

From Vietnam to Iraq: A content analysis of protest song lyrics of two war periods

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Abstract

This study offers a content analysis of the lyrics of 100 songs of protest during two periods of war, the Vietnam War during the 1960s and early 70s and the war in Iraq which began in March of 2003. It provides a brief overview of some of the social and technological conditions which have led to the changes that have taken place in recent protest songs. The article shows that more recent protest music has become more specific, with a greater focus on historical events than occurred in the lyrics of protest music written during the years of the Vietnam War.

Keywords: protest song, discourse analysis, Iraq War, 1960s protest

Introduction

Considerable changes have taken place in U.S. protest music over the past forty years, both in the lyrics and in the dissemination of protest songs. Totally new broadcast media, brought about by technological advancements, along with a growing sophistication of the audience have led to these changes. How has the message of protest music changed? This study focuses on such changes through an analysis of the lyrics of protest songs of the Vietnam War era and of the early years of the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2002~2004).

There is quite a divergence of opinion as to what exactly constitutes a “protest song.” In the 60s, Denisoff defined the protest song as “a socio-political statement designed to create an awareness of social problems and which offers or infers a solution which is viewed as deviant in nature” (Denisoff, 1972). Weinstein suggests a definition of “protest” as “an opposition to policy, as action against the people in power that is grounded in a sense of injustice,” and then discusses the difficulties in categorizing the protest song in terms of their lyrics alone, the impacts that a song has, or even how one could pin down what “people in power” or “injustice” comprises (Weinstein, 2006). This is an important and controversial matter, and one that is not likely to be resolved easily. For the purposes of this study, protest music may be defined as songs whose lyrics convey a message which is opposed to a policy or course of action adopted by an authority or by society as an institution (e.g. discrimination).

Long before the Vietnam Era, songs describing inequalities between classes and races were made popular through a myriad of folk singers, for example Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, and the Almanac Singers, often stemming from union activism and the desire to create a more egalitarian society (Dunson, 1965; Denisoff, 1971; Denisoff & Peterson, 1972). As in the earlier folk song era, a wide range of social issues found their way into popular song lyrics of the 1960s. Two of the most important issues were the Vietnam War and racial inequality, and many lyrics dealt with the topics of peace, brotherhood and love, as well as with the disdain for the “war machine” and the profiteering of the military-industrial complex.

Changes in Broadcasting Media

The music of the 60s was broadcast on radio and television stations across the U.S. A few songs protesting the Vietnam War and various domestic social issues made their way onto the airwaves. Listening audiences bought LPs or 45 rpm discs, and popularity ratings of songs was often based on record sales and on airplay. Singers and groups appeared on television variety shows and in live concerts. Although rare and controversial, shows like *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* featured songs that opposed the war in Vietnam. Some limits were placed on what could be broadcast, however, and singers such as Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan were banned from singing their more explicit lyrics. Because of the public's reaction to the censorship, CBS finally allowed Seeger to return later to perform his "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy", which indirectly accused President Johnson of mismanaging the war.

It is evident that in the early years of the conflict in Iraq singers were once again subject to the "permitted" range of expression during wartime. Although there has been some controversy over whether large media corporations actually prohibited their radio stations from airing protest music from the 60s or from the early 2000s (Cloonan and Garofalo, 2003, "Banned Songlist", 2001), a number of singers have suffered repercussions from their outspokenness regarding the invasion of Iraq (see "Las Vegas", 2004 and "Shut Up and Sing!", 2007). Madonna, feeling the pressure, pulled her original anti-war video "American Life", stating:

"I do not believe it is appropriate to air it at this time. Due to the volatile state of the world and out of sensitivity and respect to the armed forces, who I support and pray for, I do not want to risk offending anyone who might misinterpret the meaning of this video" (Pareles, 2003).

Yet in another report, she observes:

"You know, it's ironic we're fighting for democracy in Iraq because we ultimately aren't celebrating democracy here, because anybody who has anything to say against the war or against the president or whatever is punished, and that's not democracy — it's people being intolerant" ("American Life", 2003).

