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Isabelle Gillibrand

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A Different Master of War:
The Influence of the Folk Music Revival on the
Antiwar Movement during the Vietnam Era

Isabelle Gillibrand

Salve Regina University
Department of History
Senior Thesis
Dr. Neary

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“What did you hear, my blue-eyed son? What did you hear, my darling young one?”

-Bob Dylan, “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall,” 1963

In the midst of victorious rhetoric from the government, disturbing insight from the news media, and chaos from the protests, people heard the music of the Vietnam War era. The 1960s was known as a time of change, ranging from revised social norms to changing political stances to new popular music. Everyone seemed to have something to say about the war, musicians being no exception. The folk revival in the 1960s introduced young listeners to a different sound, one of rebellion and critical thought about their country. When Dylan asked “What did you hear?” to the “blue-eyed sons” and “darling young ones,” what much of the audience heard was criticism against the war sung by folk musicians, which later helped fuel the antiwar movement. Folk music sparked early antiwar sentiment, which contributed to the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War.

The United States was known for promoting patriotism and pride in prior wars, but the Vietnam War divided the nation. A major contributing factor to the division was the 1960s being a time of monumental political and social change. The antiwar movement was a result of many other social movements occurring simultaneously. For example, the antiwar movement coincided with the fight for civil rights as both expressed criticism against the force and oppression people felt the country imposed, such as the draft.¹ Another example of a concurring movement was the student movement, which advocated for students rights and freedoms.² People connected both the student and antiwar movements as fighting for individual choice and rebelling against the decisions that high-ranking officials appeared to set for them. The intertwined movements along

¹Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper, 2005), 484-485.

²Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, *Takin’ it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 163.

with the strong personal views held about the Vietnam War made the antiwar movement complicated. From the start of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, music played a part in public opinion and perceptions of the war.

The Folk Revival

The folk revival in the 1960s was a fresh take with which many young people connected. The new era of folk stemmed from the folk movement of the 1930s and 1940s during and following the Great Depression. Folk music was unique at the time because the songs had political messages and undertones, which was not the norm.³ Notable early folk musicians included Old Left figures like Woody Guthrie. Musicians like Guthrie served as the foundation for future folk musicians, including his son Arlo Guthrie, along with Bob Dylan who served as the face of the folk revival. The folk music of the 1930s and 1940s responded to the economic, political, and social turmoil during the era of the Great Depression in the late 1920s through the 1930s. Emphasized messages included a non-materialistic lifestyle and simplicity, which carried over into the later folk music. The folk revival came to be associated with the New Left, which challenged authority in similar ways as the original folk movement.⁴ A significant contrast between the two eras of folk was the 1960s folk revival appeared to express more freedom given the context of the time. The folk revival occurred when the United States experienced economic stability and prosperity, had a growing youth audience, and neared the end of the communist scare from McCarthyism. The context of the 1960s provided the folk revival more opportunity to publically criticize the government as opposed to the conditions of folk music during the 1930s

³Gary Cristall, "Depression Folk: Grassroots Music and Left-Wing Politics in 1930's America," *Labour/Le Travail* 79 (2017): 282. <https://ez-salve.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=123360244&site=ehost-live> (accessed August 1, 2019).

⁴Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *American Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178.

and 1940s when the nation faced the damage control of the Great Depression, the outbreak of World War II, and the fear of being blacklisted as a communist. The 1960s provided an environment for young people to express their opinions and use music to spread their messages.

Several developments shaped the genre and made the folk revival different from earlier folk music. The beginning of the folk revival in the late 1950s did not always provide the political commentary people expected from folk music. The early folk revival, with artists such as the Weavers, attempted to make a comeback with folk music in the age of McCarthyism and the scare of communism. Because people attacked folk musicians with a communist label, it stopped others in the music industry from working with the artists, which led to instability including trouble scheduling performances and more.⁵ Some folk artists labeled as dangerous had to adjust their music and lyric choices in order to protect themselves from not only a ruined career, but legal troubles. Topics temporarily shifted away from politics into styles such as ballads.⁶ For example, folk music transitioned from the clearly political lyrics of Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On?"⁷ fighting for unions in 1931 to the Weavers covering the comforting ballad of "Goodnight Irene" by the late 1950s.⁸ By incorporating safer and conformist topics into the songs, folk music appealed to a wider audience by limiting the fear of communist associations. Over time, folk culture gradually revived politics, an example being the Weavers and Pete Seeger as a solo artist each covering "Which Side Are You on?" in the 1960s.

⁵Ronald D. Cohen and Rachel Clare Donaldson, *Roots of the Revival: American and British Folk Music in the 1950s* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 36-39, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org.ez-salve.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt6wr5hf.1> (accessed October 13, 2019).

⁶ Ibid, 90-91.

