“STOP, CHILDREN, WHAT’S THAT SOUND?”: AMERICAN COUNTER-CULTURE, ROCK ’N’ ROLL, AND THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

The Vietnam War is often remembered as the first rock 'n' roll war.[1] Rock 'n' roll music has become synonymous with the war and the culture of Vietnam. A common observation of this claim is evident in the various films about the Vietnam War, almost all of which include a soundtrack of "Vietnam rock."[2] Films such as *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Forrest Gump* (1994) are just a few examples of cinematic films that utilized the relationship between rock music and the Vietnam War.[3] This soundtrack consists of rock music ranging from the traditional rock 'n' roll style of *The Rolling Stones*, to the folk-rock ballads of Bob Dylan, to the psychedelic infusions of *The Doors*, and the counter-culture anthems of *Creedence Clearwater Revival*. The soundtrack of Vietnam consists of songs that represent a generation and have, in the process, become part of the cultural identity of the Vietnam War.

Why have certain songs become synonymous with Vietnam? What role did rock 'n' roll music play in the narrative of the Vietnam War? What allowed for rock music to play an important role throughout the Vietnam War? These are the questions that must be asked when analyzing the relationship between rock and Vietnam. Of course, there were many songs written explicitly in protest of Vietnam, such as Country Joe McDonald's "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die" (1965) or *Creedence Clearwater Revival's* "Fortunate Son" (1969).[4] However, there were many other rock songs in the Vietnam generation that conveyed no clear reference to Vietnam,

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[1] Philip D. Beidler, *Late Thoughts on and Old War: The Legacy of Vietnam* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 103.

[2] Ibid., 104.

[3] Ibid., 104-106.

[4] Doug Bradley, and Craig Werner, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack to the Vietnam War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 5-6.

yet resonated well among GIs and the counter-culture youth in regards to war. The connection between rock and the Vietnam War has less to do with antiwar protest or war references, and more to do with the elements of war and the interpretation of the music in response to these elements. That is not to say that songs written in reference to Vietnam were not effective or popular during the war, however explicit reference did not make one song more relatable to the war than others. In many cases, the connection was personal. Rock songs written about Vietnam did not solidify the relationship between rock and the Vietnam experience, rather themes of the Vietnam War are responsible for formulating a connection between song and war.

Themes of Vietnam vary extensively as a result of the tumultuous nature of the 1960s. The 1960s brought several over-arching themes to the United States, including racial divide, class conflict, and the Cold War. These themes were a result of ongoing conflicts since the 1940s. Segregation was debated in the early 1950s, and class conflict became more evident with the rise of middle-class America in the prosperous postwar period.[5] Fear of communism and nuclear warfare dominated the early Cold War era, striking fear and uncertainty into much of the United States in the 1950s. The American counter-culture youth materialized in a society dominated by these themes, as did the rock 'n' roll genre. The evolution of rock 'n' roll music in the 1950s and 1960s alongside the baby boom generation formulated a relationship between counter-culture and youth. After all, rock 'n' roll music often embodied rebellion of traditional values of a 1950s culture built on post-World War II sentiment, national pride, and economic rejuvenation in the 1940s and 1950s. Baby boomers of the early Cold War era embraced consumer-culture, mass entertainment, and a more liberal "teenage" lifestyle, allowing for the

[5] Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-style in Modern American* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 65.

growth of rock 'n' roll as popular music. With the emergence of the New Left in the early 1960s and their embrace of the rock genre, rock 'n' roll quickly became the most popular genre of music in the United States. Moreover, the counter-culture role models that surfaced as a result of the New Left and the popularity of rock 'n' roll further legitimized the relationship between the so-called Silent Generation of the 1950s and popular music.[6] By the late-1960s, when the United States was as the height of its involvement in Vietnam, the counter-culture generation became the most important demographic in the antiwar movement, bringing rock 'n' roll along with it.[7]

This research paper will analyze the impact that rock 'n' roll music had on the Vietnam generation - whether in Vietnam or at home - beginning with the war and stretching through the post-Vietnam era. While rock music was certainly important during the years of war, the genre has embraced themes of Vietnam well after the fall of Saigon in an effort to reinforce the legacy of the war, and the effects the war had on the country. Post-Vietnam themes found in rock music often include mental health, the homecoming experience and treatment of Vietnam veterans, and the memory of the war as a loss.

This essay will include a brief background of the Vietnam War, as well as the rise of the counter-culture generation and rock 'n' roll music in the 1950s and 1960s. The purpose of this inclusion is to reveal how the evolution of the counter-culture generation allowed for rock 'n' roll to develop into popular music, and later impact the Vietnam generation. Without the emergence of the New Left and the Silent Generation in the early 1960s, the relationship between rock music and Vietnam may not have formulated the way it has.

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[6] Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 7.

[7] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 91-94.

This project will then analyze the integral role that rock ‘n’ roll music played in the Vietnam experience. Using numerous musicians, groups, and rock sub-genres, this essay will demonstrate how individual and personal themes of the Vietnam experience - not just the songs about Vietnam - formulated a permanent relationship between rock ‘n’ roll music and the Vietnam War. This study will also indicate how the relationship between rock and Vietnam established rock ‘n’ roll music as a core component of the American experience of the Vietnam War. Through the relationship between rock music and Vietnam, this essay will portray how popular music can be used to provide historical context to specific time periods. This study will also provide insight to how the use of popular music, and popular culture as a whole, can influence memory and the understanding of historical perspective.

Chapter 1: The Development of Counter-Culture and the Vietnam War

American Counter-Culture in the 1950s

The post-World War II, baby boom generation grew up in a 1950s culture that epitomized the American Dream; they grew up in a culture filled with optimism, prosperity, and consumption.[8] Yet, while suburban America appeared to prosper, the reality of the country included fear of communist threat and the Cold War, class conflict, and deep racism.[9] The baby boom generation also grew up alongside changes in society, including the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War politics. By the 1960s, the image of "traditional" America was misleading.[10] As a result, numerous cultural and political changes emerged and by the 1960s, postwar America was faltering. Cultural historian Bill Osgerby has written,

> "Even at the heart of the American Way, misgivings were beginning to register – cracks quickly appearing in suburbia's façade of happy abundance. By the end of the 1950s the postwar revival of mass consumption, initially celebrated as a benchmark of American progress and modernity, was prompting unease... During the early 1960s the spectacle of fun-filled teenage consumption had arisen in conjunction with the wider climate of confident optimism that attended Kennedy's 'New Frontier' and its promise of inexhaustible economic growth and social harmony."[11]

As the 1950s came to an end, the baby boom generation dominated American culture, and by the 1960s, baby boomers had a major influence on both culture and politics.

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[8] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore and Thomas J. Sugrue, *These United States: A Nation in the Making, 1890 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), 330-334.

[9] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (Basic Books: New York, 2008), 8-9.

[10] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise,* 62-64.

[11] Ibid., 70, 180.

The baby boom generation saw a 53 percent increase in the number of Americans aged eighteen to twenty-four between the 1950s and 1960s; there were over twenty-four million Americans aged eighteen to twenty-four group in the 1960s, up from fifteen million in the 1950s. This major demographic increase, along with an increased emphasis on education in the 1950s, led to the expansion of the American college system in the early 1960s.[12] In the 1960s, millions of baby boomers filled college universities across the country, many of which were led by a group of intellectuals collectively known as the New Left.[13] An increase in education effectively brought the baby boom generation into the political sphere in the 1960s. Emerging from this equation is one of the most important political organizations of the 1960s, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Drafting the famous Port Huron Statement in 1962, the SDS proclaimed to seek an "egalitarian, free and participatory society through our political activities and insights." By the end of the 1960s, SDS had more than 100,000 members.[14] Political organizations such as the SDS became vital to the counter-culture generation of the 1960s.

Emerging from the 1950s was a generation of baby boomers that would collectively come to be known as the counter-culture generation. Developing in response to post-World War Two ideology and mass consumption in the 1950s, the counter-culture generation challenged societal norms and beliefs. Historian Christopher Gair characterizes the counter-culture by the "continual re-questioning of hegemonic ideas about America," in his book, *The American Counterculture.*[15] Influenced by members of the Beat Generation in the 1950s, such as authors

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[12] Ibid., 92.

[13] DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 40.

[14] Maurice Isserman, "You Don't Need a Weatherman but a Postman Can Be Helpful," in *Give Peace A Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, ed. Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 23.

[15] Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 10.

Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, the counter-culture grew larger amidst the Civil Rights Movement and leadership under President Kennedy. Participating in political protests and peaceful demonstrations across the country, the counter-culture generation consisted mainly of young, baby boom Americans. Although similar to the New Left, and sometimes associated with one another, there was distinction between the counter-culture and New Left. While the New Left was rooted in politics, the counter-culture embraced the culture and arts to a larger extent.[16] As the counter-culture generation filled college campuses in the 1960s, various political organizations were established to promote counter-culture efforts.

By 1964, more than 150,000 Americans belonged to peace organizations, a number that doubled from the previous year.[17] Organizations such as the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) addressed Cold War policy.[18] Two other groups headlined by the baby boom generation were the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which first appeared in 1960, and Women Strike for Peace (WSP) which was formed in 1961.[19] The rise of political peace organizations in the 1950s and 1960s represented the growth of Kennedy's "New Frontier," and became known as the New Left.[20] The New Left emerged amidst growing dissent for American society in the 1950s, and offered fresh critiques of political culture and society in the United States. Collectively, the New Left took a radical approach to issues facing the United States at home and abroad. The New Left gradually grew as college students, activists, and intellectuals began to inter-connect to

[16] Ibid., 8-10.
[17] Small, *Antiwarriors,* 9.
[18] DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal,* 31.
[19] Ibid., 54.
[20] Ibid., 67.

discuss Cold War politics and social conflicts, such as nuclear warfare and civil rights.[21] The growth of these organizations and the New Left revealed the strength of college-aged baby boomers in terms of numbers and ideology. As the conflict in Vietnam escalated, several political peace groups centered their focus on the antiwar movement.

The growth of the baby boom generation also promoted growth in consumer markets in the 1950s and 1960s. One consumer-market in particular that blossomed with baby boomers was popular music. Rock 'n' roll music, with its "rebellious exuberance" and "sexual explicitness," attracted millions of teenage Americans in the 1950s.[22] Rock 'n' roll icons such as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley exploded onto the music scene in the mid-1950s. Early rock 'n' roll music fused several genres together, such as pop, country, and blues, to create an energetic and electric sound. Early rock also derived from multi-racial roots, providing listeners with a cultural blend in an era that still saw widespread racial divide.[23] The energetic nature of early rock 'n' roll music was also met with hints of sexuality, attracting the attention of America's youth. Early rock music quickly became a cultural phenomenon among the baby boom generation.[24]

Baby boomers embraced rock 'n' roll music as both entertainment and as a culture. Parents often viewed rock 'n' roll culture as a dangerous fad, arguing that rock culture glorified sexuality, rebellion, and "juvenile delinquency," all of which were sometimes viewed as a threat to society.[25] In fact, rock 'n' roll music simply brought more attention to these themes in the

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[21] Ibid., 40.

[22] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 94.

[23] Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 240-245.

[24] Robert C. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll: The Rise of America's 1960s Counterculture* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 44.

[25] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 94.

1950s; for decades, popular music entertained topics of sexuality and rebellion.[26] While occasionally over-exaggerated, the argument against rock culture contained a kernel of truth; rock culture was certainly rebellious. After all, rock music epitomized 1950s counter-conformity and often coincided with the concept of the American anti-hero portrayed in popular teenage films such as *The Wild One* (1954) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).[27] As one historian has written, "Fifties youth saw themselves in a new way: as a generation defined in opposition to the stodgy culture of their parents'…It was the precondition for the youth rebellions that would explode in American cities and on American campuses throughout the 1960s."[28] The relationship between rock 'n' roll music and youth counter-culture developed well into the 1960s.

The counter-culture generation embraced rock 'n' roll music in the 1960s that helped the expansion of both the rock genre and counter-culture beliefs. The American counter-culture generation followed the music of folk artists such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, later developing relationships with experimental rock groups such as *The Grateful Dead* ("Deadheads") and *Jefferson Airplane*, developing a special relationship with what Christopher Gair titles the "San Francisco Sound." In the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, hippies and counter-culture youth embraced music and drug culture, establishing a mecca for hippie culture and experimental rock music in the mid-to-late 1960s.[29] Yet, as the counter-culture generation was developing in the early 1960s, rock 'n' roll music took the country by storm. By 1964, the rock and roll industry grew to become the most popular genre of music in the United States. Rock bands such

[26] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 125.
[27] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 95.
[28] Gilmore and Sugrue, *These United States*, 350.
[29] Gair, *The American Counterculture,* 170-172.

as *The Beatles*, *The Animals*, and *The Beach Boys* dominated the *Billboard* singles chart in 1964.[30] Throughout the 1960s, hundreds of musicians took advantage of the genre's popularity, dominating the American music scene. Other musicians blended rock 'n' roll with existing styles of music, resulting in various sub-genres of rock music such as folk-rock, southern-rock, and psychedelic-rock.[31] As rock music continued to grow and develop in the 1960s, it did so alongside the unraveling of the Vietnam conflict.