Protest songs produced in the early years of the Iraq War were rarely heard on radio stations in the U.S. The widely-spread story about Clear Channel Communications' list of banned songs, although perhaps untrue, does show that at least some of the public was aware of the paucity of protest songs being broadcast in the U.S. after 9-11¹.

Changes in Technology

In the early years of the 1960s, most protest songs were sung by folk singers strumming and picking their way through the relatively innocuous lyrics on guitars, banjos, and harmonicas. Guitars, ukuleles and other portable instruments were easy to use at spur-of-the-moment discussions, sit-ins, and demonstrations. Later, as music turned electric, electric guitars, basses, and organs turned up the heat on the sound and on the lyrics as the content became more direct and confrontational. During the 1960s and early 70s, as audio recordings could be more

¹ This rumor was the basis of a 2001 song written and performed by John McCutcheon, "The List", which lambastes Clear Channel for not including his protest songs on their list. "It's a slap in the face, an awful disgrace / What do I have to do / To make the grade and not be played / Like Sinatra and U2?... / How many songs must a folksinger write / Before they're forever banned? / Imagine there's no airplay / It's easy if you try" *The List*

easily obtained, previously recorded material such as news reports or speeches of famous individuals was occasionally included in protest songs. The background newscast in Simon and Garfunkel's *7 O'Clock News/Silent Night*, a soundtrack of an aerial dogfight in Eric Burdon and the Animals' *Sky Pilot*, and radio recordings of the Kennedy assassination, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy in Tom Clay's *What the World Needs Now is Love* are examples of the use of such technology.

In contrast, a substantial amount of the protest music of the Iraq War has made prominent recordings of public officials and famous personalities. In addition, with the availability of computer programs that can manipulate digital audio recordings, many songs of the Iraq War era use actual speech of certain political figures engineered to convey totally different meanings. For example, *Imagine This* by Wax Audio takes actual recordings of the speeches and press conferences of George W. Bush, edits, or "mashes", them to give the impression that Bush is singing/rapping John Lennon's famous classic, *Imagine*. Clips from recordings of speeches or commentary by Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Tariq Ali and others have also been included, but not changed in any way, for example in *In The Garden of Eden (War Crimes / DC Rally mix)*, *MLK (Rise Again)*, *Not In Our Name (Tariq Ali)*, *Another War*, and *Condi's Naked Testimony*. One song, *Kerry-Bush Skull & Bones*, even includes a recorded clip of Amy Goodman, the producer and news anchor of "DemocracyNow!", an alternative news broadcast on public radio and television, satellite and streaming Internet.

By and far the greatest change that society has seen since the 1960s has been in technology. 33rpm LPs and 45s have given way to CDs, mp3 players, and cell phone / iTunes downloads. Whereas radio was the main mode of broadcasting popular music during the years of the Vietnam War, today the Internet is one of the main sources for finding new music. And, since songwriters and singers are now free to include virtually any lyrical material without restraint—as yet, Internet allows for a no-holds-barred approach to songwriting in terms of profanity, subject matter, and presentation.

Alternative Media Sources

Because of technical advances and the popularity of the Internet in countries around the world, many people searching for information on social issues and the war in Iraq have utilized progressive outlets such as DemocracyNow.org, blogs, and Indymedia web sites based in a number of countries, in addition to mainstream media sources. In the early years of the Iraq war, many of these sources linked to web sites that offered protest songs which were free to download, copy, and disseminate: an alternative to corporate-owned, corporate-produced, and corporate-censored music publishing. In fact, some songs sarcastically retort mainstream media's restrictive policies. *The FCC Song* written by Eric Idle of Monty Python and David Rovics' *The Commons* and *Who Will Tell the People*, among others, express outrage at corporate take-over of the airwaves. Popular podcasts such as the Mike Malloy Show and the Randi Rhodes Show play short clips of songs that decry administration policy on foreign and domestic issues. YouTube is a tremendously popular source of videos, often produced by nonprofessional singers, songwriters, and graphic artists who use their skills to produce slideshows or short movies which use protest songs as background music.

Although there have been many significant changes in the technology used to produce and to distribute songs of protest, it is the lyrics themselves that are the focus of the songs and of this study.

