaries by the likes of Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan. Whereas folk musicians highlighted their meaningful lyrics with sober musical accompaniments, music in the rock idiom often included stark instrumental segments that overshadowed its lyrics. In the instrumental section of “The Unknown Soldier”, Densmore kicks-off with a military-inspired drum rhythm, whilst Morrison takes on the persona of an aggressive drill sergeant and shouts:

“March!/Company, halt!/Present Arms!”. Soon after, a shot is heard (The Doors). The war is declared to be over, ironically resembled by “The Unknown Soldier” being relieved from his service by way of death. Morrison’s joyous screams, a dizzying guitar riff, and the sounds of a victory

parade that finalize “The Unknown Soldier”, further showcase how The Doors engaged with the political concerns present in the late Sixties (Rodnitzky “Rebirth” 23). According to Hill, “The Doors opt for lyrical allusion and direct sonic imagery”, which makes “The Unknown Soldier” a rhetorical song of protest by nature (50). The Doors gave its message of protest a mystical scope, intending to be an outburst of dissatisfaction and individualistic anger towards the ongoing Vietnam War. In line with Denisoff’s conception of the rhetorical song of persuasion, these emotional outbursts of discontent burry any message of future action (Denisoff “Evolution” 18).

During a live show at the 1968 Hollywood Bowl, this eruption of protest was even visualized. As Robby Krieger aimed his guitar at Morrison as a rifle, and Manzarek’s gunshot sound scattered through the audience, Morrison dropped dead on stage. By mimicking his passing on stage, Morrison perfectly showcased the brutality and misery of the Vietnam War: He ‘ended’ the war in the most



Figure 9: Jim Morrison performing at the Hollywood Bowl in 1968 (Henry Diltz)

literal sense possible by way of an onstage mock execution (Densmore 193-4, “The Doors” 1:35-2:30). According to Densmore, “The Unknown Soldier” had therefore “evolved into a miniplay”, with the audience “so stunned it didn’t know whether to keep quiet or applaud” (194). “The Unknown Soldier” had become a rhetorical device of music. It contained a critical message that reinforced the existing attitudes of the anti-war movement. But it also showcased how the interrelation between politics, protest, and music had evolved since the early days of the Sixties (Denisoff “Top Forty” 807).

5.3 “Fortunate Son”: An Iconic Anti-Vietnam War Anthem

Although “The Unknown Soldier” wasn’t one of The Doors’ most commercial singles – reaching #39 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 – it was an obvious sound of protest to the Vietnam War. Whereas The Doors opted for “lyrical allusion and direct sonic imagery”, Creedence Clearwater Revival’s⁸ “Fortunate Son”, rather exposed “the inherent inequities in American society – wealthy sons ‘born into’ the presidency, avoiding conscription yet demanding the ultimate sacrifice of those less privileged” (Hill 50). Released as a single in September 1969 for their forthcoming album *Willy and the Poor Boys*, “Fortunate Son” became one of the most recognizable anti-Vietnam War songs of the late Sixties. The song of protest became a reference of critique to the political world, primarily criticizing the American draft system. Even though lead vocalist John Fogerty and drummer Doug Clifford had avoided the draft by entering the US Army Reserves, Fogerty reflected on his personal experience within the military apparatus in this full-on rock song of persuasion (Sudderth 32):

*Some folks are born made to wave the flag
Ooh, they’re red, white and blue
And when the band plays Hail to the Chief
Ooh, they point the cannon at you, Lord*

*It ain’t me, it ain’t me
I ain’t no senator’s son, son
It ain’t me, it ain’t me
I ain’t no fortunate one, no* (Creedence Clearwater Revival)