Generational Differences Between World War Two and Vietnam

In the 1960s, among the radical New Left and growing counter-culture, many young Americans began to question several post-World War Two concepts in the United States. The belief that the United States was a model nation providing peace and liberty across the world was slowly fading.[32] This shift suggests that there was a certain view of the United States in the postwar period following the Second World War: a perspective of prosperity, responsibility of leadership, and acceptance of the country's Cold War role as the protector of freedom. While many American youth were embracing a new perspective of the United States, a divide was forming between two generations. The older generations, who experienced the Great Depression, World War Two, and postwar prosperity, held a much different view of the United States than the younger generation. Older generations of Americans witnessed the United States climb from economic depression to world leaders, while most of the younger generation only

[30] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – 1964 Archive," *Billboard* Charts Archives, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1964/hot-100 (accessed April 10, 2017).

[31] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 123-136.

[32] Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and our National Identity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 228-9.

experienced the prosperous times.[33] However, as conflict unfolded at home and abroad, the younger generation recognized that the image of the United States they grew up believing was not reality.

The generational differences between World War II and Vietnam proved to have an influence on how the Vietnam War and the American military was perceived by the baby boom generation. Christian Appy argues that the Vietnam generation was one of the most patriotic generations ever raised in the United States.[34] However, in the 1960s, there was a substantial decrease in overall military involvement. Historian Christian Appy states that:

> "During World War II virtually all young, able-bodied men entered service-some 12 million…Throughout the Korean War years and for several years after, roughly 70 percent of the draft-age population of men served in the military; but from the 1950s to the 1960s, military service became less and less universal. During the Vietnam years, the portion had dropped to 40 percent: 10 percent were in Vietnam, and 30 percent served in Germany."[35]

Appy interprets these statistics to reveal a separation between the military and family, a separation that did not exist in majority numbers in the 1940s. He also argues that this separation had an effect on how Americans responded to military service during the war. As the Vietnam War grew more controversial in the 1960s, the idea of declaring conscientious objector status appealed to millions of men who faced the draft.[36] While "draft dodgers" existed in World War II, intentional resistance to the draft was quite rare. In fact, no more than 0.04% of all armed service registrants during World War II were imprisoned for resisting service at any given time.[37]

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[33] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise,* 88.

[34] Ibid., 124.

[35] Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 18.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Lee B. Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 8.

The perception of the American military was influenced by the culture of the 1950s. Baby boomer and Vietnam veteran Jack Mallory bluntly states, "I guess if there is a revolution and someone asked me who I'd blame for causing the revolution I'd have to say Walt Disney. He is the one who taught all of us to believe in the things that the country and the soldier is supposed to stand for, the whole Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, George Washington image."[38] Mallory's statement is a unique take on the culture of the 1950s, which glorified the United States in terms of the military. As Mallory alludes to, the baby boom generation had a specific perspective on what the United States military stood for based on the memory of World War Two, a perspective that would later be challenged in Vietnam. Sociologist Tracy Karner, who wrote about the conflicting masculine images of World War II and Vietnam War GIs, has written that some men of the Vietnam generation had the impression that military duty was standard in American culture:

> "Remembrances of their own fathers and their own early view of what men should do and be delineate the notions of male adulthood that they had internalized…For many men, entering the military had been an attempt to achieve a cultural standard of 'manhood.'… These young boys had 'played by the rules' and by going to war they were doing what their fathers and their fathers' father before them had done. They were following the patterns of manhood that had been laid before them."[39] [40]

When it came to military service, the Vietnam generation had a perspective that resonated well with the images of World War II. However, as millions learned in the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War was vastly different from the glory stories of World War Two.

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[38] John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The New Soldier* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 106.

[39] Tracy Karner, "Fathers, Sons, and Vietnam: Masculinity and Betrayal in the Life narratives of Vietnam Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," *American Studies* Vol. 37, Issue 1 (1996), 66.

[40] Ibid, 73.

A Brief Background of the Vietnam War (1961-1975)

President John F. Kennedy was voted into office in 1961 as the youngest president in American history.[41] Kennedy's political campaign was centered on a vision of the "New Frontier," a term he used to describe the role of the emerging youth generation. Kennedy's campaign was centered on promoting "self-sacrifice and public duty."[42] His inaugural address became immortalized by the following statements: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your county…Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."[43] Historian Christian Appy states that Kennedy's "famous call to service…tapped a deep well of national feeling."[44] He continues, "Virtually every line of JFK's inaugural links the efforts of ordinary citizens to the highest imaginable stakes…Of course, if war was necessary, Americans must be willing to 'pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship…to assure the survival and the success of liberty."[45] Kennedy's speech, while not specific to military service, echoed a strong emphasis on service to the baby boom generation. Some did interpret Kennedy's message as a call of military duty when the Vietnam War escalated in the mid-1960s.[46]

President Kennedy inherited the conflict in Vietnam from his predecessor, President Dwight Eisenhower. Under Eisenhower, nation building efforts in Vietnam included economic

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[41] Gilmore and Sugrue, *These United States,* 375.

[42] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 89.

[43] "Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy – Washington D.C. – January 20, 1961," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Quotations/Inaugural-Address.aspx (accessed April 5, 2017).

[44] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 122.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Stacewicz, *Winter Soldier,* 43.

assistance that provided South Vietnam with money for infrastructure, weapons, and political programs.[47] The Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) provided South Vietnam with over a billion dollars in military and economic assistance between 1955 and 1960 (total US economic aid to South Vietnam had reached $2.1 billion by 1965).[48] The United States government also chose politician Ngo Dinh Diem to preside over South Vietnam. Diem was chosen as president for several reasons, including his catholic faith and anti-communist stance. Diem was also well-known among US politicians, and spent several years in the United States in the 1950s.[49]

Diem's reign over South Vietnam was filled with corruption, despite the praise Diem initially garnered from American media. Diem ruled with "draconian" measures, which sometimes included the execution of anyone he deemed a threat to the nation.[50] Vietnam was also overwhelmingly Buddhist, creating conflict between the Catholic Diem and Vietnamese Buddhists.[51] Diem's regime was discriminatory against the non-violent Buddhist majority in Vietnam, which was brought to international attention when Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc protested the Diem regime by setting himself ablaze in 1963.[52] In an attempt to end the dictatorial regime in Vietnam, the United States government formally assassinated Diem in

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[47] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 41.

[48] "Economic Aid to Vietnam – Obligation Basis, 1954-1965," *Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections,* Wesley R. Fishel Papers (UA 17.95) Box 1237, Folder 13.

[49] Jake T. Alster, "Spartans in Vietnam: Michigan State University's Experience in South Vietnam," *Grand Valley Journal of History:* Vol. 3, Issue 1, (October 2014). http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvjh/vol3/iss1/3 (accessed February 4, 2017).

[50] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 22.

[51] Ibid., 23.

[52] Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 3.

November 1963.[53] The decision to take out the corrupt Diem regime in South Vietnam opened up a new chapter in the Vietnam conflict.

Three weeks after the execution Diem, the world was shocked by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As a result, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson took over as Commander in Chief. At the time of Kennedy's assassination, over 16,000 American military service members were stationed in South Vietnam, mostly special forces who were in charge of training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).[54] There were also a number of growing problems in Vietnam. During his presidency, Kennedy turned to a policy of escalation known as "Project Beefup."[55] Kennedy also implemented a strategic hamlet program, which was designed to herd Vietnamese villagers into constructed hamlets to separate the innocent Vietnamese from enemy insurgents. His plan was largely unsuccessful. Instead, the hamlet program was vulnerable to undetected infiltration by the insurgency, allowing them to blend in with local villagers, recruit more personnel, and supply others with weapons and supplies.[56] The number of troops stationed in Vietnam was a response to the number of growing problems the United States had in Vietnam.[57] In an effort to promote military strength, President Lyndon B. Johnson's elected to continue Kennedy's policy of escalation in Vietnam.

In the summer of 1965, President Johnson's administration began laying out the plans for a second escalation effort. At the time, 185,000 American soldiers were in Vietnam, up from

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[53] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 24.
[54] Small, *Antiwarriors*, 11.
[55] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 42.
[56] Philip E. Catton, "Counter-Insurgency and Nation Building: The Strategic Hamlet Programme in South Vietnam, 1961-1963," *The International History Review* Vol. 21, Issue 4 (1999): 930. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40109167 (accessed April 8, 2017).
[57] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 42.

just 24,000 troops in 1964.[58] However, General William Westmoreland believed more military troops were needed to defeat to the communist enemy. Between 1965 and 1967, LBJ gradually increased the number of American troops in Vietnam and the military pressure on North Vietnam. The United States military continually bombed North Vietnamese infrastructure such as railroads, bridges, and factories, and eventually moved to using B-52's to drop chemical weapons and napalm on the North Vietnamese countryside.[59] American military operations during this period consisted of "sustained pressure" bombing and the increase of ground troops with the hopes of forcing the North Vietnamese government into submission.[60]

At General William Westmoreland's request, hundreds of thousands of American troops were sent to Vietnam between 1965 and 1968 to continue his strategy of attrition warfare. As a result, at the end of 1967, American troop presence in Vietnam was over 500,000.[61] The narrative provided to the American public was one of victory; American television media, along with the Johnson administration, was guilty of providing the public with a false narrative that convinced millions that the war's end was in sight at the end of 1967. However, this narrative was destroyed by the Tet Offensive, launched by the communist enemy, in January 1968.

In the early morning of January 31, 1968, an estimated 80,000 insurgents and North Vietnamese troops launched a surprise attack on over 100 South Vietnamese cities known as the Tet Offensive. Tet was a last gasp attempt towards victory, and it caught both the United States military and the American public off-guard. Militarily, it was a disaster; approximately half of

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[58] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Vietnam Conflict – U.S. Military Forces in Vietnam and Casualties Incurred: 1961 to 1972," Table No. 421, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, U.S. Department of Defense (Washington D.C.: 1972), 260.

[59] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), 414-5.

[60] Ibid., 415, 419.

[61] Charles E. Neu, *America's Lost War: Vietnam:1945-1975* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2005), 119.

all insurgents and North Vietnamese troops involved in the attack was lost, along with roughly a quarter of their entire force.[62] However, the psychological impact of Tet on the American side of the war was crippling. A narrative that was optimistic several days prior to Tet was flipped upside-down. The offensive revealed that the communist enemy was far from defeat, and they were capable of continuing the fight with great coordination. The aftermath of the Tet Offensive resulted in the reassessment of policy in Vietnam, which included the de-escalation of American ground troops and the relief of military pressure on North Vietnam.[63] Tet also proved to be a turning point in the war at home, as it contradicted Johnson's claim of progress in the war.[64] This shift in view became important for the antiwar movement and the fight against American involvement in Southeast Asia.

Later in 1968, the My Lai massacre occurred in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam, and became public knowledge one year later. When an American infantry division under Lieutenant William L. Calley entered the remote farming village of My Lai, American troops murdered hundreds of unarmed women and children, while no clear enemy was in the area.[65] Accounts of My Lai also include rape, torture, mutilations, and sodomy.[66] My Lai was the brutal result of the attrition warfare tactics implemented by the U.S. military. Attrition warfare included "search and destroy" tactics that involved killing more of the enemy and valued the use of body counts to determine victory.[67] My Lai, while often forgotten, remains one of the most

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[62] Marc J. Gilbert and William Head, *The Tet Offensive* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 21-22.
[63] Ibid., 119.
[64] James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 240.
[65] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 144-5.
[66] Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, Penguin Books (1992), 3.
[67] Neu, *America's Lost War*, 113-4.

controversial incidents in American military history.[68] By the late 1960s, this type of warfare had become a target for antiwar advocates. As a result, the image of the American soldier suffered an unforgettable transformation in the public eye. Many vietnam veterans were treated with disrespect upon their return home from war.[69] This became a major theme regarding the homecoming experience of Vietnam veterans.

In late April 1970, President Richard Nixon's announced his decision to invade the neighboring country of Cambodia. Nixon was facing pressure from ongoing conflict with communism in Cambodia, and in a televised event he announced plans for a military strategy that involved invading Cambodia.[70] To Nixon, his plan appeared to be the best strategy to end the war. To the American public, the invasion of Cambodia was escalation. At the time of Nixon's television announcement, the antiwar movement was in full-effect, however this particular event sent antiwar proponents across the nation into a frenzy. With many antiwar advocates being college students, universities across the country saw protests. The one protest that lives in infamy is the protest-turned-massacre at Kent State in Ohio, where four students were gunned down after a showdown between the National Guard and student demonstrators. The Kent State massacre remains one of the most tragic episodes of the war on the home front.