The Protest Song

Denisoff describes folksongs of protest as propaganda songs which were used to induce change in opinion or behavior, written and/or played in the traditional folk style. He outlines six primary goals of the propaganda song: it 1) solicits outside support, 2) reinforces the value structure of supporters, 3) promotes cohesion and solidarity among followers, 4) aims to recruit individuals, 5) invokes solutions, and 6) highlights a social problem or discontent (Denisoff, 1972, p. 2-3). He further distinguishes the propaganda song of persuasion as being either a “magnetic” song, designed to hold the members of a movement together and to attract new members to the fold, or the “rhetorical” song, which “describes some social condition, but one which offers no explicit ideological or organizational solutions” (ibid, p. 6).

In his research into the lyrics of protest songs, Knupp (1981) raised three main issues with regard to the rhetorical use of the protest song:

1. A protest song is rarely educational.
2. A protest song is absent of intellectual reflection.
3. A protest song is not concerned with specific issues or policies.

In his study of the content of fifty-nine songs from the labor and anti-war movements of the 1960s, Knupp concluded that the songs reviewed “thrive on ambiguities, sweeping assertions, and panoramic criticisms rather than on specific issues, policies, and arguments. There is a consistent avoidance of concrete historical references in the songs” (ibid p. 584-585). Laying aside the question of the soundness of his findings regarding the lyrics of the songs in his corpus, the current initial study also seeks to find the extent to which and the manner in which songs of protest of the 1960s and those of the Iraq War deal with social issues and policies.

Research questions

The aim of this study was to answer the following research questions: 1) What patterns of language use appear in protest songs of the Vietnam War era (VP) and those of the early years of the Iraq War (IP) and 2) What changes from the earlier era to the latter are evident in the rhetorical strategies of the protest songs?

Methodology

This study follows the analytic paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis as outlined in Fairclough (1992, p. 75), under the main heading of vocabulary. For the purposes of analysis, the corpus for this study consists of the lyrics of 50 songs from the Vietnam Era (roughly 1963 – 1972) which were chosen at random from a list of songs whose lyrics had been coded and which contained references to a) the Vietnam War and/or b) an issue causing social conflict². Such social issues include racial issues, gender equality, violence, drugs, the media, and poverty in the U.S. The lyrics of an additional 50 songs that were released between 2002 and 2004 were coded and found to contain references to the Iraq War, President George W.

² See Appendix A for a list of codings used in this study. A complete list of the songs used in this study is available from the author.

Bush, government cabinet members, as well as social issues such as those above. Many of the songs and lyrics from the early years of the Iraq War were found on web sites protesting the war. Others were found on CDs sold on various websites such as CDbaby.com. None came from mainstream music stores. A song was deleted from the list if it was found to contain fewer than three distinct codings. The statistical analysis software TAMS was utilized to code and to quantify the frequency of codings. Individual code words were then grouped under categories. For example, the code words *history*, *Vietnam*, *9-11*, *Bin Laden*, *Afghanistan*, *Taliban*, *drug(opium)*, *Iraq*, *Hussein*, *Saudi*, *Britain*, and *Iran* were placed under the category of “Historical”.

	VP	IP
Political	44	49
Historical	24	62
Violence	99	71
Call to Action	22	24
Economics	10	57
Civilians	25	14
Media/Free speech	3	20
Security	4	12
Soc. Issues	30	36
Religion	21	19
Celebrities/Pop Cult	7	9

Table 1. Totals number of references (codings) in each category for songs of protest from years during Vietnam War and from the Iraq War.