Shortly after one of the most iconic guitar riffs in the rock-idiom, Fogerty’s angry and energetic vocals deliver an unsurpassable message of political protest. It must be noted that at the time “Fortunate Son” was released, public support of the Vietnam War had turned into horror. President Nixon’s Vietnamization policy hadn’t come off the ground yet, as almost 550.000 American soldiers were still stationed in Southeast Asia. Amongst them, many drafted American teenagers (Phull 92-3). They were the folks “born made to wave the flag”. Those with “star-spangled eyes”, fighting wars for the American politicians behind their desks (Creedence Clearwater Revival). In “Fortunate Son”, Fogerty,

⁸ The core members of Creedence Clearwater Revival were lead vocalist/guitarist John Fogerty, drummer Doug Clifford, pianist Stu Cook, and John’s older brother Tom Fogerty on guitar.

however ferociously addresses the American teenagers who avoided the draft – the “fortunate one” or the “senator’s son” (Creedence Clearwater Revival). “Fortunate Son” was therefore “a political statement”, as noted by Doug Clifford, focusing on the people that “were able to pull a string or two and their boys stayed at home” (qtd. in Bordowitz 80). In his memoir *Fortunate Son: My Life, My Music*, Fogerty even writes that, at the time “Julie Nixon [President Nixon’s daughter] was dating David Eisenhower [former-President Eisenhower’s grandson]. [...] They seemed privileged and whether they liked it or not, these people were symbolic in the sense that they weren’t being touched by what their parents were doing. They weren’t being affected like the rest of us” (190).

The song thus perfectly exemplified the correlation between protest music and politics in these final months of the ‘Age of Protest’, being a direct sound of critique towards the Nixon Administration and the ongoing Vietnam draft. As a result, “Fortunate Son” can be analyzed in relation to Denisoff’s rhetorical songs of persuasion. The explicit criticism towards the privileged youngsters who escaped from being drafted cannot be overlooked. Fogerty perfectly portrays this harsh unfairness within American society, spelling out his message of protest in quite literal terms (Denisoff “Protest Movements” 230, Bordowitz 80). Though arguably disclosed by the forceful vocals and rock instrumentals, “Fortunate Son” is therefore evidence for the “creation of moral reaffirmation” amongst the anti-war movement, speaking to their social consciousness and making them aware in a way that was unthinkable during the early Sixties (Denisoff “Top Forty” 807).

“Fortunate Son” peaked at No. 3 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in December 1969, becoming one of the most popular protest anthems of the anti-war movement. Such songs of protest, however, are regarded by Garratt to be “a kind of political shadow boxing”, as “this week’s angry protest song is next week’s commodified hit, catchy jingle, or right-wing anthem” (55). It, indeed, cannot be denied that Creedence Clearwater Revival produced a commercial song of protest with a firm rock beat and soulful vocals that encouraged teenagers to dance. In a way, “Fortunate Son” then stands miles apart from folk songs of protest at the core of the Civil Rights Movement – such as “We Shall Overcome” and “Only A Pawn in Their Game” – that focused on acoustic sounds and harmonious group singing (Denisoff “Top Forty” 821). In *Protest Songs: Those on the Top Forty and Those of the Streets*, Denisoff even argues that when “comparing the songs of civil rights adherents with those found on the popular music charts”, the former is “genuine protest” and the latter “symbolic or expressive discontent” (821). Protest music, however, had simply changed, and its value should not be dismissed lightly. “Fortunate Son” – and “The Unknown Soldier” for that matter - proved that songs of persuasion still contained feelings of disillusionment and emotional dissatisfaction, although now showcased within the ferocious rock idiom. Maybe with less political justness than music related to the Civil Rights struggle, as folk songs really embodied this hunger for change. But with more commercial value and outspoken bitterness, closely adhering to the social movement that opposed

the Vietnam War (Orman 63, Denisoff “Top Forty” 821-2). When taking a closer look at how protest music had become part of this larger popular culture in the United States, a final look has to be taken on the summer of 1969. The summer when the Woodstock Music & Art Fair took place.