⁷Florence Reece, the Almanac Singers, "Which Side Are You On?" *Classic Labor Songs from Smithsonian Folkways*, Spotify. Loyal Jones, "Florence Reece, Against the Current" *Appalachian Journal* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1984): 69-70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40932631> (accessed November 6, 2019).

⁸The Weavers, "Goodnight Irene," *Best of the Vanguard Years*, Vanguard Records, Spotify. Note that "Goodnight Irene" was written by Lead Belly in the late 1930s.

Folk music began to rise again with a new generation who later comprised the majority of the genre's audience.

The audience most attracted to the folk revival was young people who associated with an identity called the counterculture. The counterculture denounced the established social norms of conformity and consumerism to embrace new norms of individual expression and community. The youth who identified with the counterculture rebelled against the standards set for them by experimenting through a wide range of outlets, including music considered to be outside the mainstream. The counterculture attracted an audience of mainly white, middle-class, and educated teenagers and young adults. Folk, perceived as a rebellious genre of music in the early 1960s for eliciting the issues musicians saw in society, was a type of music to which the demographic flocked to and connected with deeply.

Because the folk revival grew in popularity from the 1950s into the mid-1960s, many young people grew up hearing the music's messages. The youth at the time had folk songs exposed to them to at a young age, which influenced their outlook on life and likely impacted how they later perceived the war. In his autobiography, Vietnam veteran John Ketwig said songs from the folk revival helped define his generation by speaking to the concerns with which they grew up.⁹ Ketwig's generation would later be titled the Baby Boom, comprised of Americans born between the end of World War II and 1964, the largest generation the United States had seen to date. The teenagers of this generation, who created and composed the counterculture, grew up with the threat of nuclear warfare and social tensions which both scared and puzzled them. According to Ketwig, "Hate wasn't the answer. Material goods weren't the answer. The

⁹John Ketwig, *...and a hard rain fell* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2002), 12.

church wasn't the answer. Get yourself a surfboard and a girl, ride a wave, do your thing, and don't hurt anybody."¹⁰

From the Baby Boomers' perspective, people should not focus on violence or hate towards one another because of the tremendous threats to their lives from the ongoing tensions created by the Cold War. The messages the folk musicians sang about spoke to this conflicted generation and gave them a sense of hope. When the threat of the U.S joining the war in Vietnam emerged in the mid-1960s, it went against much of what the youth believed in. The draft and killing opposed the "do your own thing" mentality they embodied.¹¹ Also, the military represented the conformity the young generation worked hard to defy. Folk music helped spark these ideas initially, then later provided the anthems and encouragement to the counterculture youth to use their own voices to oppose the war.

Numerous factors drew the counterculture crowd to folk music. The largest attractor to folk music was the fact it created a collective identity.¹² The basis for the collective identity was the emphasis on community, understanding, and acceptance of one another. Collective identity created the sense that people from all walks of life, regardless of whether or not someone was a musician, had a place and belonged in the folk community. Folk music appeared to be rooted in collective identity, as seen with the 1930s folk music shared among the musicians. Although there were songwriters within folk music, it was more common than not that folk musicians covered other artist's songs as their own hit. Take for example Peter, Paul and Mary making Seeger's "If I Had A Hammer" and Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" some of their most popular songs. Not only was performing cover songs the norm in folk music, but

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 109.

encouraged. Sharing songs not only meant the inclusion of more people in the community, but meant the continuation of the messages the original writers wanted to share as new artists kept the songs relevant. Along with musicians' song-sharing culture, there were participatory components involved with folk music, including easy-to-learn lyrics and instrumentals, which invited in the audience.¹³ By doing so, the listeners felt as if they had a bond with each other. The collective identity and participatory nature of the music built a connection with the musicians on a personal level and with other people in the folk audience.

Although the folk audience was small, there was a close connection among the group. The teenage demographic began to be recognized seriously during the mid-1950s with the rise of evolving teen culture, such as early rock-n-roll. It was within the older portion of this teenage demographic that folk music built a major audience through the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s.¹⁴ The audience related and bonded with each other over the shared experience of transitioning from older teenagers to young adults. By the 1960s, the teenage period of life was celebrated as a time in which an individual did not have to identify as a child or an adult; one could simply be, taking the time to experience and experiment.¹⁵ From the counterculture youth perspective, the folk scene was a place to do both and embrace this identity. Folk music was rejected by many outside the younger audience in the early 1960s due to some emerging artists, such as Bob Dylan, who were viewed as radical. However, since the audience was relatively small and contained to a specific group, there was opportunity to add more personality to the music.¹⁶ Because audience members appreciated individuality, they connected with these popular

¹³David E. James, "The Vietnam War and American Music," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 235.