Results

One criticism in the Knupp study was that protest songs circumvent intellectual activity. While many more of the songs of the Vietnam War era (VP) in this sample contain more lyrical and sensitive expression than do the songs of the Iraq War period (IP), it appears that some IP songwriters have retained a bit of the idealism that was present in songwriting during the Vietnam era:

“Then can I walk beside you / I have come here to lose the smog / and I feel to be a cog in something turning / well maybe it’s just the time of year, or maybe it’s the time of man / I don’t know who I am / but you know life is for learning / we are stardust, we are golden / and we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden”
Woodstock (VP)

“But our trains rolled in on 2 and 3 / And as she stepped aboard she said to me / You can become the change that you would wish to see / For every lock that you can see / Inside your heart you hold the key / And as she waved goodbye her words came back to me” *We the People* (IP)

However, other songs in the IP sample show a deep and clear exasperation with the policies enacted by their government:

“(Washington) don’t give a damn ‘bout no resolution / (Washington) u no plan with Kofi Annan /
(Washington) when me turn on mi television / (Washington) all over the land peace demonstration /
(Washington) don’t give a damn bout no peace slogan / (Washington) u throw bomb and u have no reason /
(Washington) di one Saddam didn’t attack anyone / (Washington) your guns and bombs dem kill civilians”
We Want Peace (No More War)

and “just like that election down in Florida / this shit doesn’t all add up / it’s all about the price of oil” in *The Price of Oil*, which refers to the 2001 presidential election in which votes were not fully recounted and the Supreme Court decision declared G. W. Bush the winner.

The lyrics of IP songs included in this study include abundant references to historical figures and events, geography, and social problems as opposed to poetic phrases or metaphor often used in VP songs. Through an analysis of these, we come closer to assessing the degree to which the songs in this study call for an understanding of such elements or seek to enlighten or educate the listener. In this study, songs that included terms coded under the category of *historical* totaled 24 for VP songs and 62 for IP songs. A closer look revealed that in some songs, simply the words Vietnam, Iraq, Iran, or Afghanistan were coded as a reference under *historical*, and simply categorizing them as such could not reasonably be used as support for the proposition that the songs under consideration are, in fact, educational. However, in many of the songs, it is clear that without an understanding of history, the audience will not be able to comprehend the lyrics, in particular, references to past historical figures and events as in the following:

“Saddam killed his own people / just like general Pinochet / and once upon a time both these evil men / were supported by the U.S.A. / and whisper it, even Bin Laden / once drank from America’s cup” *The Price of Oil*

“Nicaragua, El Salvador, Columbia and Nam, / Cambodia, Grenada, Chile and Afghanistan, / Palestinian and Iraqi, and some more you never knew, / united states of people who deserved as much as you” *United States*

The IP songs contain greater detail to specific events of the era, namely the ongoing war. There are several references to the relationship between George H W. Bush (former head of the CIA and later president) and Saddam Hussein, and between the CIA and Hussein and Bin Laden, for example these lyrics from *We Want a Ceasefire* which refer to the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991):

“Just because Saddam is no longer friends with your dad / Must you drop uranium bombs on Baghdad?”

In particular, the lyrics to *The Price of Oil*, *Code Pink*, and *Go Down Congress* are quite explicit in their description of relatively current history from their critical perspectives of the role of the U.S. in foreign affairs:

“Bush and bin Laden, you think they’re foes? / They’re in business together / Daddy Bush knows. / Is Saddam really the terror they say? / We built him up through the CIA. / We paid him, we trained him, to be our “man” / When our “enemy” was not Iraq but Iran.” *Code Pink*

“Bin Laden was George Sr.’s clan / Not so long ago / Set George up with a retirement plan / Lots of low-tax dough / Tell the CIA leave the Saudi’s alone / So we depose the Taliban / Where’d Osama go? / While he’s still here let’s bomb Iraq / The opium crop was blown away/Let them poppies grow / Thanks to U.S. troops / It’s back today / Only goes to show / Go down Wall Street / Sell off my shares today / Tell my broker / Put it all in blow” *Go Down Congress*

The VP songs in this study contain fewer references to historical events and figures, and only eight make direct reference to the Vietnam War itself. There are four songs which refer to past wars in world history (*Universal Soldier*, *I Ain't Marchin' Anymore*, *With God on Our Side*, and *Vietnam* [Kaplan]), and one which refers to the arrest and trial of the Chicago 7 after the Democratic National Convention of 1968 in Chicago, *Chicago (We Can Change the World)*. There are passing references to the landing on the moon (*Ball of Confusion*, *Eve of Destruction*, *Make Me Wanna Holler*), and one reference to past invasions by the U.S. in *Cops of the World*.