5.4 The Sound of Protest at Woodstock: The Festival for a Generation

The Woodstock Music & Art Fair in Bethel arguably became the biggest symbol of the American counterculture and hippie movement of the 1960s. Promoted as “An Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace & Music”, Woodstock symbolized a site of flower power idealism and anti-war sentiments. At the festival, a communal feeling of love and togetherness was combined with the most influential artists of the ‘Age of Protest’, whom reflected on the political opinion and social consciousness of the massive audience (Van Muijden 18-9). According to singer-songwriter Melanie Safka – who performed on the festival’s first day - Woodstock “was an affirmation that we were part of each other, that there was more to life than doing what your mother and father told you and that certainly we shouldn’t have been involved in the Vietnam War”. The festival, therefore, was “a garden of Eden of sorts,” argues Unterberger, embodying the “humanitarian ethos trumpeted by the folk revival of the early 60s” (“Eight” 283). Rock music had adapted the sociopolitical lyrics and sound of critique that belonged to the folk revival. However, a wider audience was reached by the likes folk music could have never achieved. As a result, protest rock music became part of the larger American popular culture, encouraging its listeners to oppose Nixon’s political ideology (Unterberger “Eight” 283).

The unprecedented and evolving sound of protest was omnipresent throughout the 3-day festival. Music crystallized a feeling of defiance amongst the crowd, as exemplified by Country Joe McDonald’s iconic acoustic-version of “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag”. The preceding “The Fish Cheer” was converted into “The F*ck Cheer”, and obtained mythical proportions when the whole audience yelled the letters back at Country Joe. The psychedelic anthem itself became a rather massive magnetic sing-along, embodying this sense of utter collective dissent towards the Vietnam War (Unterberger “Eight” 277-8). For Joan Baez – still one of America’s key protest musicians - actions as these proved the political force of the ‘Woodstock Nation’ (Street 109). Her performance of “We Shall Overcome” passionately connected the Civil Rights Movement with the anti-Vietnam War movement, confirming “the overtly political stance that characterized the counterculture generally, and the Woodstock gathering in particular” (Evans and Kingsbury 94). Jimi Hendrix’s symbolic performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” would further justify this overt political stance, as it exemplified how music, politics and protest correlated at Woodstock.



Figure 10: Jimi Hendrix playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock 1969 (Henry Diltz)

As argued by Clague, Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock "has been interpreted as perhaps the most powerful symbol of rock's potential for protest" (435). Whereas folk songs of protest had mainly focused on lyrical substance, Hendrix's rock performance showcased how artistic expression and musical form could also be utilized as form of protest. Hendrix rendered the national anthem of the United States into a dazzling anti-war song, creating an astounding expression of political meaning through music. By way of his electric guitar and distortion-sounds, Hendrix replaced the lyrical content of the American national anthem, and delivered a message of protest only through sound itself (Schreiber 79). For example, shortly after bombastic sounds had given a new meaning to the words "And the rockets' red glare", Hendrix presents "a blistering representation of war with crunching explosions, repeated strumming for gunfire, and screams all supported by Mitchell's⁹ ecstatic drumming" (Clague 464). By sonically representing the words of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and mimicking the disastrous noise of conflict, a sound was created that protested against the Nixon administration and the unnecessary war in Vietnam. These sounds, however, were unsettling. Hendrix had abandoned the original melody completely. And shattering tunes were blasted towards the Woodstock audience (Cush, "Jimi Hendrix" 1:22-2:40). Still, it was breathtaking. The protest song influenced the emotion and mood of the audience, "enumerating the ugliness behind the American glory that the song is meant to represent" (Cush). Appearing at The Dick Cavett Show a month later in September 1969, however, Hendrix humorously talked around his exceptional protest song. "All I did was play it", Hendrix said. "I'm American, so I played it. I used to have to sing it in school, they made me sing it in school, so it was a flashback" ("Dick Cavett" 2:13-2:22). Still, it is difficult to deny that Hendrix's rock sound wasn't a political statement. His rock-protest rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" became a musical embodiment of the anti-war movement, proving how protest music had evolved since the early days of the 'Age of Protest'. It represented the growing anguish towards the Vietnam War at a time and place that exemplified peace and togetherness (Schreiber 79). Hendrix's performance therefore did

⁹ John Mitch Mitchell was the drummer of The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

not simply transmit a message, as it gained “rhetorical force and collective significance through its musical dimension” (Garratt 11-2).