Deciding to escalate the war further would have been suicide, and Nixon, who's approval dropped below 50 percent by March 1973, needed to find a way out of Vietnam.[71] Between 1970 and 1973, Nixon's administration turned to a policy known as Vietnamization. The policy was fairly straightforward: gradually pull American troops out of Vietnam while handing over

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[68] Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 4.
[69] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 237.
[70] Karnow, *Vietnam*, 609.
[71] Ibid., 632.

responsibility to the South Vietnamese. While Nixon proclaimed that Vietnamization was a success, the facts proved otherwise. Vietnamization successfully pulled U.S. troops out of Vietnam, but left the South Vietnamese hopeless; the South Vietnamese were in no position to take on a much stronger enemy force.[72] To many Americans, it appeared as though Nixon had abandoned an entire country of people.[73] On March 29, 1973, the last American troops departed from Vietnam. On April 29, 1975, the last Americans in Vietnam were rescued by helicopter as the capital of South Vietnam was faltering to communist forces. On April 30, 1975, the communists successfully captured Saigon.[74]

The Emergence of the New Left and the Antiwar Movement

After LBJ dramatically escalated the war in 1965, he maintained his positive approval ratings; 70 percent of the nation still supported the war in 1965.[75] Despite the growing number of participants in the antiwar movement, they remained a minority to those in support of the U.S.'s role in Vietnam. However, this did not prevent the New Left from increasing peace efforts. In July 1964 Joan Baez and other activists proclaimed "an American declaration of conscience" regarding Vietnam.[76] Teach-ins were orchestrated on over 100 college campuses throughout the United States in 1965.[77] At Berkeley, a teach-in attracted more than 20,000 participants and lasted 36-hours, featuring several performances from popular culture icons such

[72] Neu, *America's Lost War,* 148.
[73] Karnow, *Vietnam*, 631.
[74] Ibid., 684-5.
[75] Ibid., 415.
[76] Small, *Antiwarriors,* 13.
[77] DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal,* 109.

as folksinger Phil Ochs and New Left journalist I.F. Stone.[78] As tensions in Vietnam heightened, a war led by the New Left was brewing on the home front.[79]

A key component of the New Left and the emerging antiwar movement in the 1960s was the use of music. Since the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s, folk music was often featured at political demonstrations. Joan Baez was one musician involved with peace organizations beginning in the early 1960s. Baez was an outspoken advocate for Civil Rights. At some of the earliest antiwar demonstrations Baez was featured as either a speaker or an artist. On December 19, 1964, Baez led a march of over 600 protestors in downtown San Francisco, one of the earliest known antiwar demonstrations against the Vietnam War.[80] By 1965, Baez was a known fixture at early antiwar protests and SDS demonstrations, effectively fusing music with counter-culture sentiment and popularizing the use of music at antiwar demonstrations. Later, Baez visited troops in Vietnam during the infamous Christmas Day bombings of 1972, recalling her experience as extremely fearful and a confirmation about the reality of the war. Baez was involved in peace efforts for the length of the war, and was featured at the "last gathering" of the antiwar movement on January 25-27, 1975 in Washington D.C. [81]

Phil Ochs was also a prominent folk musician who was instrumental in the efforts of the New Left in the early 1960s. Ochs, who like Baez was involved with the Civil Rights movement, was featured at many counter-culture gatherings during Vietnam, such as the Berkeley teach-in of 1965, "Vietnam Day" on May 21st 1965, and the 1967 March on the

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[78] Ibid., 115.
[79] Ibid., 100.
[80] Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-war Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 79.
[81] Ibid., 80.

Pentagon.[82] Ochs also wrote several explicit antiwar songs in the mid-1960s, including as "I Ain't Marching Anymore," "Draft Dodger Rag," and "Days of Decision."[83]

A third folk musician who impacted the New Left is perhaps the most famous folk musician of his generation. Bob Dylan emerged on to the popular music scene in the early 1960s. Influenced greatly by folk legend Woody Guthrie, Dylan produced some of the first rebellious counter-culture songs of the 1960s, ranging from themes of civil rights ("Only A Pawn in Their Game") to the changing of American society led by the New Left ("The Times They Are A-Changin'") and the power of authority in regards to war ("Masters of War").[84] Author Wayne Hampton argues that Dylan was the "first truly popular artist in American to exhibit a social consciousness."[85] By 1963, Dylan was a cultural star among the New Left.[86] Although Dylan acknowledged his role as a leader of the counter-culture generation, he often "rejected political involvement"; Dylan, an obscure character who often kept out of the public eye, let his music speak for itself. While some of his songs were explicitly political, Dylan did not favor the political attention he drew, and he constantly denied becoming too entrenched in social and political organizations.[87] Yet, his personal feeling about his role in the counter-culture generation did not affect the influence he had enough on the generation. Dylan, along with Baez and Ochs, helped formulate a strong relationship between counter-culture and music.

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[82] Ibid., 28.

[83] James F. Dunnigan and Albert A. Nofi, *Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 158.

[84] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 125.

[85] Wayne Hampton, *Guerilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 164.

[86] Ibid., 166.

[87] Ibid., 167.

As both rock ‘n’ roll and the Vietnam War evolved in the mid-1960s, the counter-culture brought them together. The counter-culture generation and New Left embraced music as a political tactic in the early 1960s, and as Vietnam grew and the rock genre developed, rock music became an integral part of the Vietnam experience.

Chapter 2: A Rock 'N' Roll War

Pro-war Propaganda

In 1966, Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler released "The Ballad of the Green Berets." Sadler's song was the most popular song of the year, passing up numerous other popular records that remain relevant today from legendary artists such as *The Beatles*, *The Rolling Stones,* and Simon and Garfunkel.[88] From March 5th through April 9th of 1966, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" held the top spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 songs of 1966.[89] At the time of the song's release, the American public was still in favor of Vietnam, and American media reflected this pro-war sentiment.[90] Sadler's song symbolized the efforts of United States government and pro-war activists to promote the war.[91] "The Ballad of the Green Berets" alludes to the honor attached to military service, specifically the Green Berets:

> "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./ Trained to live off nature's land./ Trained in combat, hand-to-hand./ Men who fight by night and day./ Courage take from the Green Berets."[92]

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[88] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 124.

[89] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – 1966 Archive," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1966/hot-100 (accessed April 10, 2017).

[90] Marc Leepson, *Ballad of the Green Beret: The Life and Wars of Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler* (Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2017), 65.

[91] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 124.

[92] Barry Sadler, "The Ballad of the Green Berets," *Ballads of the Green Berets.* RCA Victor, 1966.

The success of the song, which sold over eight million copies, is a testimony to the amount of support the war garnered in 1966, and many antiwar activists feared that "Ballad of the Green Berets" was quite effective as a piece of military propaganda.[93]

The effectiveness of "The Ballad of the Green Berets" came from its allusion to the heroic nature of the military, often portrayed in relation to World War II. In reference to this claim, Robert Stacewicz writes, "Americans were especially proud of their victory in World War II, which propelled the nation to its new prosperity and strength…combat films and westerns portrayed American military forces as 'all-conquering, all powerful, always right'…They seemed to be the quintessence of American individuality, decency, and bravery." Stacewicz notes that the educational system in the 1950s also played an influential role in the shaping of this heroic image.[94] This image is synonymous with the Green Beret described by Sadler in his song. The imagery is strong, and Sadler utilizes key words such as "fearless," "brave," and "courage" to describe the GI.[95] Sadler attempted to resonate with millions of American men who grew up in the 1950s surrounded by national pride and military culture from World War II.[96] For some baby boomers, Sadler's propaganda song worked.

Numerous Vietnam generation men were influenced by Sadler's pro-war tune, and its relationship with post-World War II sentiment regarding military service and national pride. Jim Kurtz, a Vietnam veteran who enlisted shortly after the song's release, reflects on the influence that "Green Berets" had on the Vietnam generation. Kurtz reflects:

> "For me, 'The Ballad of the Green Berets' is more about relevance than popularity. It's more than just a song. It's a shared story, an anthem to valor and

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[93] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 124.

[94] Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 25.

[95] Sadler, "Green Berets."

[96] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 124.

> sacrifice, patriotism, and victory. At the time in Vietnam in 1966, 'The Ballad of the Green Berets' was the Vietnam anthem… Like a lot of guys in my generation, I grew up on visions of John Wayne movie heroics and World War Two victories. I remember believing that there was no chance we were going to lose in Vietnam…I thought I wanted to be a hero and that Vietnam was the place to be heroic and that's what the song said."[97]

Another Vietnam veteran, Bill Branson, states, "Well, you had the newsreels and you had the popular songs, you know, 'Green Berets.' I was anticommunist. I thought they were evil and whatnot…I believed the domino theory."[98] Another veteran Tom Wetzler said Sadler's song and other propaganda convinced him to join the armed forces almost immediately in 1966.[99] "Green Berets" had some success influencing 1950s youth to join the armed forces in the 1960s.

The soldier presented in "The Ballad of the Green Beret" was designed to match a specific stereotype of the military. This stereotype alludes to the glory of World War II, and can be observed in other forms of entertainment and propaganda since the 1940s. Most notably was the role played by actor John Wayne in numerous 1950s westerns and war-related films. Vietnam veteran Danny Friedman reveals how his perspective of the U.S. military was influenced in his youth by what he refers to as the "John Wayne Mystique." The "John Wayne Mystique," as described by Friedman, is simply doing what he determined as the right thing to do: "You've got to do the right thing. Yours is not to question why; yours is to kick ass on the commies and win the pretty girl…This is what most people thought."[100] The "right thing" that Friedman alludes to can be interpreted as what he grew up believing, was right. In an early Cold War era dominated by national pride, John Wayne embodied doing what was right in terms of

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[97] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 35.
[98] Stacewicz, *Winter Soldier,* 49.
[99] Ibid., 43.
[100] Ibid., 46.

masculinity. The John Wayne, masculine image of the American male in the 1950s can be observed in "The Ballad of the Green Berets."

Friedman's allusion to John Wayne is not obscure for men of the Vietnam generation; John Wayne was the quintessential American entertainment icon for young men during this era.[101] Wayne, who was a towering 6 foot 4 inches, starred in over 150 films, ranging from westerns to reenacting famous military battles.[102] Regardless of the role, Wayne's characters were heroic and masculine, which had a lasting effect on the youth of the Vietnam generation.[103] Many young men in the 1950s and 1960s viewed Wayne's masculine image as the symbol of American manhood. One Vietnam veteran describes his image of Wayne as "tall and rugged-looking, and nearly always got the woman, even when he was too preoccupied with his military duties to attend her needs.[104] Another Vietnam vet emphasized that his decision to join the armed forces was influenced by Wayne's work: "It had nothing to do with politics in the sense of any consciousness…I had always wanted to go to the Marines. It was a reflection of having grown up with…John Wayne movies…- the propaganda."[105] Christian Appy states that, "It would be hard to exaggerate just how important John Wayne was as a boyhood fantasy figure among soldiers who fought in Vietnam. No one in U.S. popular culture did more than Wayne to advance military recruitment."[106] For millions of men in the Vietnam generation, the war was their opportunity to be like John Wayne.

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[101] Marcia A. Eymann and Charles Wollenberg, *What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 133-4.

[102] Edward J. Rielly, "John Wayne." *Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia* (January 2017): *Research Starters*, EBSCO*host* (accessed April 9, 2017).

[103] Eymann and Wollenberg, *What's Going On?*, 134.

[104] Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers*, 25.

[105] Ibid, 53.

[106] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 144.

John Wayne himself believed that bringing the United States' military efforts in Vietnam to the American people through popular culture was vital to prove, as he said, "why it is important for us [America] to be there."[107] It can be argued that Wayne's public support for the war had a positive effect in recruiting many young men for the military. In reference to "The Ballad of the Green Berets," John Wayne himself spoke directly to President Johnson about capturing the essence of the song and turning it into a motion picture, which eventually happened in 1968.[108] *The Green Berets* was a clear attempt to build upon the success of Sadler's popular 1966 tune, however the film's blatantly obvious attempt to garner support for the war resulted in a failed campaign. The film made a clear attempt at depicting the Vietnamese as "hideous monsters," and tried to sell the narrative that the United States was making progress in Vietnam.[109] In his book, *American Reckoning,* Christian Appy compares the portrayal of the Vietnamese in *The Green Berets* to the portrayal of the American Indians in John Wayne westerns. Appy even states that screenings of the movie to GIs in Vietnam were met with skepticism and even humor: "In Vietnam, when American troops were treated to a screening of *The Green Berets,* they found it hilarious…Many of them had come to see John Wayne himself in a completely different light. He had once epitomized what millions of baby boomer boys associated with enviable manly courage and panache."[110] American crowds at home also viewed Wayne in *The Green Berets* cynically, and viewings were sometimes met with laughter over the efforts to glorify American military service.[111]

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[107] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 34.
[108] Eymann and Wollenberg, *What's Going On?,* 166.
[109] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 143.
[110] Ibid., 143-144.
[111] John Helleman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 91.

The fact that the movie was released in 1968 did not help the film's cause, as the infamous Tet Offensive in January 1968 is often considered a turning point in the war in terms of popularity and support.[112] After years of deceptive information leading the American public to believe the conflict was near its end, the Viet Cong launched a full-scale military operation across Vietnam, busting the lies of the American government.[113] The failure of *The Green Berets* just two years after the success of the song reveals a shift in the culture surrounding the war. To millions of men in the baby boom generation, John Wayne and Barry Sadler had lied. The failure of *The Green Berets* in 1968 was a symbol of the crippling attempt to garner pro-war support for Vietnam, and a symbol of the impact the counter-culture generation had on the war.