¹⁴John Covach, "The Folk Revival," in *History of Rock, Part One*, Coursera video, 11:00, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/history-of-rock/lecture/YLO1y/the-folk-revival> (accessed August 1, 2019).

¹⁵Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 264.

¹⁶Eyeman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 107.

folk figures in an emotionally intimate way. Over time, the personal association led to a connection with song lyrics which discussed new perspectives and ideas. The fans then accepted the lyrics on a personal level and started advocating for the messages themselves.

The counterculture was typically used to describe the young, white, middle-class demographic in the post-World War II period, but there were different levels of counterculture. Counterculture included both those who were considered to be conventional but critical and those considered hippies, the carefree identity which evolved in the 1960s. In general, people who identified with the counterculture as a whole did so because they did not want to be a part of a culture perceived to be headed in the wrong direction.¹⁷ Both the conventional and hippies could agree on the idea of wrongness in 1960s culture; however, there was a disagreement between them about how to go about solving the issues. While hippies took the approach of not participating in mainstream culture, those who considered themselves more conventional wanted to face the issues head on.¹⁸ The conventional subset of the counterculture was the group who took the messages and ideas from folk music and used them to protest and unify people in support of the antiwar cause.

The Politics of Folk

One of the key components to the spread of folk music were public figures who represented the folk image and message. In a time in which many adults did not take young people seriously or listen to what they had to say, the folk musicians served as an outlet for their audience. Young people needed idols to look to, and folk musicians held an outlook similar to their own, which helped build a connection between the music and the audience. Folk music

¹⁷*Berkeley in the 60s*, directed by Mark Kitchell (Films Media Group, 2002), <https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=97698&xtid=141788> (accessed November 9, 2019).

¹⁸*Ibid.*

made demands similar to those of the counterculture, so the audience took the messages the artists sang about to heart.

Several figures symbolized and encapsulated the folk revival. Most notable was Bob Dylan, the shaggy-haired man from the Midwest who moved to New York City to start a career in music. Although perceived by many as socially awkward and an outcast, Dylan embodied characteristics with which the folk audience connected and respected. The fans saw Dylan as honest, rebellious, mysterious, and an image of a person they wanted to be.¹⁹ The raw emotion and individuality they believed Dylan symbolized juxtaposed the conformist standards of the 1950s rejected by the counterculture. Not only did Dylan's public appearance contribute to this image, but his lyrics did as well. Many of his songs from the folk revival period were about topics he felt needed to be brought to the forefront. Dylan wanted his music to make people ask daunting questions and be honest about the flaws he saw in society, such as the shortcomings in enforcing civil rights and the violence in American society.²⁰ Although fans later criticized Dylan for his outspokenness and rebellion against traditional folk when he "went electric" at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, it was this same quality that initially attracted people to Dylan. Much of the young, white, middle-class American audience saw a piece of themselves within him and his music to which they attached themselves, creating a bond which influenced them more as Dylan became a popular name.

People not only connected with the musicians themselves, but also the lyrics they sang. Folk artists communicated a clear message in their lyrics, leaving little room for interpretation.²¹ The effect was two-fold. First, this direct approach appealed to the audience because they valued

¹⁹Richard Fariña, "Baez and Dylan: A Generation Singing Out," in *The Age of Rock: Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution*, ed. Jonathan Eisen (New York: Vintage, 1969), 200.

²⁰Larry David Smith, *Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and American Song* (Westport, CT: Prager, 2002), 23.

²¹James, "The Vietnam War and American Music," 235.

transparency, which made them more apt to listen and take the lyrics into consideration. Second, many folk songs addressed current events or issues specifically, even focusing on concerns which may not have received extensive news coverage, to inform audiences of what the musicians believed was going on behind-the-scenes of the “establishment” controlled by those in authority and in high-ranking positions.²² If listeners were not paying attention to different issues prior to hearing the music, they were more inclined to pay attention after hearing it because their peers and idols focused on these issues as well. Dylan categorized folk music as “topical” songs instead of protests songs: rather than the music telling the audience what to believe, the message focused on why the topics were important.²³ The songs accomplished this through tactics such as asking rhetorical questions or being poetic in the description of something or someone specific in order to elicit an emotional response. Dylan was well-known for this; an example was his song “Blowin’ in the Wind,” made famous by the folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary. The lyrics asked questions like, “How many times must the cannon balls fly before they’re forever banned?” and “How many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?”²⁴ Although the song never mentioned a specific event, listeners likely associated the big-think questions with the issues and context of the time, mainly civil rights, given that Dylan wrote the song in the early 1960s. The questions from the song were reutilized in future years during the antiwar movement. The lyrics put vivid and disturbing images, such as violence, into the listeners’ minds, which forced them to be reflective about what was happening around them. The tactic remained relatively consistent with folk music during the antiwar movement itself, an example being Country Joe and the Fish’s antiwar folk-rock song “I Feel Like Fixin’ to Die Rag,” which asked

²²Ibid.

