

AMERICA'S CHANGING MIRROR: HOW POPULAR MUSIC REFLECTS PUBLIC OPINION DURING WARTIME

by
Christina Tomlinson
Campbell University

Faculty Mentor
Jaclyn Stanke
Campbell University

Entertainment is always a national asset. Invaluable in times of peace, it is indispensable in wartime. All those who are working in the entertainment industry are building and maintaining national morale both on the battlefield and on the home front.¹

Franklin D. Roosevelt, June 12, 1943

Whether or not we admit it, societies change in wartime. It is safe to say that after every war in America's history, society undergoes large changes or embraces new mores, depending on the extent to which war has affected the nation. Some of the "smaller wars" in our history, like the Mexican-American War or the Spanish-American War, have left little traces of change that scarcely venture beyond some territorial adjustments and honorable mentions in our textbooks. Other wars have had profound effects in their aftermath or began as a result of a

¹ Telegram to the National Conference of the Entertainment Industry for War Activities, quoted in John Bush Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 31.

catastrophic event: World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and the current wars in the Middle East. These major conflicts create changes in society that are experienced in the long term, whether expressed in new legislation, changed social customs, or new ways of thinking about government.

While some of these large social shifts may be easy to spot, such as the GI Bill or the baby boom phenomenon in the 1940s and 1950s, it is also interesting to consider the changed ways of thinking in modern societies as a result of war and the degree to which information is filtered. Because the thoughts of a nation's citizens are seldom expressed explicitly, exploring pop culture during wartime may be a good way to gauge America's feelings about war. For the sake of clarification, pop culture is defined as "commercial culture based on popular taste."² There are many aspects of pop culture that address the topic of war, but to best understand how everyday citizens felt about wars of the twentieth century, music is one of the best media to consider. Music is readily available and abundant in both number and variety. In addition, given that participation in music is available to everyone, it provides a means to look for themes of continuity or change over time.

Music's role during times of war has changed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The research present will consist of the four wars previously mentioned: World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and the wars in the Middle East (including the Gulf War of the early nineties, the war in Afghanistan, and the war in Iraq). It is evident that how music is used has changed over time after studying the popular songs of these wars. Once used as a tool for military recruitment or a means to boost public support of world conflict, music's role changed drastically during Vietnam to become the people's outlet for anti-war sentiment and criticism of the government, a role which has, for the most part, persisted to the present. These changes

² The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, 2009, "Pop culture."

reflect a larger, changing public opinion that became altered with the advent of mass media in the war zone. As the media became more unfiltered, the music became more uncensored, willing to express more radical views from supporting desertion to overthrowing the government. In a way, war, or at least the media's depiction of it, made culture more democratic.

To show this change over time, it is necessary to explore the popular music of each of these wars. The first step in the process will be to examine how the songs of World War I were developed and identify social opinions about war that may be reflected through the music. World War II will be examined in a similar fashion, but given the greater number of US troops in the conflict and, by extension, a greater involvement of US citizens, it will be necessary to consider how music adapted to reflect the changing atmosphere.

Coverage of Vietnam will reveal the shift in public opinion from pro-war to anti-war, exposing growing divisions within American society. These are, of course, generalizations, but this research will consider songs that address both sides of the conflict. How the anti-war protestors expressed their views in song, i.e., what language they employed, will also be studied.

The final portion of the paper will explore music associated with the wars in the Middle East. Given that these wars are ongoing, secondary research on the subject is very limited, but the songs available are abundant. By exploring songs that have been released in recent years and recognizing similar patterns from previous wars, this paper will ultimately consider the current direction of public opinion.

The songs themselves will commonly be referred to as "war songs." For the purposes of this paper, to be considered a "war song" the song in question must be released during a war and the lyrics must address a topic related to the conflict on the warfront or "back home." These topics vary greatly from war to war, but many prevailing themes have been opinions concerning

the draft, separation of loved ones, fulfilling one's duty, motivating the troops, and criticism of the conflict itself or the world leader responsible. Those songs that may have been written during a war but address alternate themes, such as the drug subculture or civil rights in the 1960s, will not be considered in this research.