The Rise of Rock in the Vietnam Generation

In 1965, one year prior to Sadler's release of "The Ballad of the Green Berets," folk-rock artist Barry McGuire released the protest song, "Eve of Destruction." McGuire's song is pragmatic, and includes themes associated with the New Left and the counter-culture generation, such as war, civil unrest, and ignorance of Cold War conflict:

> "The eastern world it is exploding./ Violence flaring, bullets loading./ You're old enough to kill but not for voting./ You don't believe in war but what's that gun you're toting?./ And even the Jordan River has bodies floating./ But you tell me over and over and over again my friend./ Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction./ Don't you understand what I'm trying to say./ Can't you feel the fears I'm feeling today?./ 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…/ Yeah my blood's so mad feels like coagulating./ I'm sitting here just contemplating./ I can't twist the truth it knows no regulation./ Handful of senators don't pass legislation./ And marches alone can't bring integration./ When human respect is disintegrating./ This whole crazy world is just too frustrating…/

[112] Ibid., 89.
[113] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 173.

> Think of all the hate there is in Red China./ Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama./ You may leave here for four days in space but when you return it's the same old place./ The pounding of the drums, the pride and disgrace./ You can bury your dead but don't leave a trace./ Hate your next door neighbor but don't forget to say grace."[114]

McGuire's song references various Cold War era themes, including communism and the war ("eastern world exploding", "violence flaring, bullets loading"), civil rights and antiwar marches ("Selma, Alabama, "marches alone can't bring integration"), and ignorance of the imploding Cold War scenario, including Vietnam ("can't you feel the fears I'm feeling today?", "you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction"). At the time of the songs release, the American public still favored the war; a poll in August 1965 found that "76 percent of Americans under 30…64 percent of those 30 to 49 and…51 percent of those over 49," supported the government's actions in Vietnam.[115] These numbers indicate that the American public, even the youth, were very much still in support of the war in 1965. Yet one small victory for the antiwar movement in 1966 came from a radio station poll in New York City, dubbed the "battle of the Barry's" by historian Adam Garfinkle. The election between Barry Sadler's "Green Berets" and Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" resulted in McGuire winning by a small margin of one vote.[116] While fictional, this small victory for the antiwar movement foreshadowed the increasing relationship between popular rock music, the counter-culture generation, and Vietnam.

The rock 'n' roll boom of the 1950s and early 1960s expanded the reach of rock music as popular music. By the mid-sixties, rock had matured and dominated all other genres in popular music. Within this expansion were hundreds of musicians and bands influenced by the rock genre, some of which infused rock 'n' roll to create new sub-genres of music. The result of this

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[114] Barry McGuire, "Eve of Destruction," *Eve of Destruction*. Dunhill Records, 1965.
[115] Gilmore and Sugrue, *These United States: A Nation in the Making,* 421.
[116] Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts,* 82.

expansion exposed millions of young Americans to new styles of music, as well as new artists. The mid-1960s saw an explosion of rock talent that influenced the impact rock 'n' roll music had on the counter-culture generation and eventually Vietnam.[117]

One way that rock music manifested a relationship among the counter-culture generation was through music festivals. Music festivals were popularized in the 1960s. Some of the 1960s music festivals include The Trips Festival (1966), and the Monterey-Pop Festival (1967).[118] These festivals allowed many rock musicians and bands to present their work to thousands of listeners. In talking about the impact of music festivals on the counterculture revolution in the 1960s, historian George Lipsitz states, "Yet it was not just large numbers that made these gatherings important; on the contrary, it was the cultural unity that they affirmed. Presumptions of a common community with a mutuality of values pervaded festival rock concerts no less than they did political mass demonstrations."[119] Music festivals provided an environment similar to protests and political demonstrations, in which thousands of like-minded individuals were gathering in one location to promotes their interests. At rock music festivals, ideas were spread and common values were celebrated. Rock festivals were instrumental in the evolution of rock music and counter-culture ideology, and they certainly helped manifest the rock boom in the mid-1960s.

In 1969, one of the largest cultural events of the Vietnam generation occurred on Max B. Yasgur's farm in New York. The Woodstock Music and Art Festival - three days of love, peace,

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[117] Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music,* 344.

[118] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 128, 210.

[119] George Lipsitz, "Who'll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock'n'Roll, and Social Crises," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History,* David Farber (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 163.

and music - exemplified the counterculture revolution of the 1960s in many different ways.[120] The large crowd consisting of hippies, college students, and even ex-military members has become a major symbol of the counter-culture movement. More than three-hundred thousand counter-culture youth flocked to Yasgur's farm, with over one-hundred thousand in attendance without event tickets. The gathering was so large that the county in which the land was situated on, Sullivan County, was placed in a state of emergency. The festival attracted some of the most notable Vietnam generation rock musicians, including *The Who, Jefferson Airplane, The Band, Creedence Clearwater Revival,* Jimi Hendrix, and *The Grateful Dead.*[121] Woodstock is often viewed as the pinnacle of the counter-culture 1960s. In reference to George Lipsitz' statement regarding the impact of music festivals on the Vietnam generation, Woodstock was a "social phenomenon" that defined a revolutionary episode in American history. The festival was more than just a musical gathering; it was a celebration of a generation. Woodstock also revealed the strength behind the counter-culture movement in the 1960s, as well as the influence of rock music on the Vietnam generation.

As rock 'n' roll expanded in the mid-sixties, and the counter-culture generation adopted rock music as their voice for social and political representation, rock became more intertwined with the Vietnam conflict. With escalation, more Americans were directly affected by the war, and new themes emerged as the conflict grew. Class conflict, racial divide, and controversy surrounding Vietnam helped develop a deeper relationship between popular rock music and the Vietnam experience at home and abroad. As a result, rock 'n' roll became a key component of the Vietnam experience.

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[120] Michael Sheehy, "Woodstock," *Journalism History* Vol. 37, Issue 4 (Winter 2012): 238, *MasterFILE Elite*, EBSCO*host* (accessed April 8, 2017).

[121] Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll,* 295.

"Vietnam Rock"

Professors Doug Bradley, a Vietnam veteran himself, and Craig Werner compiled a list of Vietnam-era rock songs titled the "Vietnam Vets' Top 20" in their book, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place.*[122] The authors determined which songs made the cut after narrowing down the most popular songs found in essays and literature involving Vietnam. They also received the input of dozens of Vietnam vets through interviews and veterans events in which they interacted with their audience by playing numerous songs, and asking veterans individually "What was your song?" As a disclaimer, Bradley and Werner state that it was nearly impossible to accurately narrow their list down to even a "Top 200"; there were thousands of songs they discovered in their search that had ties to Vietnam.[123] While unofficial, Bradley and Werner's "Top 20" list is a great representation of the diversity found in the soundtrack of the Vietnam War.

The "Top 20" list consists of various genres and artists, yet they all have links to rock music. Some of the songs that made the list are "For What It's Worth" by *Buffalo Springfield* (#20, 1967), "My Girl," by *The Temptations* (#16, 1965), "What's Going On," by Marvin Gaye (#13, 1970), "Fortunate Son," by *Creedence Clearwater Revival* (#6, 1969), "Purple Haze," by Jimi Hendrix (#5, 1967), "Leaving on a Jet Plane," by Peter, Paul, and Mary (#3, 1969), "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die," by Country Joe McDonald (#2, 1967), and "We Gotta Get Outta This Place," by *The Animals* (#1, 1965).[124] On this list, there are examples of folk-rock ("Jet Plane"), psychedelic-rock ("Purple Haze"), southern-rock ("Fortunate Son"), and even rhythm and blues ("What's Going On"), a genre with similar components to rock music. There are also several

[122] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 135.
[123] Ibid., 135-7.
[124] Ibid., 137-43.

different themes related to the Vietnam experience within this list. Some of the songs included on the list refer specifically to Vietnam, such as "Fortunate Son" and "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die." Others relate to the counter-culture generation that emerged in the 1960s, such as "For What It's Worth" and "Purple Haze." Some of the songs do not have any relationship to Vietnam at all, including "My Girl," "Leaving on a Jet Plane," and "We Gotta Get Outta This Place." This is an important distinction in determining the role that rock music in relation to Vietnam.

The interpretation of rock music during Vietnam was a product of the political and cultural environment of the 1960s, as well as a result of the elements of war. In other words, after the rock 'n' roll began to dominate the popular music scene, and the conflict in Vietnam grew in the mid-1960s, the Vietnam generation often interpreted music in relation to the war. Interpretations of music were often personal, which is one reason why the Vietnam soundtrack varies greatly. Bradley and Werner argue that interpretation was influenced by the "three *W*s – When you were there; Where you were; and What you did."[125] Therefore, one song could have a completely different meaning to one person than it did to another, depending on the experience they had with Vietnam. Examples of this can be observed in several songs included on the "Top 20" list. "My Girl" by *The Temptations* is a mellow Motown hit that involves nothing more than a man talking about his wonderful lover. Similarly, "Leaving on a Jet Plane" is song originally written by country/folk artist John Denver that describes a man departing on a trip, expressing love to the woman waiting for him to return. Denver's song made no references to the war. However, thousands of Vietnam veterans interpreted "My Girl" and "Leaving on a Jet Plane" to

[125] Ibid., 3.

relate to their personal experiences.[126] These are just two examples of hundreds of songs that bear no direct relation to the war, yet have become synonymous with the Vietnam experience.

There are, of course, numerous rock songs that were written during Vietnam that clearly reference the war. Folk-rock artist Country Joe McDonald wrote one of the most famous antiwar anthems of the Vietnam era in 1965, titled "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die" in 1965.[127] McDonald sings:

> "Well come on all of you big strong men, Uncle Sam needs your help again. / 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 lot of fun. / And it's 1-2-3 what are we fighting for? / Don't ask me, I don't give a damn. / Next stop is Vietnam! / And its 5-6-7, open up the pearly gates. / Well there ain't no time to wonder why. / Whoopee! We're all gonna die! / Well come on generals let's move fast. / Your big chance has come at last. / Got to go out and get those reds cause the only good Commie is the one who's dead. / And you know that peace can only be won when we've blown them all to kingdom come! /…Come on mothers throughout the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam. / Come on fathers, don't hesitate, to send your sons off before it's too late. / Be the first ones on your block to have your boy come home in a box."[128]

The song was often considered "underground material," and was banned on just about every radio station in the country.[129] McDonald alludes to the young age of GIs fighting in Vietnam, mothers and fathers losing their sons to the war, and the Cold War, communist narrative that was used by the United States to justify the war's purpose. Like many others, McDonald's song victimizes the American soldier rather than glorify their service. Country Joe McDonald's protest song became a popular and meaningful song among the Vietnam generation.

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts,* 81.

[128] Country Joe McDonald, "The Fish Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die-Rag," *I Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die,* Vanguard Records, 1967.

[129] Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts,* 81.

California-based rock group *Creedence Clearwater Revival,* or *CCR,* were well known among the counter-culture generation for their involvement in antiwar music. In the late 1960s, *CCR* released several songs against Vietnam, including "Who'll Stop the Rain" and "Fortunate Son." *CCR* front-man John Fogerty wrote "Who'll Stop the Rain" in response to escalation policy in Vietnam, and the prolonging of the conflict under LBJ and Richard Nixon.[130] Fogerty sings of the falling of "rain" for as long as he remembers, wondering when it will stop, and who will stop it.[131] The falling of the rain is in reference to the U.S. military strategy in Vietnam that consisted of pounding North Vietnam with artillery and bombs. *CCR* drummer Doug Clifford also explains that it was a reference to the "reign of terror" that Nixon had on the youth culture during the war.[132] "Who'll Stop the Rain?" advocated both antiwar sentiment and support for the counter-culture generation.

Creedence Clearwater Revival released "Fortunate Son" in 1969. The song is straightforward in reference to Vietnam, and the purpose of the song is to expose class conflict in the military. An overwhelming majority of Americans fighting in Vietnam came from working-class backgrounds. According to historian Christian Appy, an estimated 80% of the enlisted men in Vietnam came from working-class families.[133] This exposed a class conflict that angered many working-class Americans who were essentially at a disadvantage when it came to the draft. Furthermore, in 1966 Defense Secretary Robert McNamara issued 'Project 100,000,' a program intended to increase the number of soldiers in Vietnam. 'Project 100,000' was aimed towards working-class, poor Americans who did not have a high school diploma or the ability to pass the

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[130] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 69.

[131] *Creedence Clearwater Revival,* "Who'll Stop the Rain?" *Cosmo's Factory,* Fantasy Records, 1970.

[132] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 69.

[133] Appy, *Working-Class War,* 6.

ASVAB test for the military.[134] The original plan was to implement these men into vocational training positions with the eventual outcome of performing non-combat service roles in the armed forces. According to historian Christian Appy, the reality of 'Project 100,000' sent more than "200,000 very poor, confused, and ill-equipped young men to Vietnam, where their death rate was twice what it was for American forces as a whole."[135]

"Fortunate Son" was written in response to military class conflict in the Vietnam era. The song had tremendous success, spending 15 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 songs in 1969-1970, topping off at the third overall in December 1969.[136] In an interview, *CCR* drummer Doug Clifford states that lead singer John Fogerty's experience in the Army reserves helped influence the meaning behind "Fortunate Son": "John was in the Army Reserve and he saw the inequities of the lower class and the middle class going while the privileged class didn't have to…It's written from the perspective of the poor guys who go drafted over there and exposing those that didn't."[137] Lyrically, "Fortunate Son" describes the experience of a typical working-class male in regards to the military service, the draft, and Vietnam; more working-class men were sent to war than those born with "silver spoon in hand."[138] "Fortunate Son" became a song that defined an entire generation of working-class American soldiers. While the song referenced Vietnam explicitly, it also revealed an underlying theme of class conflict.