Addressing Knupp's third point, that the protest song is not concerned with specific issues or policies, if we add social issues to the category of historical references, we find a total of 15 VP songs which contain references to both historical and social issues and 31 IP songs which do so. The specific issues will be outlined below.

Social Issues

Social issues found in VP songs in this study include race, the rich, drugs, rioting ("The cities ablaze in the summer time" *Ball of Confusion*), unemployment ("We've got no jobs to give you here" *Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation*), population explosion, poverty ("We shall no longer be the poor / For no one owns us anymore" *Weary Mothers*), and environmental issues. The Temptation's *Ball of Confusion* alone contained over 30 references to social issues.

Those found in the IP songs include all of the above as well as more contemporary references to 401Ks, radioactive sites, job outsourcing ("I grew up in a company town / And I worked real hard 'til that company closed down / They gave my job to another man / On half my wages in some foreign land" *No Power without Accountability*), the working poor and increased poverty at home and abroad ("Now what about us folks who live hand to mouth / We can't afford our lives, and we're working three jobs" *My Hero Mr. President*), political prisoners and the prison-industrial complex ("They got a war on Mumia [Abu Jamal]", "The war on pot, is a war that's failed / A war that's fillin' up the nations jails" *We Don't Stop*), animal rights, health care, and the KKK. Six IP songs in the sample made direct reference to globalization and the widening gap between rich and poor, with one exceptionally clear description:

"unrecognized by the minority as they purchase a pair of Nike air / the Indonesian woman who made those sits on a chair / unable to send out a flare / but what the fuck would we westerners care? / that she works battery style, under the glare of strip lighting / in temperatures that reach forty degrees / as she sews on the sleeves of a gap summer shirt / sweat mixed with dirt drips down into her eye / she asks why this is happening to herself? / long hours, low pay, while fat cats reap the wealth of this slavery / the bravery of a few that start unions are terminated / 'cause it threatens profits to be deflated and we can't have that, no, we gotta keep the flow of cheaply made merchandise" *The Unpeople*

One significant difference between VP and IP songs is how the topic of drugs is dealt with. In several IP songs the subject is raised not regarding personal use, as in the 60s, but regarding the increase in the production of opium as a result of the war:

The opium crop was blown away / Let them poppies grow / Thanks to U.S. troops / It's back today / Only goes to show / Go down Wall Street / Sell off my shares today / Tell my broker / Put it all in blow *Go Down Congress*

as well as references to GWB's alleged use of cocaine:

“It’s not the politicians but their actions I despise / You and Saddam should kick it like back in the day / With the cocaine and Courvoisier... Politicians are shady / So people watch your back ’cause / I think they smoke crack / I don’t doubt it look at how they act” *In a World Gone Mad*

Addressing the media

In the VP songs in this study, there were two songs that made direct reference to the media (“Your newspapers / They just put you on / They never tell you / The whole story” *What About Me*; “Most of what you read is made of lies” *Simple Song of Freedom*). These references are what Knupp describes as “panoramic criticisms” (Knupp, 1981). The media was mentioned in 18 of the IP songs, and three directly confront the media:

“The tears of one mother / Are the same as any other / Drop food on the kids / While you’re murderin’ their fathers / But don’t bother to show it on CNN” *Bomb the World*

“All you need is duct tape / And plaster it ‘cross their lips / All these armchair warriors / Shooting from their hips / When you’ve had enough / Fox News, Falwell / Limbaugh, George Will / Spreading lies and fears / Just cover up your ears / With duct tape” *Duct Tape*

In this line from *Tonight I’ve Seen Tomorrow*, “They’re edged on by the weapons men who own the news and form the minds”, the weapons men is a reference to General Electric, which owns weapons manufacturing companies as well as the broadcasting network, NBC.