To understand why this research is important, it is necessary to recognize the link between music and society itself. The impact of music on society has been greatly debated as far back as Plato. In *The Republic*, he argued that music can influence not only individuals, but whole societies. For this reason he urged that some musical expressions be encouraged, but others banned because, as he stated, "when modes of music change...the State always changes with them."³ War songs in the World Wars operated with a similar point of view. It was commonly understood that music can build morale or mobilize the masses. Music could be used as a vector for change to ease confusion during conflict. Furthermore, as writer Les Cleveland asserts, music can be "infused with a sense of individual worth and national urgency."⁴

World War I: Reluctantly Going "Over There"

During the early years of World War I, before the radio was available in every household, the best way to gauge a song's popularity was by counting sheet music purchases, which *Billboard* charts reflect.⁵ Many of the songs prior to the United States' involvement in World War I reflected strong support for neutrality. Such melodies included Blanche Merrill's "We Take Our Hats Off to You, Mr. Wilson" sung by Nora Bayes and Fanny Brice in 1914. In

³ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Forgotten Books, 2008), 146, <http://www.forgottenbooks.org/info/9781605064413>.

⁴ Les Cleveland, "Singing Warriors: Popular Songs in Wartime," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 3 (1994), 155.

⁵ John Druessedow, "Popular Songs of the Great War: Background and Audio Resources," *Notes* 65, no. 2 (2008): 366.

the song, Wilson is hailed as “the world’s great mediator” because his “pen is greater than the sword.”⁶ 1914 was the first year of the Great War and under President Wilson the United States remained neutral despite the conflict overseas.⁷ Americans were not ready to fight a war, and many citizens did not see a good reason to get involved in what they believed was another country’s fight; according to the song, they supported Wilson’s role as a peacekeeping mediator.

Public opinion experienced a shift following the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915. When the story reached American newspapers, the public was outraged at Germany’s unrestricted submarine warfare. As a result, titles such as “When the *Lusitania* Went Down,”⁸ written by Charles McCarron and Nathaniel Vincent, were released. Nevertheless, even after the sinking of the ship many Americans were still reluctant to join the fight.

When the United States began to consider mobilizing troops, several songs were released that showed support *and* protest for the war.⁹ The common misconception is the assumption that World War I songs were all in support of the war, but this is not the case. There was a presence of openly pacifist sentiment reflected in song, mostly through the eyes of parenthood. According to the *Billboard* charts, Al Bryan’s “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” was a very popular song at its release in 1915. With lines like “Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder/ To

⁶ Blanche Merrill, “We Take Our Hats Off to You, Mr. Wilson,” 1914.

⁷ Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 245.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

shoot some other mother's darling boy,"¹⁰ the message of the song implies that war would be nonexistent if more mothers spoke out in opposition.¹¹

While this song was very popular in 1915, it faded by April 1917 when the U.S. entered the war.¹² Even Al Bryan later rewrote his song, giving it the title "It's Time for Every Boy to Be a Soldier."¹³ The songs considered "pro-war" during World War I used commonly recognized American symbols to arouse patriotism. Songs with titles like "We Shall Never Surrender Old Glory" and "Uncle Sam Will Help You Win the War" used this imagery as a means to encourage participation in the military and industrial ventures for the war effort.¹⁴ The American flag became an icon in songwriting and the focus of many war anthems. In fact, the national anthem "Star-Spangled Banner" was made popular in 1914, even though it was penned by Francis Scott Key a century earlier. After it reemerged, it remained an important rallying song and was used constantly at public events.¹⁵

By far the most popular song of World War I was George M. Cohan's "Over There." Released about two months after the United States entered the war, it became the number one song on the *Billboard* charts in 1917. Sung by Nora Bayes, the song urges families and sweethearts to be happy their loved ones are heading off to battle to "show the Hun [they're] a son of a gun." The upbeat tempo and sound of the drums in the song are reminiscent of troops marching. Soldiers are urged to "hoist the flag and let her fly/ Yankee Doodle do or die" and go

¹⁰ Alfred Bryan, "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier," 1915.

¹¹ Cleveland, "Singing Warriors: Popular Songs in Wartime," 162.

¹² Watkins, *Proof Through the Night*, 249.

¹³ Alfred Bryan, "It's Time for Every Boy to Be a Soldier," 1917.

¹⁴ Cleveland, "Singing Warriors: Popular Songs in Wartime," 160.

¹⁵ Watkins, *Proof Through the Night*, 289, 297.

into battle with the intention of bringing pride to their country.¹⁶ The song was an instant success, and remained so until the end of the war. For his part in contributing the lyrics, Cohan was actually awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1936.¹⁷

Following the war, there was a growing sense of inevitable change as a result of the world conflict. After having gone overseas and being exposed to other cultures, many soldiers returned home and desired a life outside of the small-town atmosphere they were raised in. Such is the subject of the popular 1919 hit, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Patee?),” which became one of the top singles on the *Billboard* charts that year. The song is a conversation between a farmer named Reuben and his “wifey dear” who discuss the likelihood of their sons staying on the farm. The mother represents the voice of the past, with the desire to have her sons return to a life of normalcy after the war: “...farmers always stick to the hay.” Reuben, on the other hand, represents the voice of reason that reflected a growing realization that the war had changed everything: “They’ll never want to see a rake or a plow/ And who the deuce can parley vous a cow?”¹⁸ Although parts of the song are humorous for the listener, there is a clear message that exposure to other cultures during war have led to social change, and many who returned home desired to move into the cities.