Edwin Starr's Motown-inspired protest song "War" could not have been any more explicit about Vietnam. Released in 1970, "War" topped the *Billboard* Hot 100 for over three

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[134] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 132.
[135] Ibid., 133-134.
[136] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – December 20, 1969," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1969-12-20 (accessed April 10, 2017).
[137] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 68-9.
[138] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 134.

weeks.[139] The song was popular among the Vietnam generation, including those in Vietnam.[140] Starr's song is straightforward about his feelings towards the war, and in 1970, with the antiwar movement at its height across the country, the song was appropriate.[141] Just about every line in Edwin Starr's hit song references his hatred for war. The chorus is as follows: "War, huh (Good God ya'll!). / What is it good for? (Absolutely nothin'!)."[142] "War" is explicit, powerful, and emotionally driven; it is simple enough to get Starr's message across that the war in Vietnam did no good. Starr's hit song is also an example of the relationship between African Americans and Vietnam.

Along the same line as Starr's Motown-themed protest song, Marvin Gaye released his own rhythm and blues-rock album *What's Going On* in 1971. The title track on the album, "What's Going On," spent 15 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 songs, and several weeks at the second spot.[143] In "What's Going On," Gaye gets personal about the issues of war in Vietnam and on the home front:

> "Mother, mother, there's too many of you crying. / Brother, brother, brother, there's far too many of you dying. / You know we've got to find a way to bring some lovin' here today. / Father, father, we don't need to escalate. / You see, war is not the answer, for only love can conquer hate…Picket lines, picket signs, don't punish me with brutality. / Talk to me, so you can see, what's going on."[144]

Gaye references several themes related to Vietnam, including rising deaths of American troops ("there's too many of us dyin'"), the prolonging of war into the 1970s ("we don't need to

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[139] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – 1970 Archive," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1970/hot-100 (accessed April 10, 2017).

[140] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 42.

[141] Neu, *America's Lost War,* 159.

[142] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 42.

[143] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – April 10, 1971," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1971-04-10 (accessed April 10, 2017).

[144] Marvin Gaye, "What's Going On," *What's Going On,* Motown/Universal Records, 1971.

escalate"), and antiwar movement clashes with the U.S. government under Nixon, such as Kent State ("picket signs, don't punish me with brutality"). Gaye states that the *What's Going On* album was inspired by his brother's military experiences in Vietnam in the late 1960s. Gaye adapted his brother Frankie's Vietnam stories, as well as Frankie's personal homecoming experience, to create *What's Going On.*[145] While *What's Going On* included over-arching themes related to Vietnam, it also invoked personal themes related to the Vietnam experience.

In 1973, African American jazz musician Curtis Mayfield released *Back to the World*, an album dedicated to Vietnam veterans and their return to "the world."[146] "Back to the world" was a common phrase used among Vietnam GIs to refer to anywhere but Vietnam, or in other words, the world they are used to.[147] The album features tracks such as "Back to the World," "If I Were Only a Child Again," and "Right on for the Darkness," all referring to different stages of a returning Vietnam soldier.[148] *Back to the World* enjoyed 26 consecutive weeks on the *Billboard* Top 200 albums chart in 1973, peaking at 16 overall.[149] The timing of Mayfield's album could not have been any more perfect, as the last U.S. troops left Vietnam in late March 1973, and Mayfield's album was also released 1973.[150] Similar to *What's Going On*, Mayfield's album took up themes around the homecoming experience of Vietnam veterans.[151]

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[145] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 194.

[146] Stephen Davis, "Curtis Mayfield: Back to the World," *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 1973, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/back-to-the-world-19730719 (accessed April 7, 2017).

[147] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 2.

[148] Davis, "Curtis Mayfield."

[149] "*Billboard* 200 – July 28, 1973." *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/1973-07-28 (accessed April 12, 2017).

[150] "*Billboard* 200 – July 28, 1973."

[151] Davis, "Curtis Mayfield."

The title track of Mayfield's soul-rock album resembles a conversation between a Vietnam veteran and his mother in which they discuss transpired at home during the soldier's tour:

> "My prayers must've been with you, and now that you're back in town./ Let me tell you son, the war was never won; the war was never won./ In these city streets everywhere./ You gotta be careful where you move your feet; how you part your hair./ Do you think that God could never forgive this life we live?./ Back in the world, back in the world./…It's so hard, it's so hard, it's so hard./ This life is so hard./ I've been beaten up and robbed./ Soldier boy ain't got no job./ Back in the world, back in the world."[152]

"Back to the World" deals with issues Vietnam veterans faced in their homecoming ("This life is so hard" "Soldier boy ain't got no job"). Mayfield, who at the time was a well-known soul-rock artist, is also referencing the experience that African Americans had during the Vietnam era.

African American communities were greatly affected by the Vietnam War. In the mid-sixties, as a result of the focus on the expansion of white-dominated suburbs in the 1950s, African Americans were economically disadvantaged.[153] Over 13 percent of African Americans were unemployed nationally, reaching as high as 39 percent in cities such as Detroit. Young black male unemployment reached as high as 26 percent.[154] In many cases, unemployment and economic troubles in African American communities resulted in high numbers of military participation. When Robert McNamara introduced Project 100,000 in 1966, 40 percent of the 400,000 men sent to Vietnam from 1966-1971 were African American. In military combat roles, African Americans were also disproportionately integrated; at the end of 1966, African

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[152] Curtis Mayfield, "Back in the World," *Back to the World*, Curtom Records, 1973.

[153] Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 202.

[154] Ibid., 191, 203.

Americans accounted for 45 percent of all volunteer combat troops.[155] African Americans experienced several disadvantages during the war, both at home and in Vietnam.

Similar to Mayfield's reference to the African American soldier's postwar struggles, Marvin Gaye makes similar references on *What's Going On. What's Going On* was inspired by the war in Vietnam and African American struggles, yet Gaye's audience, regardless of race, could relate to other themes related to the Vietnam experience. For example, "Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)" on *What's Going On* deals with issues that veterans faced returning home to a failing economy. Not only was this a problem for African Americans, but many white Vietnam veterans experienced a similar economic struggle.[156] "What's Going On" also alludes to the problems African Americans faced in communities across the nation during Vietnam. The disproportionate number of African American troops killed in combat ("there's too many of *us* dyin'"). For some African Americans in the Vietnam era, "What's Going On" was an anthem addressing both the war in Vietnam and the problems that African Americans faced as a result of the suburban expansion of the 1950s.[157] *What's Going On* was widely recognized as a protest album addressing the problems that African Americans faced, yet several of the themes Gaye wrote about were understood by many of the Vietnam generation, white or black.[158]

Both Gaye and Mayfield wrote albums inspired by Vietnam and in protest of the war, yet these albums contain several underlying themes related to the larger Vietnam-era experience. Themes of economic struggle in African American communities, problems faced by returning veterans, and even drug use among the African American and veteran community ("Flying

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155 Ibid., 190, 203-4, 206.
156 Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 195.
157 Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?,* 115-6.
158 Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 196.

High" by Marvin Gaye) are all prevalent in these albums. These are just some of the themes embraced by rock musicians during the Vietnam War. While Gaye and Mayfield are more explicit in their reference to Vietnam, several other rock artists wrote songs with no connection to the war, yet were interpreted with correlation to Vietnam. During the Vietnam era, there were many rock songs and albums that either dealt with larger themes of the 1960s or personal themes that were also associated with the war. Many of these songs became some of the most popular songs among the Vietnam generation, despite having no connection to the war. Regardless, interpretation with the Vietnam War in mind allowed for many of these songs to become an important component in the relationship between rock and Vietnam.

Creedence Clearwater Revival released several songs in protest of the war in Vietnam, yet some of their more popular songs were associated with the war despite having no intention of protest. Three songs in particular that were hits for *CCR* were interpreted by the Vietnam generation as protests songs: "Proud Mary," "Bad Moon Rising," and "Run Through the Jungle."[159] "Proud Mary" was released in 1969 on *Bayou Country*, and enjoyed 14 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 while appearing as high as number two overall.[160] John Fogerty of *CCR* wrote the song as a counter-culture ballad, describing a care-free lifestyle riding down the Mississippi on a boat, the Proud Mary.[161] Fogerty states that Vietnam had no influence on "Proud Mary."[162] In an interview, the bassist of *CCR* Stu Cook remembers receiving a picture from a group of marines in Vietnam standing beside their tank, which they named "Proud Mary."

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[159] Ibid., 69.

[160] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – March 8, 1969," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1969-03-08 (accessed April 10, 2017).

[161] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 69.

[162] 92nd Street Y, "Creedence Clearwater Revival's John Fogerty with Alan Light," YouTube, October 9, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkTrRCC_g4w (accessed April 15, 2017).

Cook recalls believing that he and the other members of *CCR* had an impact in Vietnam that went beyond the meaning behind the music; it was the theme of counter-culture that grasped the attention of the Vietnam generation.[163]

"Bad Moon Rising" was released in 1969 on *Green River*, spending several consecutive weeks in the top five songs on the *Billboard* Hot 100.[164] The song makes no reference to Vietnam. In fact, Fogerty states that the song was inspired by the movie *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941) in an interview with *Rolling Stone.*[165] Yet, the chorus of "Bad Moon Rising" became popular among many of those in Vietnam, sometimes associated with guerilla warfare in the jungle: "Don't go around tonight, it's bound to take your life. / There's a bad moon on the rising."[166]

"Run Through the Jungle" was released by *CCR* as a single along with "Up Around the Bend" in 1970. As a single, the song spent eleven weeks on the *Billboard* charts, reaching fourth overall for several weeks.[167] Although it appears as though "Run Through the Jungle" reference the jungles of Vietnam, John Fogerty states that the song was inspired by the rise in gun violence within the United States:

> "Most people assumed the jungle was Vietnam…The thing I wanted to talk about was gun control and the proliferation of guns…I remember reading around that time that there was one gun for every man, woman and child in America, which I found staggering… I just thought it was disturbing that it was such a jungle for our citizens just to walk around in our own country at least having to be aware

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[163] Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 365-366.

[164] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – June 28, 1969," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1969-06-28 (accessed April 12, 2017).

[165] Michael Goldberg, "John Fogerty Looks Back on the Glory of Creedence Clearwater Revival," *Rolling Stone*, February 4, 1993.

[166] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 69.

[167] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – June 6, 1970," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1970-06-06 (accessed April 12, 2017).

> that there are so many private guns owned by some responsible and maybe many irresponsible people."[168]

Doug Bradley and Craig Werner state in *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* that "Run Through the Jungle" was often adopted by Vietnam GIs as a war anthem.[169] Even though "Run Through the Jungle" was not inspired by the war in Vietnam, the jungle element of Vietnam connected the rock song to the war. This simple connection, along with *CCR's* popularity among Vietnam GIs, formed a relationship between the song and the war. This is just one example of how an element of the Vietnam War, and the lyrics of a song released during the war, influenced a relationship between rock and war.

Folk-rock group *Buffalo Springfield* released "For What It's Worth" in 1966, which spent fifteen weeks on the hit charts, peaking at number seven overall in March 1967.[170] Stephen Stills, a member of *Buffalo Springfield* and later a member of *Crosby, Stills, and Nash*, wrote "For What It's Worth" as a response to a protest in Los Angeles over a curfew set by the LAPD on Sunset Strip.[171] Although the song was inspired by a counter-culture protest in Los Angeles, unrelated to Vietnam, it became a hit among the antiwar movement and Vietnam GIs. "For What It's Worth" even made the "Vietnam Vets' Top 20" list compiled by Doug Bradley and Craig Werner.[172] The theme in "For What It's Worth" that connects the song to the Vietnam

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[168] "The Big Interview with John Fogerty – Run Through the Jungle Clip," *AXS TV*, January 12, 2016, http://content.jwplatform.com/previews/XweV3uOj-necgKPaX (accessed April 12, 2017).

[169] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 69.

[170] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – March 25, 1967," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1967-03-25 (accessed April 12, 2017).

[171] David Browne, "'For What It's Worth': Inside Buffalo Springfield's Classic Protest Song," *Rolling Stone*, November 11, 2016, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/for-what-its-worth-inside-buffalo-springfield-classic-w449685 (accessed April 13, 2017).

[172] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*, 108, 137.

experience is simply protest. Stills wrote the song in response to a protest, and that is exactly what the song describes:

> "There's something happening here. / What it is ain't exactly clear. / There's a man with a gun over there, telling me I've got to beware. / I think it's time we stop, listen, what's that sound? Everybody look what's going down. / There's battle lines being drawn. Nobody's right if everybody's wrong. / Young people speaking their minds. / Getting so much resistance from behind. /…A thousand people in the street. / Singing songs and carrying signs. / Mostly say, hooray for our side."[173]

Stills' reference to a gun certainly invokes elements of war, as does his reference to "battle lines." Yet, these references had no relation to Vietnam. Instead, they reference the growing counter-culture movement in the United States. The song describes a scene in which a gathering of baby boomers ("young people") speak their mind, common in the 1960s (Civil Rights, antiwar movement) and among the counter-culture generation. The references to protest and counter-culture in "For What It's Worth" resonated well among GIs and the antiwar movement due to the relationship between Vietnam and protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Similar to *CCR's* "Run Through the Jungle," "For What It's Worth" was written in response to an event unrelated to Vietnam, yet overlapping themes between the song and the war created a lasting relationship between the two.