²³Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, From Billie Holiday to Green Day* (New York: Ecco, 2011), 55.

²⁴Bob Dylan, “Blowin’ in the Wind,” *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, Sony Music Entertainment, Spotify.

the audience the question outright, “What are we fighting for?”²⁵ Consequently, when folk artists began singing about topics relating to war, people began to take a stance on the Vietnam War even before direct American involvement began.

Before the United States sent troops to Vietnam, folk artists expressed their concerns, which in turn made their young audience question international intervention as well. Musicians discussed concerns with the military-industrial complex shaping the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s, and indirectly involving the U.S. in Vietnam. An example was Bob Dylan’s “Masters of War,” one of the most notable early antiwar songs. Released on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* album in 1963, Dylan expressed his frustrations and anger about the focus on militarization and the U.S. involvement in foreign entanglements, including Vietnam. The lyrics were vivid and arguably vulgar in their graphic imagery and unapologetic hate. Although the United States had not yet officially put troops on the ground in Vietnam, the song sparked concerns and criticisms about the U.S. military and made young people care about the topic. In one verse in the song, young Dylan shared his harsh criticisms:

How much do I know
To talk out of turn
You might say that I’m young
You might say I’m unlearned
But there’s one thing I know
Though I’m younger than you
Even Jesus would never
Forgive what you do²⁶

The lyrics themselves may have been aimed towards the military and government, but they also spoke to the young audience in a different sense. Dylan spoke to the listeners by saying they could educate themselves, hold strong opinions, and have the ability to speak out against

²⁵Country Joe McDonald, “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag,” *The Vietnam Experience*, Rag Baby Records, Spotify.

²⁶Bob Dylan, “Masters of War,” *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, Sony Music Entertainment, Spotify.

traditional establishment figures and ideas, too. Not only did Dylan introduce antiwar ideas to the minds of young people, he also encouraged them to use their own voices to express such ideas.

Folk's Place in the Marketplace

Folk music may not have been a mainstream genre initially, but it became an important part of popular culture during the 1960s. However, folk music did not skyrocket on the music charts at the time. For instance, in 1963 and 1964, which many people consider to be the height of the folk revival, folk music had little to no presence on the “Billboard Hot 100” chart, and the largest streak on the “Billboard 200” album chart for folk music was Peter, Paul, and Mary when they topped the list for six weeks at the end of 1963.²⁷ The evidence questions how influential the voices of the folk revival were at the time. If they were so important to popular culture, why did the songs not regularly make the charts? Although folk artists did not dominate the top spot on these charts, they had a constant place within them. Take, for example, Bob Dylan. Dylan released *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* in the middle of 1963. The album fluctuated spots within the “Billboard 200” for thirty-two weeks, and secured a spot in the top quarter of the chart several times; the album only dropped from the chart after the release of Dylan's third album, *The Times They Are A'Changin'*, which provided new social movement anthems.²⁸ Folk artists consistently attracted people to their music and always had someone new listening; the folk audience may have been small, but with continuous listenership the music made a gradual, yet powerful, impact.

To understand the folk revival's impact on the antiwar movement, it is important to analyze the perspectives of the youth who identified as radicals within the movement. The folk

²⁷“Billboard 200-1963 Archive,” *Billboard*, <https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1963/billboard-200> (accessed April 29, 2019).

²⁸Ibid.

revival's popularity gradually decreased in the mid-1960s, yet intertwined itself in the antiwar movement, which grew in the late 1960s. Both the folk revival and the antiwar movement radicals held similar characteristics and values; collective identity, personal connections, individuality, and self-reflection. According to Kenneth Keniston, who extensively studied a group of radicals involved in the U.S antiwar movement in 1967 during an activist period called the Vietnam Summer, the consensus among participants was that their relationships with others, group effort, and cooperation were the keys to being successful.²⁹ Radicals involved with the antiwar movement believed their strength stemmed from sharing similar values and working cooperatively as a single unit, much like the folk revival musicians and audience did. In addition, a personal trait shared by many of the radicals studied by Keniston was an emphasis on self-reflection and analysis of what was going on around them and how they fit into it.³⁰ The Baby Boomers experienced significant changes from their parents' generation following the end of World War II and during the era of the Cold War; consequently, the generation was no longer able to look to their parents for guidance. Rather, they needed to learn and make sense of new ideologies for themselves. Folk music helped with this by promoting big-think questions about society, authority, and oneself. Although there were many factors which contributed to the commonalities, such as demographics and background, growing up with folk music likely had an influence on how people behaved and thought as they grew older. What they heard and witnessed firsthand through folk music and performers likely was carried with them into their adulthood.