Retro songs

Denisoff (1972) points out that the “magnetic” songs of persuasion, those used to create cohesion among movement members, often adapted new lyrics to well-known tunes. “This places emphasis on a commonality of experience and speeds the communication in terms of a perceived social discontent” (Denisoff 1972, p. 5). Two of the songs in the pool of IP songs in this study reinforce that observation. The Compassionate Conservatives’ *In The Garden of Eden (War Crimes / DC Rally Mix)* and *Midnight Confessions (of Emperor G. W. Bush)* use the music of Iron Butterfly’s *In-a-Gadda-da-Vida* and The Grass Roots’ *Midnight Confessions* respectively. *Another War* is sung to the tune of the Beatles’ *Baby You Can Drive My Car*.

Several of the IP songs contain lyrics that are reminiscent of songs of the 60s: “One by one I see the old ghosts rising / Stumblin’ ’cross Big Muddy” (*Déjà Vu All Over Again*); “Hey, Hey, USA / how many children did you kill today?” *Hey, hey USA*, referring to the original chant in the 1960s, “Hey, hey, LBJ (President Lyndon B. Johnson), how many kids have you killed today?”, “When will our government ever learn?” *Not My President*, and “We’re on the eve of destruction, my friends / We are about to go too far” *We Want Peace*.

It can be argued that the use of lyrics and music from the Vietnam era elicits nostalgia in those who were part of the movements of the 60s. This aspect of current protest music is a powerful emotional link for a generation of people who experienced the marches, sit-ins, and draft card burnings four decades ago.

Conclusion

The Internet has become the new “airwave” and its underground FM stations are the web sites that offer protest music to their viewers and listeners. This technological and social revolution has been a major factor in the evolution of the protest song. Whereas VP songs, especially those played on radio stations, were generally vague with regard to the issues, IP songs are

much more specific, giving details and examples of historical events, people, and policies. This indicates a greater willingness on the part of songwriters of the IP era to deal directly with issues of concern to the public than was done during the VP years, perhaps because there is less censorship when distributing songs through the Internet or through the sales of CDs (eg. through iTunes, etc.).

The IP songs in this study provide evidence supporting Denisoff's six points describing the protest song. Current protest music seeks to highlight social problems or discontents, gain outside support and mobilize new individuals, reinforce the value structure of adherents, promote solidarity among the followers, and call for solutions.

The main limitation to this study is the fact that the coding system was performed by one person, the author, and therefore the categorization of each song can be questioned. Nevertheless, through the above analysis, several key patterns have emerged. Knupp argues that "there is little history in the rhetorical world of protest music." Although this may be true of many of the VP songs in this study, the IP songs use a rhetorical strategy that not only invites the listener to learn but often requires the listener to have some background knowledge of history, economics and international trade policies, and American foreign and domestic policy.

"Three thousand died as the planes crashed into the towers / at ground zero the laying of flowers showed
people care / while Bush and Blair use this as an excuse / to tighten the noose around the axis of so-called evil
/ the bombs that dropped in Afghanistan / that killed five thousand / who had nothing to do with Bin Laden"
The Unpeople

In fact, IP songwriters who deal with day-to-day issues facing society are keenly aware of how the issues are connected. In his study, Knupp states that protest music lacked "intellectual reflection" defined, for example, as "thinking, planning, analyzing, or evaluating" (Knupp 1981, p. 380). It is not clear how Knupp actually categorized the lyrics in his study as having or lacking these qualities. Here, I will use the broad definition of "examining the structure of something in order to explain it." We find two VP songs in this study which size up corporate interests at home as profiteers:

"Come you masters of war / You that build all the guns / You that build the death planes / You that build the
big bombs... / I think you will find / When your death takes its toll / All the money you made / Will never buy
back your soul" *Masters of War*

and corporate interests abroad as one reason behind American foreign policy decisions ("United Fruit screams at the Cuban shore" *I Ain't Marchin' Anymore*). Compare this with the following IP songs which offer observations as to the reasons behind current social, political and historical events:

"911 / Fire in the skies / Many people died / And no one even really knows why / They telling' lies of division
and fear / We yelled and cried / No one listened for years / But like, 'who put us here?' / And who's
responsible? / Well, there's no debatin' / Cause if they ask me I say / It's big corporations / World trade
organization / Tri-lateral action / International sanctions, Satan / Seems like it'll be an endless price tag / Of
wars tremendous" *Bomb the World*