Along the same line, "We Gotta Get Outta This Place" by *The Animals* became popular among Vietnam GIs and the Vietnam generation altogether, despite having any relation to the war. *The Animals,* a British rock band who gained fame in the U.S. with their version of "House of the Rising Sun" in 1964, released "We Gotta Get Outta This Place" in 1965.[174] The song was

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[173] *Buffalo Springfield*, "For What It's Worth," *Buffalo Springfield,* Atco Records, 1966.

[174] "House of the Rising Sun" reached number one overall on the *Billboard* charts in 1964. See "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – September 5, 1964," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1964-09-05 (accessed April 15, 2017).

inspired by inner city conditions and working-class culture, fitting for a rock group who often wrote about the "harsh conditions" they experienced throughout their youth in the city of Newcastle.[175] The lyrics describe a man recognizing the crumbling world around him, trying to persuade his girlfriend to leave their life and city behind:

> "In this dirty old part of the city. / Where the sun refused to shine. / People tell me there ain't no use in tryin'. / Now my girl you're so young and pretty. / And one thing I know is true. / You'll be dead before your time is due, I know. / Watched my daddy in bed dyin'. / Watched his hair been turnin' grey. / He's been workin' and slavin' his life away, oh yes I know. / He's been workin' so hard. / I've been workin' too, baby. / Every night and day (Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!) / We gotta get out of this place! / If it's the last thing we ever do! / We gotta get out of this place! / Girl there's a better life for me and you."[176]

The song quickly gained popularity among Vietnam GIs, despite the song having no relation to Vietnam. Eric Burdon, front man of *The Animals*, states that the band was aware of the war but purposely did not mention the war in song or to the press. The group did not want to be known for publically choosing a side in the war; rather Burdon opted to state that the band was "against war, period," in response to reporters.[177] Regardless, Vietnam GIs adopted "We Gotta Get Outta This Place" as an anthem describing their situation, with Vietnam being "this place." For Vietnam GIs, the lyrics described Vietnam, not Newcastle. Doug Bradley and Craig Werner also state that the song served different meanings for different units, but the song almost always served as a "magnet" that brought GIs together in Vietnam (The authors even chose this song as the title of their book chronicling Vietnam veterans stories about rock music and Vietnam).[178] The theme related to the Vietnam experience in "We Gotta Get Outta This Place" is mostly

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[175] David Simonelli, *Working Class Hero: Rock Music and British Society in the 1960s and 1970s* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013), 54.

[176] *The Animals*, "We Gotta Get Outta This Place," *Animal Tracks,* ABKCO Music & Records, 1965.

[177] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 14.

[178] Ibid., 9-12.

found in those who fought in Vietnam, as it was a rallying cry for many GIs who wanted to leave Southeast Asia alive.

Jimi Hendrix was a popular counter-culture rock musician, and was well-known among Vietnam GIs. He was famous for his unique and distorted guitar, a sound that resonated well with Vietnam GIs and the counter-culture. Several of Hendrix's songs gained fame in relation to the war without any clear reference to Vietnam, such as his cover of Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower," and his drug-culture anthem "Purple Haze." Doug Bradley and Craig Werner write that the drug-related song "Purple Haze" took on a different meaning to some GIs in combat, as the image of haze often symbolized the elements of bombing raids and firefights. Similarly, "All Along the Watchtower" captivated GIs and counter-culture fans of Hendrix. In the post-Vietnam era, the music of Jimi Hendrix has been placed at the heart of several Vietnam-inspired movie soundtracks.[179]

At Woodstock, Hendrix infused his famous sound into an improvised version of the national anthem, creating his own symbolic protest against the war.[180] The interpretation of Hendrix's performance was determined by the listener, and many interpreted Hendrix's version of the "Star-Spangled Banner" as a metaphor for combat in Vietnam. Describing Hendrix's performance, Doug Bradley and Craig Werner write:

> "A virtuosos of feedback and amplification, Hendrix unleashed a barrage of battle sounds – echoes of a trumpet call to arms and the navy's all stations, evocations of helicopter blades, explosions, machine guns. Chaos. It is at once a tribute to the soldiers living in the midst of those sounds and a razor-sharp comment on the contrast between America's ideals and the realities of war."[181]

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[179] Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music,* 362-4.

[180] Theodore Gracyk, "Meanings of Songs and Meanings of Song Performances," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* Vol. 71, Issue 1 (February 2013): 28, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCO*host* (accessed April 7, 2017).

[181] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 76.

Philosopher Theodore Gracyk discusses Hendrix's use of the guitar to mimic the sounds of combat, creating a connection with Vietnam without uttering a single lyric. Gracyk mentions that the timing of Hendrix's performance - amidst turmoil under Nixon in Vietnam and growing antiwar sentiment - was an important factor to Hendrix's impact, creating a metaphorical protest against the United States and the war. He also notes that Hendrix's use of "guitar pyrotechnics" during specific parts of the performance, specifically following the line that references "bombs bursting in air" in Francis Scott Key's lyrical version, resembles elements of warfare.[182] Brilliantly, Hendrix uses his skill to invoke war imagery and allusions to Vietnam. Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock instrumental performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" reveals the culmination of the strong relationship between rock music and the Vietnam experience that developed in the late 1960s.

There are numerous rock songs from the Vietnam era that were unrelated to the war, yet developed a relationship with GIs, the antiwar movement, or the war in general. However, since many songs were subjective to personal experiences, it would be impossible to analyze them all. Psychedelic rock group *The Doors'* had several popular songs in the Vietnam era that developed a relationship with Vietnam without any relation, such as "Light My Fire" (*The Doors,* 1967), "Hello, I Love You" (*Waiting For The Sun,* 1968) and "The End" (*The Doors,* 1967). "Light My Fire" and "Hello, I Love You," both topped the *Billboard* chart, in 1967 and 1968 respectively.[183] The psychedelic sound of *The Doors* was often associated with drug use, a fairly common theme in Vietnam.[184] Folk-rock group *Peter, Paul, and Mary* released their version of

[182] Gracyk, *Meanings of Songs,* 28.

[183] "*Billboard* – The Doors," *Billboard* Chart History, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/artist/401582/doors/chart (accessed April 14, 2017).

[184] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 45.

John Denver's "Leaving on a Jet Plane" in 1969, becoming a hit on the charts and among Vietnam GIs.[185] While the song had no relation to the war, many GIs interpreted "leaving on a jet plane" as leaving their loved ones for Vietnam, and the hope for a return home someday.[186] Historian and Vietnam veteran Philip Beidler writes that "airplane music" was popular among GIs due to their experiences with leaving for war, and hoping to return home at the end of their tour.[187] Similarly, "My Girl," by *The Temptations* and "The Letter," by the *Box Tops* were two hit songs that were popular among GIs longing for their significant others back home.[188] Philip Beidler notes that songs relating to "happier memories" back home, such as "My Girl," often resonated with GIs reflecting on their home life.[189] Both "My Girl" and "The Letter" topped off at number one on the *Billboard* song chart in their respective release years (1965 and 1967). [190] These are just a few examples of the scores of popular rock songs that formed a relationship with Vietnam without any formal relationship.

Rock music was certainly important during Vietnam; it often provided a connection between culture and the war. Many of the popular rock songs associated with Vietnam had no intended relation to the war, yet formulated a relationship through themes and personal experience. Just as the problems faced by majority of Vietnam veterans did not end with the war's conclusion in the early 1970s, rock music did not discontinue its relationship with the war. Rather, rock music embraced the relationship with Vietnam past the war's end, and continued to

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[185] "Leaving on a Jet Plane" reached number one overall in the *Billboard* charts in 1969. See "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – December 20, 1969," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1969-12-20 (accessed April 15, 2017).

[186] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 6.

[187] Beidler, *Late Thoughts on an Old War,* 114.

[188] Bradley and Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place,* 6.

[189] Beidler, *Late Thoughts on an Old War,* 115.

[190] "*Billboard* Hot 100 – March 6, 1965," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1965-03-06 (accessed April 15, 2017).

include themes of memory, the legacy of the war as a loss, and mental health in reference to Vietnam.

Chapter 3: Rock's Role in Defining the Vietnam Generation

The Legacy of a Loss: The Post-Vietnam Era

In his book *American Reckoning,* Christian Appy discusses the impact that Vietnam had on the United States and the idea of Americanism following defeat in Vietnam.[191] Appy writes that "Vietnam brought something wholly new and unexpected into the American war story: failure."[192] The post-Vietnam period in the United States exposed Americans to an era opposite the postwar period following the Second World War. The memory of the war was not engulfed by heroism or national pride. Rather, the United States entered a period in which it attempted to regain its self-esteem.[193] For veterans of Vietnam, they lived in a world where their military service meant very little; there were no victory parades or national acknowledgments of homecomings, life for Vietnam vets continued as normal. As Appy bluntly writes in allusion to returning Vietnam veterans, "You were there, and now you're not. Welcome home." This is the polar opposite of what the generation of veterans before them experienced.[194]

The return home for many Vietnam veterans was unpleasant and disappointing. Many claims have been made by Vietnam veterans that their return home resulted in being tagged as "baby killers" and "murderers," and there have even been claims that veterans were spit-on by antiwar protestors. Sociologist and Vietnam veteran Jerry Lembcke argues that there is no definitive evidence indicating that any of these events had ever occurred in his book, *The Spitting*

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[191] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 223

[192] Ibid., 228.

[193] Robert McMahon, "Contested Memory: The Vietnam War and American Society, 1975-2001," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 26, Issue 2, 2002: 178.

[194] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 237-8.

Image.[195] However, the narrative of the neglected veteran is fact, not fiction. [196] In an interview, Vietnam veteran Terry DuBose recalls not wanting to travel in his military uniform upon his return home: "As soon as we got off the plane, we put on civvies. You didn't want to travel in your uniform like they did after World War II."[197] Another veteran, John Kniffin, remembers feeling as though there was something wrong when he returned from his tour:

> "I came back feeling there was something definitely wrong in that after World War II and Korea everybody was welcomed home, and after Vietnam, 'Oh, you're back. Where have you been?' And they didn't really want to talk about it."[198]

Another, Jack McClosky, remembers returning home to unfulfilled promises and false hope:

> "You've got to remember that we were promised that if we go fight this war, we've got all this shit – we've got education, all these jobs waiting for us when we come home…So I think it was a combination of seeing the war itself and understanding what that was about, and the…shattering of the American dream. I was given all these promises. I come home and they're not there. I remember…trying to talk to my father, who had served in the Second World War; trying to talk to my uncles who had all served…They didn't want to hear it. I'm saying to them, 'I'm not questioning your war. What you taught me, believing in America, believing in the Bill of Rights, I still believe in. The difference is now I know my country can be wrong."[199]

Not only have similar claims of neglect been made by countless Vietnam veterans, but the image of the forgotten veteran has become an important symbol in the legacy of Vietnam.[200] In the post-Vietnam era, several rock songs deal with the experiences of neglected veterans.

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[195] Jerry Lembecke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3.
[196] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 238.
[197] Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers,* 110.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid., 100.
[200] Appy, *American Reckoning,* 238.

Post-Vietnam Rock

The relationship between rock and Vietnam persisted well into the post-Vietnam era. Since the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, several rock artists have turned to their music to express sentiment and memory of the Vietnam War. One of the most outspoken artists regarding Vietnam was Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen grew up in the Vietnam era fearful of being chosen for the draft. His draft moment came in 1968 after receiving a letter in the mail that he was chosen for service.[201] However, after strategic planning by Springsteen and two of his closest friends, Springsteen showed up to his draft board a "mess," and was deemed "unfit for military service."[202] More than ten years after the United States military left Vietnam, Springsteen released *Born in the USA* (1984), a rock album inspired by conflict in the 1970s, the legacy of Vietnam, and the issues the United States faced in the early 1980s.[203] While the album and title track appear patriotic, they are both far from praise for the American effort. Rather, *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984) criticizes the Vietnam War, focusing on the legacy of the conflict, and the failing infrastructure of the nation since the war's conclusion. Along with *Nebraska* (1982), *Born in the U.S.A.* was one of Springsteen's first politically charged records that dealt with problems within the United States over the course of Springsteen's life, both personally and nationwide.[204]

The title track of the album, "Born in the U.S.A." ironically became a popular American anthem that is too often heard at celebratory events.[205] In early 1985, "Born in the U.S.A" reached number nine overall on the charts, while the album grabbed the top overall spot in the

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[201] Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 100.
[202] Ibid., 102.
[203] Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 469.
[204] Springsteen, *Born to Run*, 298.
[205] Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 469.

summer of 1984.[206] The song remains one of Springsteen's most popular songs, and successfully captures the sentiment and seriousness of the effects the Vietnam War had internally on the United States.[207] "Born in the U.S.A. is loud and glaring, with the simple beat of a snare drum and use of major guitar chords to create a powerful, and seemingly patriotic tone. Springsteen noted that the use of instruments to create an up-beat, patriotic sound was purposeful, yet has long been misinterpreted. As for the lyrics, Springsteen wrote "Born in the U.S.A." from the perspective of a Vietnam generation, working-class male who has suffered through the Vietnam War and the post-Vietnam era.[208] The first few verses describe a young male growing up in a 1950s, small town America, who spent his youth stumbling in and out of trouble which eventually landed him in Vietnam. Springsteen's tone is dark and hopeless:

> "Born down in a dead man's town. / The first kick I took was when I hit the ground. / End up like a dog that's been beat too much, till you spend half your life just covering up. / Born in the U.S.A. / I was born in the U.S.A. / I was born in the U.S.A. / Born in the U.S.A. / Got in a little hometown jam. / So they put a rifle in my hand. / Sent me off to a foreign land, to go and kill the yellow man."[209]

The song progresses to the protagonist's postwar experience, returning home with trouble finding work and dealing with the death of his brother at Khe Sahn. The last lines of Springsteen's final verse reflects the lost hope experienced by thousands of Vietnam veterans after the war: "I'm ten years burning down the road./ Nowhere to run, ain't got nowhere to go."[210] Springsteen is alluding to the faltering economy in the 1970s and early 1980s specifically hurting the working-class, many of which were Vietnam veterans.