Folk music was also relevant to the antiwar movement because it provided public figures for young people to look up to. Another observation Keniston recognized in the young radicals

²⁹Keniston, *Young Radicals*, 27 and 32.

³⁰Ibid, 81.

was learning from those they considered models.³¹ Role models not only gave folk audiences a sense of what commitment to the movement was, but what it looked like. Folk artists, especially ones like Dylan, were some of the most prominent models for the young generation. The teenagers invested in the folk revival portrayed early Dylan, prior to the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, as a hero. He was their voice for some time, and he inspired them to share their seemingly radical opinions unapologetically as he did in his songs. For some, he might have been their introduction to these radical ideas, and, for others, he symbolized dedication to a cause and allowed people to feel like they were a part of a like-minded community and a movement.

The Influence of Folk

The folk revival reached and influenced the music's audience and the antiwar movement; however, consider the composition of the group. In both the folk revival and the antiwar movement, the people most notable in each group were mostly white and male. The initial artists who come to mind were artists like Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger, both white men. Women played a role in folk music, too, including Joan Baez and Mary Travers from Peter, Paul and Mary, but they were the exception and most notable when partnered with a male act.³² Female musicians wrote folk protest hits, including Malvina Reynolds who composed "Little Boxes," but the song was made famous by Pete Seeger, her songwriting credit lost as the song grew in popularity.³³ People of color participated in the folk revival as well, both as musicians and audience members, but in small numbers. An example was Lead Belly, a folk and blues artist who wrote popular songs, including "Goodnight Irene," which were most often associated with white artists like the

³¹Ibid, 135-143.

³²Mary with the other two men in the trio, and Joan Baez when she was on stage with guests like Dylan.

³³"Reynolds, Malvina (1900-1978)," *Harvard Square Library*, <https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/malvina-reynolds/> (accessed November 6, 2019).

Weavers. Granted, in both the cases of “Little Boxes” and “Goodnight Irene,” it was the norm for folk artists to cover and share songs. However, the mentality of the times spoke volumes as people were able to identify the songs written by a white man, like Bob Dylan, but credit was not apparent for female musicians or musicians of color. The small number of racial minorities may have been a result of the times in the midst of the civil rights movement. Racism was still prevalent in the United States, which put minorities at a disadvantage when breaking through into the music industry or being able to have access to consuming the music itself. The evidence raises the question of whether the folk audience was as diverse, open, and meaningful as the music’s message appeared to be.

Similar patterns appeared with activists highly involved in the antiwar movement as well. From the young radicals whom Keniston studied, the demographics of the group were fairly consistent: all were white, mainly came from middle-class families, and eleven out of the fourteen observed in the study were men.³⁴ Although the radicals tried to expand their efforts to minority groups, the only representation within the Vietnam Summer radicals was white, and most were males.³⁵ Many components contributed to the antiwar movement, but it seemed only to become a recognized movement once the middle-class, white male demographic was heavily affected. Although one of the major drivers of the antiwar movement was the skewed draft, which appeared to target minority groups, the movement gained most of its traction once the white, middle-class men felt affected when the government became less lenient on college deferments.³⁶ The race component might have helped strengthen the antiwar movement by

³⁴Ibid, 13-14.

³⁵Ibid, 6.

³⁶Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, “Resolve (January 1966-June 1967)” in *The Vietnam War, Netflix*, 1:54.

expanding the movement's appeal to other demographics, but the main motivation was not to fight for racial equality; it was to save young, white, middle-class men from the draft.

Although the audiences for both folk music and the antiwar movement tended to be skewed towards the white, middle-class male demographic, both groups influenced the general public and changed the once-patriotic narrative. The United States was not yet involved in the Vietnam War when the folk revival was in its prime, but it sparked antiwar ideas in the minds of the young Baby Boomers before the war felt relevant to them. Many folk songs conveyed a message of nonviolence and expressed individuality, even when focused on other topics. Antiwar messages were not being directly expressed, but folk music planted the first seeds of antiwar thought into the minds of young people.

The conventional counterculture which intertwined with both the folk audience and later the antiwar movement used folk songs as the anthems to the cause. For example, the antiwar movement used folk songs for the movement's purpose during a strike at the University of California, Berkeley in 1966. The crowd sang both the folk-rock song "Yellow Submarine" by the Beatles and the traditional folk song "Solidarity Forever."³⁷ The two songs encompassed the ideas of unity and the power in numbers. According to an interview with one of the Berkeley demonstrators, "We take this music seriously and there's a meaning which everyone can interpret," and said, specifically regarding "Yellow Submarine," how, "It's an understanding. We're banding together in a yellow submarine, and it represents a new way of looking at life."³⁸ The songs the protestors of the antiwar movement used may not have always been directly

³⁷*Berkeley in the 60s*, directed by Mark Kitchell, <https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=97698&xtid=141788>. According to the Industrial Workers of the World, "Solidarity Forever" was originally written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915. The melody of the song was borrowed from "Battle Hymn of the Republic," a song thought of today as a rallying and activist tune. The song was later covered and popularized in folk music by Pete Seeger.