"If it's freeing the Iraqi people you're after / then why have we waited so long / why didn't we sort this out last
time / was he less evil than he is now / the stock market holds the answer / to why him, why here, why now"
The Price of Oil

and these that call for introspection to understand why events have played out as they have:

“They were crazy / they were evil and they were wrong / but all the weak take a desperate measure / when they’re backed into the corner by a foe too strong / my brother, my sister, my countrymen and my friend / I think we’ve also got to take a hard look at ourselves / if we want to keep this from happening again” *Out of the Clear Blue Sky*

“You’re beautiful, big-hearted, in many ways you’re free / you’re smart enough to get the world how you want it to be / so it’s hard for me to tell you what you shouldn’t have to hear / your nation is that terrorist most human beings fear” *United States*

Apart from the casual listener who finds one track on the CD they have purchased, the audiences who fervently buy, download and listen to current protest music are quite sophisticated in terms of their understanding of international banking and trade policies, globalization and its effects on developing nations, or the Bush administration’s domestic policy decisions and their effects on the American infrastructure. It is a seasoned listening public, the better part of which have been members of other movements: for civil rights and against the Vietnam war in the 60s, the anti-globalization movement that organized boycotts against Nestle, GAP, Nike, and others throughout the 80s and 90s, against the WTO in the face-off in Seattle in 1999, the movement to take back the Media in reaction to mergers of the major media corporations that have occurred since the mid-1980s.

As protest music audiences have matured since the height of the protest music of the 1960s, so has the protest songwriter. For example, drugs are sung about as a social problem, not as a way to experience and enjoy life. The president is criticized for allegedly using cocaine and for allowing Afghanistan to once again become the world’s largest supplier of opium. The protest songwriters of today connect and express the issues in ways that were never done in the Vietnam War era (eg. drugs and the prison industry, corporate control of the media).

Protest song writers have also become technologically-savvy. Twenty-six of the 50 IP songs use recorded material such as presidential speeches, television and radio clips, “mash-ups” and other edited versions, in order to get their points across—technology that did not exist for the average musician forty years ago.

The upheaval and controversies of the Vietnam era gave birth to a new generation of protest music that was limited in its expression due to restraints in the recording and broadcasting industries. The lyrics of protest songs of the early years of the Iraq War have enjoyed much more freedom. Denisoff and Peterson wisely observed that “Change in technology, industry structure, and marketing precedes changes in the diversity of sentiments in music lyrics” (1972, p. 298). That is only part of the change that is necessary. The other part is brought on by society and the events which lead to the need for protest music. Many of the protest songs of today have given an interpretation of events, and in doing so, the songs themselves have become part of the record of history.

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Appendix A

Categorization of Code Words

Civilians: child, civilian, mother, woman, student

Social Issues: society, hunger, marijuana, drug, riot, prison, race, KKK, poverty, rich/poor

Security: security, police, CIA, secret, surveillance

Media: media, news, censorship

Economics: economics, trade, money, developing nations, corporations, WTO, military-industrial, oil

Violence: World War III, war, weapon(s), violence (psychological), violence (military), violence (sexual), violence (physical), weapons (anthrax) weapons (WMDs), weapons (chemical), weapons (nuclear), military-maneuver, troop, military officer, torture, war crimes, death count, terrorist/terrorism, target, soldier, draft dodge, victim, gold star

Political: patriotism, flag, country, voting, democracy, communism/communist, fascism, axis of evil, policy, politician, doves, democrats, republicans, neo-conservative, impeachment, empire, president

Historical: history, Vietnam, 9-11, Bin Laden, Afghanistan, Taliban, drug (opium), Iraq, Hussein, Saudi, Britain, Iran

Retro: (references to 1960s lyrics or a remake of a song from the Vietnam era)

Techno: (a clip of an original speech or an edited version of an actual speech)

Call to Action: civil rights, march (civil rights), march (war protest), civil disobedience, student protest, protest, protest (race), understanding (race), understanding (gender), revolution, dissent

Culture / Religious: pop culture, pop culture (videogame), fashion, celebrity, Orwell, profanity, religion, religion (heaven)