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[206] "*Billboard* 200 – July 7, 1984," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/1984-07-07 (accessed April 14, 2017).

[207] Springsteen, *Born to Run,* 314.

[208] Ibid., 313-215.

[209] Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the U.S.A.," *Born in the U.S.A,* Columbia Records, 1984.

[210] Ibid.

Springsteen describes the song as his own story of a GI experiencing trouble in the country he fought for. He states, "It was GI blues, the verses an accounting, the choruses a declaration of one sure thing that could not be denied…birthplace….Having paid body and soul, you have earned, many times, the right to claim and shape your piece of home ground."[211] Springsteen is expressing the feeling of false hope in one's birth country, a feeling that is expressed by many men of the Vietnam generation.[212] This sentiment is a factor of the counter-culture generation, and the shift from post-World War Two prosperity and Americanism, to dealing with loss in Vietnam and a crumbling economy in the post-Vietnam era. The false hope that Springsteen wrote about were the broken promises of prosperity given to Vietnam GIs and the baby boom generation in the 1950s and 1960s.

Springsteen's anthem also focuses on the theme of alienation, something that many Vietnam veterans were exposed to upon returning home. Appy writes that Springsteen alludes to the fact of, "Corporate America and the government had turned their backs." The life of the protagonist in "Born in the U.S.A." is filled with "false promises" and "betrayal." Springsteen alludes to the fact that Vietnam veterans did not return home to a growing economy or period of prosperity as the World War Two generation of veterans did. For Vietnam veterans, the return home was met by a failing economy. Springsteen also alludes to the reality that the war was a failure for the United States, and the campaign to retain national pride in the early 1980s following the tumultuous 1970s. Springsteen mentions the false sense of patriotism that was attached to the memory of the war in the 1980s, notably by Ronald Reagan in his presidential campaign and American corporations such as Jeep.[213]

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[211] Springsteen, *Born to Run*, 314.
[212] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 255.
[213] Ibid, 256.

"Born in the U.S.A." was not Springsteen's only song inspired by the legacy of Vietnam. "Brothers Under the Bridge," "Shut Out the Light," and "The Wall," are all songs written by Springsteen with themes regarding the Vietnam conflict. In "Brothers Under the Bridge," Springsteen sings of brotherhood among GIs in Vietnam.[214] The lyrics present the image of a Vietnam veteran reflecting on the relationships he made with fellow GIs, and the postwar struggles that these veterans faced after returning home from Vietnam. "Shut Out the Light" alludes to the nature of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental disorder that affected thousands of Vietnam veterans, commonly referred to as "post-Vietnam syndrome" in the immediate years following the war.[215] Written from the perspective of a Vietnam veteran, Springsteen sings of alienation, depression, and physical and mental anguish.[216] Featured on Springsteen's most recent album, *High Hopes* (2014), "The Wall" is similar to "Brothers Under the Bridge" in that it features a protagonist reflecting upon his experiences and his relationships with fellow GIs.[217] Springsteen was inspired to write "The Wall" after a visit to the memorial in 1997, as well as his relationship with two close friends he lost to the war.[218] The lyrics to "The Wall" are a reference to the legacy of the war as a loss, and the maltreatment of veterans in the post-Vietnam era.[219] In "The Wall," there is a clear sense of anger in Springsteen's voice and lyrics, specifically in reference to the actions of the U.S. government and their treatment of Vietnam vets.[220] Springsteen helped sustain the relationship between Vietnam and rock music.

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[214] Bruce Springsteen, "Brothers Under the Bridge ('83)," *Tracks*, Columbia Records, 1998.

[215] Appy, *American Reckoning*, 284.

[216] Bruce Springsteen, "Shut Out the Light," *Tracks*, Columbia Records, 1998.

[217] Bruce Springsteen, "The Wall," *High Hopes*, Columbia Records, 2014.

[218] Bruce Springsteen, "The Wall," *Springsteenlyrics.com*, December 10, 2015. *http://www.springsteenlyrics.com/lyrics.php?song=thewall* (accessed April 5, 2017).

[219] Springsteen, "The Wall."

[220] Ibid.

Popular rock musician Billy Joel also used his work as a vehicle for addressing themes of the Vietnam War. Released just two years before *Born in the U.S.A.,* Joel released his own successful Cold War album, *The Nylon Curtain* (1982).[221] A reference to Winston Churchill's famous phrase "The Iron Curtain," *The Nylon Curtain* addressed issues of communism and the Cold War in America ("Pressure"), the deteriorating Rustbelt region ("Allentown"), and the Vietnam War and its impact on a generation of veterans ("Goodnight Saigon"). Between 1982 and 1983, *The Nylon Curtain* spent 36 weeks on the *Billboard* album charts, reaching number seven overall in late 1982.[222]

The two songs referencing the Vietnam experience on *The Nylon Curtain* are "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon." Joel was inspired to write "Allentown" as a response to the deteriorating steel industry in Eastern Pennsylvania, which was heavily affected when Vietnam sent many working-class men in the region to Vietnam.[223] The song reached the seventeenth spot overall on the *Billboard* charts in 1983, spending 22 weeks on the chart in total.[224] While the song does not explicitly reference the Vietnam War, Joel includes themes that relate to the postwar experience of the Vietnam vet, including economic hardship. Joel also compares the postwar experience of Vietnam to the postwar experience of World War Two:[225]

> "Well we're living here in Allentown, and they're closing all the factories down. / Out in Bethlehem they're killing time, filling out forms, standing in line. / Well our fathers fought the Second World War. / Spent their weekends on the Jersey Shore. / Met our mothers in the USO, asked them to dance, danced with them slow. / And we're living here in Allentown. / But the restlessness was handed

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[221] Fred Schruers, *Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2014), 158.

[222] "*Billboard* 200 – November 20, 1982," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/1982-11-20 (accessed April 16, 2017).

[223] Schruers, *Billy Joel*, 152.

[224] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – February 5, 1983," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1983-02-05 (accessed April 14, 2017).

[225] Schruers, *Billy Joel*, 152.

> down. / And it's getting very hard to stay. / Well we're waiting here in Allentown, for the Pennsylvania we never found. /… Every child had a pretty good shot. / To get at least as far as their old man got. / But something happened on the way to that place. / They threw an American flag in our face."[226]

Joel's reference to the problems faced by the working-class in the post-Vietnam era ("closing all the factories down") is similar to Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.," and it alludes to the theme of lost hope in many working-class Vietnam veterans after returning home. Joel also makes a reference to the generational difference between World War Two and Vietnam ("Well our fathers fought the Second World War" "They threw an American flag in our face"). Joel's reference to the American flag being thrown in the face of working-class Americans can be interpreted as sending hundreds of thousands of working-class Americans to war, which furthered the depletion of several working-class industries in the 1970s (in this case, the steel industry). Upon returning home from war, these working-class men did not return to jobs as their fathers did; instead, they returned to a failing economy.[227] "Allentown" connects with the Vietnam War through themes of class conflict and the economy in the postwar era.[228]

Also on *The Nylon Curtain,* "Goodnight Saigon" explicitly references the Vietnam War. The title of Joel's song is a reference to the fall of Saigon to the communists in 1975, an allusion to the war's legacy as a loss.[229] Although "Goodnight Saigon" did not enjoy as much success as "Allentown," it did break the *Billboard* Hot 100 for seven weeks in 1983, peaking at 56.[230]

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[226] Billy Joel, "Allentown," *The Nylon Curtain,* Columbia Records, 1982.

[227] Schruers, *Billy Joel,* 154.

[228] For information involving the economic state of the United States in the 1970s, see Samuel Rosenberg, *American Economic Development Since 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 208-233.

[229] Ibid., 155.

[230] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – April 2, 1983," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1983-04-02 (accessed April 15, 2017).

"Goodnight Saigon" is written from the perspective of a Vietnam veteran reflecting upon his military experience and his relationship with fellow GIs:

> "We met as soul mates, on Parris Island. / We left as inmates, from an asylum. / And we were sharp, as sharp as knives. / And we were so gung ho, to lay down our lives. / We came in spastic, like tame-less horses. / We left in plastic, as numbered corpses. /…We passed the hash pipe, and played our *Doors* tapes. / And it was dark, so dark at night. / And we held on to each other, like brother to brother. / We promised our mothers we'd write. / And we would all go down together. /…Remember Charlie? Remember Baker? / They left their childhood, on every acre. / And who was wrong? / And who was right? / It didn't matter in the thick of the fight."[231]

Joel references several Vietnam experience themes in "Goodnight Saigon," including the effects Vietnam had on the mental health of veterans ("We left as inmates, from an asylum"), the high number of American casualties ("We left in plastic, as numbered corpses"), drug use and rock music ("We passed the hash pipe, and played our *Doors* tapes"), and the sense of brotherhood among Vietnam GIs ("And we would all go down together"). While writing *The Nylon Curtain,* Joel admits that he still felt the "post-Vietnam seismic shift in the country."[232] He recognized the effect that Vietnam had on the nation, and felt the need to write about the effects the war had on his own generation, evidenced in both "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon."

In 1982, country-rock band *Charlie Daniels Band* released the song "Still in Saigon." Including themes of memory and the experiences of a young GI from the beginning of the war until his homecoming. The song follows:

> Got on a plane in 'Frisco, and got off in Vietnam. / I walked into a different world, the past forever gone. / I could have gone to Canada, or I could have stayed in school. / But I was brought up differently, I couldn't break the rules. / Thirteen months and fifteen days, the last ones were the worst. / One minute I'd kneel down and pray, and the next I'd stand and curse. / No place to run to, where I did not feel that war. / When I got home I stayed alone, and checked behind each door. / Cuz I'm still in Saigon, Still in Saigon. / I am still in Saigon in my mind. /

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[231] Billy Joel, "Goodnight Saigon," *The Nylon Curtain,* Columbia Records, 1982.
[232] Schruers, *Billy Joel,* 154.

> The ground at home was covered in snow, and I was covered in sweat. / My younger brother calls me a killer, and my daddy calls me a vet. / Everybody says I'm someone else, and I'm sick and there's no cure. / Damned if I know who I am, there was only one place I was sure. / When I was still in Saigon, still in Saigon. / I am still in Saigon in my mind. / Every summer when it rains, I smell the jungle, I hear the planes. / I can't tell no one, I feel ashamed. / Afraid someday I'll go insane. / That's been ten long years ago, and time has gone on by. / Now and then I catch myself, eyes searching through the sky. / All the sounds of long ago, will be forever in my head. / Mingled with the wounded cries, and the silence of the dead."[233]

Some of the themes presented in "Still in Saigon" include the draft and draft-dodging ("I could have gone to Canada"), post-traumatic stress disorder ("When I got home I stayed alone, and checked behind each door" "I'm sick and there's no cure"), the rough homecoming of some veterans ("My younger brother calls me a killer, and my daddy calls me a vet"), and memory of the war ("Still in Saigon," "That's been ten long years ago"). The song topped at 22 overall on the *Billboard* Hot 100 songs in 1982, and spent 12 consecutive weeks on the list.[234] Similar to both Bruce Springsteen and Billy Joel, *The Charlie Daniels Band* approaches memory of Vietnam with negativity, shining light on the many issues Vietnam veterans faced during and after the war.

In 1985, British musician Paul Hardcastle released "19," his own Vietnam pop-rock song. The song spent 14 weeks on the hit charts, reaching the 15th overall spot in the United States.[235] Hardcastle's song utilizes spoken radio talk rather than singing, with an up-tempo, 1980s synth-pop beat in the background. The lyrics, in spoken word style, are as follows:

> In 1965, Vietnam seemed like just another foreign war, but it wasn't. / It was different in many ways, as so were those that did the fighting. / In World War II the average age of the combat soldier was twenty-six. / In Vietnam he was

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[233] *The Charlie Daniels Band*, "Still in Saigon," *Windows*, Epic, 1982.

[234] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – May 29, 1982," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1982-05-29 (accessed April 23, 2017).

[235] "*Billboard* The Hot 100 – July 20, 1985," *Billboard* Charts Archive, billboard.com, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1985-07-20 (accessed April 23, 2017).