After Woodstock, the ‘Age of Protest’ slowly came to a close. Woodstock proved to be the last piece of the puzzle, as the folk sounds were intricately interwoven into the popular format of rock music. It was the final highlight to prove how music and politics correlated during the ‘Age of Protest’, with Jimi Hendrix as its closing messenger. Protest music had evolved into a clarion bell, mixing rather commercial sounds with ominous critiques that contained an honest core (Unterberger “Eight” 60). “Fortunate Son” and “The Unknown Soldier” – but also Steppenwolf’s “Draft Resister” and the complete *Volunteers* album by Jefferson Airplane – proved how the protest song had evolved since the early days of the folk revival. Anger and disapproval were put forward in a remorseless and electrified manner by the end of the Sixties, adhering closely to Denisoff’s framework of rhetorical songs of persuasion (Orman 155-6).

Conclusion

Protest music during the American Sixties kept the pace. From “We Shall Overcome” to “Fortunate Son”, the sounds of protest provided anthems that functioned a sociopolitical cause in an ever-changing fashion. Songs of protest marveled about societal unrest and political challenges, solidifying how politics and music correlated during this ‘Age of Protest’ (Rodnitzky “Microgrooves” 105). Matters as racial inequality and the lopsided draft system of the Vietnam War weren’t eschewed, but rather addressed in both a magnetic and rhetorical fashion. Music, therefore, really evolved to become this “powerful political force”, as Kodosky had pointed out, inspiring a generation in an attractive manner (70). Were it the gentle tones of folk, or the obscure sounds of psychedelic-rock, songs of persuasion truly embodied the dissenting views and critique towards the American sociopolitical landscape, often entangled with the apparent social movements – particularly the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement. Within these social movements, music constituted more than a mere soundtrack. Protest songs namely animated societal action and represented political ideas and values (Street 48). Undoubtedly, far from all music in the Sixties contained a message of protest, as music mostly functioned as a form of entertainment. Still, as presented throughout this thesis, the sounds of the protest song impeccably gave shape to the musical – and political – landscape of the United States. Music became this vehicle of expression that continuously evolved, as the musical styles in which these attitudes of sociopolitical protest were presented to the listener significantly altered throughout the 1960s (Seely 289-90).

Folk musicians like Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Pete Seeger made the early 1960s sound politically relevant. The folk revival signified a sociopolitical re-awakening within song, inspiring forms of collective thought and action that was most often related to the Civil Rights Movement. An energized hunger for change was portrayed in the question-laden lyrics and gentle sounds of the folk idiom. Music became this public site of political deliberation that brought folk musicians – with guitar in hand – to arms (Rodnitzky “Rebirth” 18). Rhetorical songs of protest as Dylan’s “The Death of Emmet Till” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” perfectly connected with the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement. Protest music’s lyrical content amplified a political message, gently – yet explicitly - criticizing the racial violence and segregation policies within the United States (Eyerma and Jamison 122). Besides, songs of protest within the folk idiom had choruses that raised the courage of those who sang them, which became especially apparent during the March on Washington. Joan Baez’s magnetic performance of “We Shall Overcome” and “If I Had a Hammer” by Peter, Paul and Mary reflected the mood of the times, as the audience sang along en masse (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 583). These protest songs held on to the emotional feelings of solidarity and

togetherness that were so dear to the Civil Rights Movements. As the attendants stood hand-in-hand on the Washington Mall, they sang along with the anthems of the movement, exemplifying the magnetic qualities of these folk songs of protest (Denisoff "Social Significance" 4). Portrayed in a compassionate manner, folk musicians gave a collective voice to the Civil Rights struggle. A voice that exemplified how politics, music, and protest would correlate throughout the rest of the Sixties.