³⁸*Ibid.*

related to war, but they were important to the cause as the messages of the songs encouraged other important components to the movement's success, which included standing together as a united front and being open to change. By singing, gathering, and bonding with others around a message, the songs gave a sense of understanding and empowerment to the group of young activists.

Another important component was how the folk artists themselves felt about their own music and being wrapped into the new subcategory of "political music." Although the antiwar activists resonated with them as protest anthems, not all folk musicians meant for that to be the case. Dylan was a common example. He was a complicated figure who rarely let the public, his fans included, know what he was actually thinking. Dylan did not want to be overanalyzed in his image or his lyrics. When reporters asked him about deeper meanings and what he symbolized, Dylan often became sarcastic and noticeably irritated in how he answered.³⁹ Consequently, it was hard to tell whether or not Dylan accepted the "idol" role bestowed on him. On the other hand, he also responded in such a way in which he seemed to know and accept the role, even if not outwardly. For example, when a reporter asked Dylan why he was hard on people in his lyrics, Dylan simply responded, "I want to needle them."⁴⁰ Dylan was a vague character, so it was difficult to know exactly what he meant by the statement, as he did not elaborate past those four words. However, one interpretation of the statement was Dylan wanted to call certain people out and prod those he referred to in his songs to say something in response. Statements like these could imply that as much as Dylan tried to put on a front, he did genuinely care about the causes and issues he sang about and knew his platform could make a difference.

³⁹Bob Dylan, "What Do You Want Me to Say?" by Gen Fong-Torres in *Rolling Stones Interviews Vol. 2*, 1967, 16.

⁴⁰Ibid, 14.

A similar mindset appeared to ring true for a number of the notable folk and folk-rock artists associated with political music at the time. Country Joe McDonald, lead singer of Country Joe and the Fish, summarized the mindset in an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine: “See, there’s a mistake made a lot of times — people think that I’m a political activist. I’m not. I’m a musician who plays for the left wing, because they have a lot of things I dig.”⁴¹ Many of the musicians were not interested in being directly involved with political activism and protest; however they shared similar ideals and feelings with the counterculture, and music offered a way to cope. Critics questioned the authenticity of the musicians and whether they simply fed into the rising counterculture seeking stardom, but the everyday actions of the musicians along with their songs appeared as if the artists did it for themselves. An early example is when the United States government blacklisted prominent folk artist Pete Seeger during the McCarthy Era as a communist, yet Seeger persevered and continued to perform as usual. Dylan was also known for doing what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it without asking for approval. When Dylan’s set list was rejected by the *Ed Sullivan Show*, one of the most popular variety television programs at the time, he cancelled the performance.⁴² Dylan put enough thought into his songs and why he wanted to sing them that he dismissed an opportunity for a large, nation-wide audience if it meant compromising who he was as an artist. Even if the folk artists were not always vocal about being political figures, they cared enough about what they were doing and saying with their music to do so, even if it led to repercussions. The work of the folk musicians spoke louder to the young activists than public relations did. The actions of the folk artists and their songs were influential to the antiwar movement and the future of protest music.

⁴¹“Country Joe McDonald And the Psychedelic Fish” by David Felton and Tony Glover in *Rolling Stone Interviews Vol. 2*, 1971, 191.

⁴²Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute*, 59.

The Lasting Legacy

When reflecting on folk music's influence on the antiwar movement, the majority of researchers reached a consensus. Many of the scholars agreed that folk music and artists laid the groundwork for early antiwar sentiment and the music which evolved later in the antiwar movement.⁴³ Scholars perceived folk as an accessible genre from the music itself to the musicians who led the folk revival. The accessibility and relatability of folk music and musicians encouraged participation from audiences, allowing people to gain a better understanding and connection to the music's messages. The lyrics of the songs were direct and created a vivid image of what the musicians wanted to share, which also contributed to a strong personal connection between the audience and performer. Much of the scholarly research done on folk music and the antiwar movement was completed relatively close to the end of the Vietnam War, published in the 1980s and 1990s. The secondary literature, the availability of more primary research sources like oral histories and interviews, and a significant time lapse from the end of the Vietnam War make clear the long term effect of the folk revival. Folk music laid the groundwork for protest music going forth, which carried into the Vietnam antiwar movement and beyond into contemporary music. In the words of Pete Seeger, "There's no Gallup poll you can take which would really be meaningful," to prove how much folk music impacted antiwar thought and protest music, yet the influence is qualitatively seen in how the antiwar movement used the music and how the folk revival affected protest music going forward.⁴⁴

⁴³Scholars and secondary literature which I considered to be the greatest influences on my research included Dorian Lynskey's *33 Revolutions Per Minute*, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison's *Music and Social Movements*, and David E. James's chapter, "The Vietnam War and American Music," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*. These scholars introduced key ideas including collective identity, participatory components and the methods, like rhetorical questioning, which impacted the influence of folk music at the time.