> nineteen…/ The heaviest fighting of the past two weeks continued today twenty-five miles northwest of Saigon. / I really wasn't sure what was going on…/In Vietnam the combat soldier typically served a twelve-month tour of duty, but was exposed to hostile fire almost every day…/In Saigon a US military spokesman said today 'More than seven hundred enemy troops were killed last week in that sensitive border area in all of South Vietnam. / The enemy lost a total of two thousand six hundred eighty-nine soldiers. / All those who remember the war, they won't forget what they've seen. / Destruction of men in their prime whose average age was nineteen…/According to a Veteran's Administration study, half of the Vietnam combat veterans suffered from what psychiatrists call post-traumatic stress disorder. / Many vets complain of alienation, rage, or guilt. / Some succumb to suicidal thoughts. / Eight to ten years after coming home, almost eight-hundred-thousand men are still fighting the Vietnam War."[236]

Hardcastle tackles several Vietnam themes in his unique pop-rock song ten years after the fall of Saigon. "19" focuses on the experience of a Vietnam GI, touching upon themes of age ("nineteen"), differences between World War Two and Vietnam ("In World War II the average age of the combat soldier was twenty-six. / In Vietnam he was nineteen"), memory ("eight-hundred thousand men are still fighting the Vietnam War"), and post-Vietnam problems, such as PTSD ("half of the Vietnam combat veterans suffered from…PTSD"). Not only was "19" a hit in the United States, but the song reached the top overall spot on several European charts, including the UK Singles.[237] Hardcastle released the song ten years after the fall of Saigon, and shares a similar spot alongside "Born in the U.S.A," "Allentown," and "Still in Saigon" as Vietnam-related songs released in the 1980s.

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[236] Paul Hardcastle, "19," *Paul Hardcastle,* Chrysalis, 1985.

[237] "Official Singles Chart Top 100 – 5 May, 1985 – 11 May, 1985," Official Charts, officialchart.com, http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19850505/7501/ (accessed April 23, 2017).

Music and Film in the Post-Vietnam Era

The early 1980s in the United States featured a resurgence of Americanism under President Ronald Reagan. President Reagan believed it was time for the United States to put the past behind and look towards the future, especially in regards to Vietnam. Reagan himself, in the face of looming Cold War problems, stated in August 1980 that the United States had faced the "Vietnam Syndrome" for far too long, and it was time to increase military efforts and national defense spending in order to prevent another Vietnam from ever happening.[238] Reagan often exhibited behavior that suggested he did not know much about Vietnam and the history of the war. Several statements by Reagan himself reveal that his information regarding the history of the conflict was incorrect.[239] Reagans understanding of an alternative history casts light on the message he presented to the 1980s generation of Americans, a message that depicted the Vietnam War as a "noble cause."[240] In reference to Reagan-era patriotism, Christian Appy writes:

> "Young kids coming of age in Reagan's America and beyond could hardly imagine a time, just a decade or two in the past, when the military and the war it was fighting became so unpopular that more than half of all draft-age men took steps to stay out of uniform and out of Vietnam; a time when some 500,000 servicemen deserted the military; a time when many Americans rejected the idea that military service was always honorable and heroic."[241]

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[238] Ronald Reagan, "PEACE: Restoring the Margin of Safety, Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, Chicago, Illinois, August 18, 1980," Reagan Library, https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/8.18.80.html (accessed April 23, 2017).

[239] H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 27-32.

[240] Reagan, "PEACE."

[241] Ibid, 258.

Appy is referencing the false sense of Americanism that was often tied to the memory of Vietnam, the same false Americanism that musicians have invoked in Vietnam-related songs since the end of the war ("Born in the U.S.A," "Allentown.").

While Reagan focused on rebuilding national strength in the eighties, he also had to convince a generation of Americans that Vietnam was not a complete disaster. Historian Charles Neu writes "Many American sense that the nation had entered a new era after Vietnam, one that was filled with divisions, uncertainties, and moral confusions…the powerful rhetoric of President Reagan…could not restore the old sense of innocence, destiny, and national self-confidence."[242] Americanism under Reagan muddled the scene of war and memory; the United States under Reagan was encouraged to erase the memory of the war as a loss in order to regain military strength and confidence in order to face international conflict. However, many who still dealt with post-Vietnam issues, especially veterans, had a tough time dealing with the implications of a lost war. Many veterans felt as though their service was meaningless, and had a hard time understanding what went wrong in Vietnam.[243] While Reagan viewed Vietnam in the same context as World War Two as a good war and a victory, the memory of Vietnam as a failure was still fresh in the minds of millions of Americans.[244]

The post-Vietnam War period introduced several rock songs dealing with themes of the Vietnam experience, such as the treatment of veterans in the postwar period, mental health, the memory of the war, and the impact it had on the United States and "Americanism." Many of the rock songs written in relation to Vietnam in the postwar period reflect the same themes as those

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[242] Charles E. Neu, "The Vietnam War and the Transformation of America," in *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*, ed. Charles E. Neu (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 23.

[243] Ibid., 21.

[244] McMahon, "Contested Memory," 169.

songs written during the war. This is in part due to the fact that many of the artists reflecting on Vietnam, such as Springsteen and Joel, were part of the Vietnam generation. The impact that the war had on the baby boom generation is reflected in rock music well past the fall of Saigon.

Following the Vietnam War, there were many attempts to recreate the war for entertainment purposes in cinematic form. In the 1970s and 1980s, Americans saw the release of several Vietnam-related films that varied greatly in theme and interpretation of the war. Some films sought to depict hopelessness and immorality, while others attempted to dismiss themes of failure and suffering. For instance, *Coming Home* (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1979), and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) highlighted darker, yet more accurate, themes connected to the Vietnam experience, as well as deep psychological topics.[245] Other films, specifically the *Rambo* series of the 1980s starring Sylvester Stallone, rejected American defeat, and turned the Vietnam narrative inside-out to portray the Americans as victims. The memory of Vietnam through film provides insight into the post-Vietnam United States. Evidently there are two sides to the argument: one accepts the war as a failure and a crippling setback of American military strength and self-confidence, and the other rejects Vietnam as a failed campaign. Yet, more prevalent in both film and rock music in the post-Vietnam era was the narrative depicting Vietnam as a detrimental episode in American social and military history.[246]

As film and music in the post-Vietnam era continued to call attention to conflict and the war, filmmakers began to blend the two forms of popular culture, introducing what can be referred to as the "Vietnam soundtrack." Numerous cinematic films and entertainment shows

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[245] William J. Palmer, "Symbolic Nihilism in *Platoon*," in *America Rediscovered: Critical Essays on Literature and Film of the Vietnam War,* ed. Owen W. Gilman Jr. and Lorrie Smith (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 257.

[246] McMahon, "Contested Memory," 179.

have utilized the relationship between Vietnam and rock music to place emphasis on the role that the rock genre played in the counter-culture era and the Vietnam experience. *Platoon* (1986) includes numerous Vietnam-era rock songs, such as *The Doors'* "Hello, I Love You," *Jefferson Airplane's* "White Rabbit," Otis Redding's "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay," and "Aretha Franklin's "Respect."[247] *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), a film adaptation of Ron Kovic's novel, includes several 1960s rock songs, including the *The Rolling Stones'* "Ruby Tuesday," "Jumping Jack Flash," and "Sympathy for the Devil," as well as *The Temptations'* "My Girl," Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'," and *CCR's* "Born on the Bayou." At the heart of the *Forrest Gump* (1994) soundtrack are several Vietnam-era songs, such as Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," "*CCR's* "Fortunate Son," *Buffalo Springfield's* "For What It's Worth," and several songs by *The Doors.*[248] The relationship between rock and Vietnam evident in post-Vietnam films reveals the impact that rock 'n' roll had on the Vietnam experience.

Films that utilize the relationship between the Vietnam War and rock music play an important role in the memory of the conflict. A recurring theme in many of such films is the relationship between rock, counter-culture, and the war. For example, the scenes in which protagonist Forrest Gump is involved in combat and scenes that include antiwar context in *Forrest Gump* share similar songs. Included in a combat scene of *Forrest Gump* is "For What It's Worth," while *Jefferson Airplane's* counter-culture anthem accompanies an "in-country" scene.[249] Both songs were connected (although "For What It's Worth" was indirectly related) to the antiwar and counter-culture movement, yet show up in scenes related to the war at home and abroad. The use of context here is important, as the theme of counter-culture is related to scenes

[247] Beidler, *Late Thoughts on an Old War,* 104.
[248] Ibid., 105-6.
[249] Ibid., 106.

in both Vietnam and in-country, formulating a relationship between the music and the Vietnam experience.

Throughout most Vietnam movie soundtracks, the use of music is, more often than not, used to highlight the relationship between culture and the war. Very rarely are pro-war or pro-military songs from the Vietnam era used in connection to Vietnam, similar to the trend of post-Vietnam music.[250] However, many Vietnam movies use rock music that has no direct connection to the war. Yet they utilize the interconnected relationship between counter-culture, rock, and the Vietnam War. Thus, the connection between counter-culture, rock music, and Vietnam is utilized most often in pop culture depictions of the war.

[250] McMahon, "Contested Memory, 182.

Conclusion

The development of American counter-culture and the rock ‘n’ roll explosion of the 1950s helped formulate a relationship between rock and Vietnam in the 1960s. The counter-culture generation developed out of the early Cold War era in the 1950s, adopting rock ‘n’ roll music when it burst on to the popular culture scene in the mid-1950s. Rock ‘n’ roll was instrumental in the development of American counter-culture in the 1960s. As both the counter-culture generation and rock ‘n’ roll evolved into the 1960s, their relationship grew, and rock music began to play a larger role within the counter-culture generation. When Vietnam emerged as a major conflict in the mid-1960s, rock music was at the height of its popularity: Dylan, Hendrix, *The Doors*, *CCR*, and *The Rolling Stones*, among countless other rock ‘n’ roll artists, dominated the music charts. Without the popularity and evolution of rock music in the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between rock and Vietnam may not have been as strong as it is.

The culmination of both counter-culture and rock music in the 1960s created a relationship between the Vietnam War and rock music. This relationship between rock music and Vietnam goes deeper than protest and antiwar-inspired songs. While protest songs did exist and were effective, the relationship also stems from personal experiences and the various themes of the Vietnam experience. Many songs with no relation to the war gained popularity among GIs and Americans in association with the war (“My Girl,” “For What It’s Worth,” “We Gotta Get Outta This Place”). Themes of race, class, and culture, as well as more personal themes in connection with American GIs, are some examples of themes found in rock music connected to Vietnam.

The Vietnam War affected a generation of Americans, and the legacy of Vietnam is preserved by the persistent relationship between the Vietnam generation and rock music. Numerous musicians who lived through the Vietnam experience, such as Billy Joel and Bruce Springsteen, wrote about themes of Vietnam more than ten years after the United States left Southeast Asia. In most of the various pop culture movies about Vietnam, at least some of the songs considered to be "Vietnam Rock" are included in the soundtrack, highlighting the strong relationship between rock and Vietnam. The relationship between rock 'n' roll and the Vietnam War continued long past the fall of Saigon in 1975.

There is not just one link that binds rock 'n' roll music to the Vietnam War. Numerous themes and experiences with Vietnam had the ability to link even the simplest of rock songs to the war. The extensive catalog of rock music in the 1960s expressed themes that were evident in the personal experiences of both GIs and those experiencing the Vietnam conflict. The role of rock music in the Vietnam era was often left up to the interpreter. The relationship between rock 'n' roll and Vietnam, and the interpretation of rock music in connection to the war, established the Vietnam War as the first rock 'n' roll war, and had a lasting imprint on the culture surrounding the Vietnam experience. Thus, rock 'n' roll remains a fundamental element of the American experience of the Vietnam War.

Observing the scope of rock music in relation to the Vietnam War, it provides an understanding of how popular culture, specifically music, operates in modern American society. Since rock 'n' roll emerged as a national phenomenon in the United States, it has dominated the popular music landscape. Yet, understanding just how rock music came to be one of the largest music genres is an entirely different topic. One has to look at the broader range of social and cultural topics - baby boom, Cold War, consumerism, counter-conformity - to understand how

the rise of rock persisted in the 1960s. Similarly, with the expansion and evolution of rock music in the mid-1960s, one would also need to understand the broader historical context. Rock music not only played an important role in promoting pro-war or anti-war arguments, but it impacted how the war was perceived by many. In memory, rock music of the 1960s, regardless of its connection to the Vietnam War, has most often been linked to the memory of Vietnam in terms of counter-culture or protest. Hence, the "Vietnam soundtrack" plays a role in how the war is perceived by post-Vietnam generations in the United States.

The relationship between rock and Vietnam is very much a part of 1960s cultural history of the United States. The songs themselves not only highlight specific themes of history, but they provide insight into which issues or themes were important in specific time frames. For example, popular rock music in the antiwar scene emerged after Tet, the turning point in the war in terms of popularity. In the post-Vietnam era, Vietnam-related music in the 1980s responded to Reagan's "Vietnam Syndrome" and the problems that many veterans faced a decade after the war. Rock music related to Vietnam in the post-war era reinforces the idea that the Vietnam War was wrong, and in some ways immoral. Through music, one can relatively map the history of the Vietnam experience, providing a glimpse of how music as a whole can preserve the emotion and historical context of a specific time period. As rock 'n' roll music helps preserve the timeline, memory, and legacy of the Vietnam War, it also supports an orthodox historical perspective of the Vietnam experience, an orthodox view that confirms immorality and failure. The relationship between rock 'n' roll and the Vietnam War will long serve as a vehicle for remembering Vietnam as a bad war.

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