When Dylan went electric, and the emerging sounds of folk-rock entered the American airwaves, the evolving nature of the protest song truly became clear. As pointed out by Pratt, "Dylan's movement away from explicit protest themes coincided with the deepening radical critique then emerging in the country" (qtd. in Eyerman and Jamison 126). The genuine sounds of folk blended with the dazzling force of rock, significantly altering the messages of sociopolitical critique that were engraved within the lyrics and sounds of protest music. Magnetic folk-styled messages - as "We shall overcome, some day" - slowly vanished. And when the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, the Vietnam War became protest music's most focal point. Songs of protest evolved into a thought-provoking weapon with raucous sounds and rhetorical lyrics, standing in stark contrast to the tender and magnetic sounds often presented by folk musicians (Denisoff and Levine 119). "Eve of Destruction" - as exemplified in Chapter 3 - demonstrated this ever-evolving sound of protest. McGuire presented a surrealistic song of protest full of fear and frustration, envisioning an impenitent scenario of doom that was unthinkable within folk-styled ballads (Phull 55-6). Not a single sense of hope was offered to its listeners, holding on closely to Denisoff's idea of "emphasized negativism". "Barry McGuire", as Denisoff argues, "exploded the 'art is a weapon' ethos upon the Top Forty", pointing to dysfunctions within American society with a lyrical clarity and electric instrumentation that was - until then - unsurpassed ("Top Forty" 810). Whereas folk music had embodied the sounds of protest, rock slowly evolved to become its new flag bearer. And, as portrayed in this thesis, the label fitted perfectly.

As showcased by McGuire's "Eve of Destruction", music became a space in which tones of melancholy, fear, sarcasm, and rage were all mixed together, capturing the demoralizing and destructive impact of the war in Vietnam in an astonishing manner. By 1967, the immorality of the Vietnam War was presented in the most blatant lyrics and eclectic sounds, even though the majority of Americans were still more inclined to describe themselves as "hawks" (Hillstrom and Hillstrom 27-8). On the one hand were rhetorical folk songs of protest such as "Alice's Restaurant Massacre" and "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy". These songs critically condemned America's war efforts in Vietnam, and specifically referred to the political mismanagement of President Johnson. On the other hand, however, was the introduction of psychedelic-rock. A new musical genre that supported protest music's 'evolution' to new heights. Protest songs by the likes of "Suppose They Give A War and No One Comes" proved how the creativity of folk-rock had blended with unorthodox sounds and

raucous messages of protest. A new approach to protest music was therefore introduced, standing miles apart from the magnetic songs of persuasion that were performed during the March on Washington in 1963 (Unterberger “Eight” 36). Psychedelic songs of protest did not create this “we” feeling that was unmistakably related to the Civil Rights Movement. Rather, psychedelic lyrics centered on individualistic and unmitigated outbursts of protest, embodying the framework of a rhetorical song of persuasion. Behind the exuberant humor and eccentric sounds - as presented in the case studies on Country Joe and The Fish’s iconic “Superbird” and “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” – stark messages of protest namely touched upon the ideals of the anti-war movement (Phull 72). The sounds of protest were not poetized – as often occurred in the Dylanesque folk idiom. Rather, (psychedelic-)rock songs point-blank stated their critique: the war in Vietnam was both useless and ridiculous. The sounds of rock therefore proved how protest music was heading into its final gear.