⁴⁴David King Dunaway and Molly Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of American's Folk Music Revivals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 193, https://ez-salve.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=312250&site=ehost-live&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover (accessed November 9, 2019).

Some of the young audience members who resonated with the folk revival music eventually grew up to be heroes of the rock genre. The folk music which grew with the generation of future rock musicians helped shape these musicians' values and beliefs, which later came out in their own music. A prominent example includes John Fogerty, the lead singer from Creedence Clearwater Revival, the band known for the antiwar anthem "Fortunate Son." Fans know Fogerty as a rock artist; however, one of his greatest influences was the folk revival. In his autobiography, Fogerty discussed how attending folk concerts shaped many of his views on the world, stating how "...these weren't just concerts: they were an education."⁴⁵ Like many in his generation, he did not follow the status quo of 1950s life, and was interested in learning about these seemingly radical ideas being discussed by folk musicians like antiwar, equality for all, and so on. As previously mentioned, many of the musicians of the folk revival in the 1960s shared a purpose to elicit serious conversations about large-scale issues as opposed to gaining a wide fan base and popularity. By the musicians taking these matters seriously, audiences felt encouraged to do the same. Fogerty spoke in-depth about the influence of folk musicians like Pete Seeger. Fogerty admired that Seeger spoke his mind, and he felt like he connected with Seeger's ideas because Seeger conveyed messages through song rather than a lecture.⁴⁶ Folk music became a significant part of Fogerty's life at a young age, thus staying with him throughout his career. Fogerty is only one example of a firsthand account showing how the folk revival made a lifelong impact.

Many rock artists during the time of the antiwar movement credited folk music with influencing their messages or the rock scene during the mid-1960s as a whole. Roger McGuinn, lead singer of the Byrds, noted in an interview with *Rolling Stone* that 1960s and 1970s rock

⁴⁵John Fogerty, *Fortunate Son* (New York: Bay Back, 2015), 56.

⁴⁶Ibid, 58.

stemmed from folk music.⁴⁷ Although rock music existed prior to the folk revival, folk music led the charge of making music more political. Earlier rock 'n' roll musicians, including Elvis Presley, rarely mentioned politics in their music, especially in their beginning of their careers. Rock music was taboo because it grew out of Black culture in a time of rampant racism in the United States, along with expressing overt sexuality when conformity and conventionalism were the norms. The rock 'n' roll industry viewed engaging in more controversial areas, including politics, as risky by potentially leading to lower sales and listenership; so rock tended to avoid the discussion altogether. Without folk music setting the stage in the early 1960s, showing how an audience engaged with popular, politically based songs, some of the rock protest songs may never have been popular during the antiwar movement.

Folk music may not be a prominent genre today, but the effects can still be heard in current music. The 2016 election of President Donald Trump created a tense political climate in the United States, which led musicians to speak out. Musicians across different genres have criticized President Trump and issues in his administration through their work. A popular example is Kendrick Lamar and his 2017 album *DAMN*, in which he criticized the president along with issues of racism and race relations in the United States. Songs like "XXX. FEAT. U2" discussed racial inequality, gun violence, and political corruption to name a few topics within the four-minute song, while "DNA" focused mainly on Black pride. Lamar is popular for being political in his music, yet still is a prominent artist in the industry, having thirty-seven songs on the "Billboard Hot 100," fourteen of which were "Top 10 Hits" and two of which were

⁴⁷Roger McGuinn, "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star," by Ed Ward, *Rolling Stone Interviews Vol. 2*, 1970, 89.

“No. 1 Hits.”⁴⁸ Although the genres and artists significantly changed and evolved throughout the years, the presence and spirit of folk music has not.

Several trends in contemporary political music show the impact and influence of the folk revival in contemporary music. First, “Trump-Era music” discusses similar topics as the folk revival, including racism, feminism, and nonviolence, which reveals recurring issues in American society. Second, identity politics continues to play a major role in political music. During the folk revival, the identity focused on aspects like the age gap, whereas today’s music emphasizes identities such as race or gender.⁴⁹ The identities of the musicians continue to be a bonding factor with their audiences. Last, the purpose of protest music continues to be “[to] make people feel not alone.”⁵⁰

Protest music was never a direct causation to major political and social change; however, that was never the purpose. Instead, music served as an outlet for people to express their thoughts. Musicians became idols for their audiences to look to for examples and to assure people they were not isolated. Music was and continues to be a way to bring people together and create a bonded community with people who share similar interests and ideas. Essentially, music helps prepare people for something larger. From there, people can use these communities to mobilize and share ideas they believe in with others. Preparing confidence and a voice was what the folk revival served to many young people in the 1960s and what a variety of music genres continue doing today.