Even though Vice President Agnew “charged that rock lyrics were ‘brainwashing’ young listeners into taking drugs and that rock music was threatening to destroy our national strength”, the American audience ‘digged’ the sounds of rock (Orman 6). Rock music created an awareness for sociopolitical matters that resembled a storm, rather than a gentle sunrise like the songs of the folk revival (Denisoff “Social Significance” 26). Containing these outbursts of desperation within both lyrics and sound, the rock songs of protest embodied Denisoff’s rhetorical description like never before, and portrayed an unmistakable sense of urgency. The case of Bob Seger’s “2 + 2 = ?”, for example, proved the ferocious nature of protest music within the rock idiom. Undisguised sociopolitical critique and forthright commentary on America’s militaristic stance were blended with boisterous guitar tones and loud drums, shaping the final stage of protest music in the Sixties. Case studies in relation to “Fortunate Son” and “The Unknown Soldier”, furthermore, proved how anger and disapproval were put forward in a remorseless, individualistic, and electrified manner, lifting the existing correlation between American politics, protest and music to an absolute pinnacle (Hill 50). The horrors of the Vietnam War - paired with its unequal draft system - were brought to the American audience in the most graphic manner possible, often reinforcing the existing attitudes amongst the anti-war movement. Feelings of disillusionment and anger that were portrayed in folk tunes such as “Only A Pawn in Their Game” and “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” were still apparent, but only had evolved into ferocious rock monsters (Denisoff “Top Forty” 821-2). Jimi Hendrix’s performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock, for example, epitomized how sociopolitical tones of protest were even interwoven in only sound. According to Candaele, “Hendrix put an exclamation point on a decade of protest music aimed at America’s military adventures in general, and the Vietnam War in particular”. A performance by the likes of Hendrix would have been unthinkable in the early Sixties – dominated by the folk revival. But as the ‘Age of Protest’ came to an

end, the sounds of protest had completely evolved, challenging the American status quo in the most forthright manner. Equivalents to magnetic songs of persuasion as “We Shall Overcome” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” were almost non-existent – with exceptions as “The F*ck Cheer” by Country Joe during the Woodstock Music & Art Fair (Kodosky 78). Instead, the straightforward messages of critique and “emphasized negativism” of Denisoff’s rhetorical songs of protest – “I protest, I do not concur” - had proved to be the new – and final - mainstay in popular political protest music of the ever-exciting Sixties (Denisoff “Songs of Persuasion” 587, Denisoff “Evolution” 18).

As pointed out by Grassy, “[p]rotest songs in the sixties did not disarm soldiers or save lives, but they did reflect the idealism of the times. They mirrored the aspirations of a generation hungry for change, and elevated popular music to the status of an art” (260). Protest music became this ever-evolving destabilizing force that created a unique interplay between the political and the musical in both a magnetic and rhetorical fashion. From the gentleness of magnetic folk songs to the rhetorical ferocity of rock, songs of protest remained both vigilant and relevant, adjusting continuously to their societal and political surroundings. And even though the Sixties zeitgeist and sound of protest seemed to disappear by the end of the 1960s, protest music continued to be this powerful entity that was continuously affected by its times and its sociopolitical surroundings (Cline and Weiner 95). Dylan’s recent single “Murder Most Foul” exemplifies that music indeed continues to merge with hard-hitting political truths. He created yet another sorrowful picture of the world, almost marking the final collapse of the American Dream (Shorrock). Recently, I also stumbled on an acoustic release by Steve Earle: “Times Like These”. As Earle poetically unravels the United States he sees before him, and critically engages with the “Trumpian Nightmare”, he also recalls the magnificent times of protest and unity that existed during the Sixties:

*We were marchin’ on Washington
Signing’ we shall overcome
Had a dream and the dream lives on
But we still got miles to go (Earle)*

The prowess of protest music produced and performed during the Sixties thus seems to be always apparent, even though its current-day topics and sounds continue to evolve. All in all, the American Sixties were the true decade of protest music. Protest music evolved from the gentle – and often magnetic - sounds of folk to the straightforward and more rhetorical sounds of rock. The examined songs of protest shaped the American musical landscape in a unique manner, and reflected on what was going on in society. And until today, it continues to do so.

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