⁴⁸Kendrick Lamar Chart History,” *Billboard*, <https://www.billboard.com/music/kendrick-lamar/chart-history/rap-song/2> (accessed November 6, 2019).

⁴⁹Spencer Kornhaber, “The Trump Protest-Song Boom, in the Eye of History,” *The Atlantic*, January 15, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/trump-protest-music-one-year-dorian-lynskey/550268/> (accessed September 11, 2019).

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

Along with noticeable trends originating from folk music, the traditions of the folk revival continue to be celebrated today. After a period of financial struggle and instability after the 1970s, the Newport Folk Festival revived itself in the 2000s by incorporating a broader range of music genres. Although the festival now presents genres outside traditional folk music, each year the festival finds ways to honor the tradition of the musicians who started it all and the roots of folk. In 2019, Colin Meloy from the Decemberists and the Milk Carton Kids covered Woody Guthrie's classic "This Land Is Your Land" and Kermit the Frog closed the festival with "Rainbow Connection," both which were simplistic with a basic stage set up and instrumentals and resulted in an audience-wide singalong with the popular and recognizable lyrics.⁵¹ The simplistic and communal experience set by the folk revival carried on into today's culture, showing how people and music fans alike consider these traits worthwhile. Folk music continues to show the power of song and power of the people.

Although not accepted into the mainstream in the early 1960s, folk music played an important role in influencing the antiwar movement in its early stages. The research showed how the impact of folk music on antiwar sentiment was not direct, but rather seeped its way into different aspects of people's lives and was a constant presence when the folk revival and the antiwar movement overlapped.⁵² The music and its leading figures did not instantly change people's thoughts, rather the music over time connected more with the audience and made them question the topics of the songs.

⁵¹"This Land is Your Land- Colin Meloy and the Milk Carton Kids close out Newport Folk Festival," *YouTube* video, 8:08, posted by "Anna Ballantyne," July 28, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM_ZcDQ2_w8 and "Rainbow Connection- Kermit The Frog + Jim James (Newport Folk Festival)," *YouTube* video, 3:15, posted by "The Latest Noise," July 28, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=46&v=tKhpVMq6wVE&feature=emb_logo.

⁵²Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 108.

Folk music served as one of the first outlets for counterculture youth to find their voice and learn more about social, political, and cultural debates, which mainstream thought downplayed. The folk revival emphasized collective identity to the young counterculture audience, which they used to mobilize when needed once the U.S involvement in the Vietnam War began during the mid-1960s. By having a large and connected audience, the group gained a voice to spread the values of nonviolence and peace. Last, and maybe most importantly, folk music gave the audience the confidence that they could have a voice aside from the musicians and the music. In an oral history interview, Arlo Guthrie stated, “As far as I can tell, the real practical benefit of seeing people sing together is if they can learn to sing together they can probably learn to do other things together,” including mobilizing for political, social, and cultural causes.⁵³ The models and the messages of folk music contributed a sense of power for the young audience to break from conformity and to express individual thought with the support of a united community. The music served as their initial outlet, but eventually gave the audience the skills and confidence to take activism into their own hands during the antiwar movement.

In 2019, the Vietnam War is still a contested topic. People who lived through the era are still at odds about whether the war was morally right or wrong, and those who learn about the war today are often confused because of its complexity. More than four decades later, the United States appears still to be coping. Today, there is a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Moving Wall, which temporarily sets up a replica of the Washington D.C. memorial in communities across the country as a way for people to reflect on, learn about, and remember the war. When strolling through one of these displays, one sees people from all walks of life. Children are playing in the

⁵³Dunaway and Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of American's Folk Music Revivals*, 196, https://ez-salve.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=312250&site=ehost-live&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover (accessed November 9, 2019).

grass, while parents and grandparents search for and browse the names which line the panels of the wall. The area is silent as visitors walk along the path of thousands upon thousands of names honoring soldiers who died during the Vietnam War. Some of the attendees are veterans honoring their fellow soldiers, others are there to reflect on the intense era which they lived through, and others are trying to understand the complexity and severity surrounding a war which often still evokes strong and contradictory reactions. In Ketwig's words, "a hard rain fell" on the United States during the Vietnam War, and people continue to seek answers of what to do with the memory of the devastating and unattractive time in American history. To all the visitors and the thousands of people memorialized on the wall who were affected by the Vietnam War era, Bob Dylan might ask this: What did you hear?

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