As the lyrics indicate, there were different views related to the war during World War I. Prior to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the songs released reflected the public support for neutrality. It was only after the newspapers broke the story that the songs supported the war effort, and largely so; the most popular song “Over There” favored involvement in the Great

¹⁶ George Cohan, “Over There,” 1917.

¹⁷ Druessedow, “Popular Songs of the Great War: Background and Audio Resources,” 371.

¹⁸ Joe Young and Sam M. Lewis, “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Patee?),” 1918.

War. Still, there were voices of opposition, but these popular songs resonated mostly with worried parents. When the war was finally over, Americans understood that their country was forever changed, as reflected by “How ‘Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm.”

World War II: Preferring Not to “Sit Under the Apple Tree” with the NWMC

With roughly a million American troops killed and wounded, the reach of World War II was exponentially greater than the previous one.¹⁹ The music industry consequently reflected an array of varied feelings about the conflict. The changes in society following the Great War were illustrated through several war songs and, as one historian states, mirrored a “corresponding shift away from homogeneity of America during World War I.”²⁰

Technological changes during the interwar years set the stage for the musical scene of World War II. The radio became the premier source of media and information during the 1920s and 1930s with the typical American citizen listening to it around four and a half hours a day.²¹ Not only did Americans listen to radio more frequently, but there were more and more radios available in the home; the percentage of homes with at least one radio rose from 67% in 1935 to 89% in 1945.²² While the main reason for owning a radio can be debated, it is not far-fetched to assume that more radios would equate to more opportunities to listen to music, hence the war songs having a stronger influence on society, however subtle.

¹⁹ William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *Music of the World War II Era* (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 1.

²⁰ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 105.

The federal government understood the mobilizing potential that media could have on Americans. In June of 1942, the Office of War Information (OWI) was formed with the intent to maintain morale and regulate information coming in about the war. In their book *Music of the World War II Era*, authors William and Nancy Young described the institution as the following:

The OWI hired artists to create propaganda posters on subjects as varied as rationing and saboteurs, put together several hundred newsreels about both the war and the home front to show in theaters...and utilized radio by producing numerous broadcast series that heightened public awareness about current events.²³

Furthermore, the head of the OWI, Elmer Davis, created the NWMC, or the National Wartime Music Committee. As the title implies, the committee's purpose was to evaluate the appropriateness of war songs for the public. The committee identified songs that encouraged the citizens or motivated the troops, acting as national music arbiters and extending their governmental influence into the music business. Their quest for the perfect war melody, however, proved to be a big disappointment, as only a few songs attracted any attention. After the failures of the NWMC to boost morale through music, the committee voted itself out of existence in April 1943.²⁴

Of all of the songs the NWMC released, only two were popular in the American mainstream. "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" both became big hits, with the latter going to number one on *Billboard* in early 1943.²⁵ "Praise the Lord" told a story of a pilot who encouraged a group of gunners to keep fighting the good fight: "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition/ And we'll all stay free."²⁶

²³ Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶ Frank Loesser, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," 1942.

The catchiness of the song is undeniable, and the NWMC managed to cleverly pass on a message: the United States must fight this war in order to preserve democracy.

Other efforts were made to fuel the war effort through songs outside of the NWMC. Tin Pan Alley, a neighborhood in New York that was home to the music publishing business, hired lyricists and composers to create war songs, many of which were big successes.²⁷ It is not exactly clear why Tin Pan Alley was more successful than the NWMC, but it can be expected that while the federal government's main concern was shaping public opinion and regulating information about the war, Tin Pan Alley's primary motivation was making money. Thus, Tin Pan Alley followed public tastes to profitable ends. Whether or not the song was explicitly about war was of secondary importance. Over the course of the war it became more obvious that the majority of Americans did not want to hear songs about patriotism; they preferred ballads of romance or songs that were good numbers at the dance halls,²⁸ like "I'll Be Seeing You" or "Rum and Coca Cola."

At the onset of World War II, the songs debuted seemed to have inherited the isolationist mindset from World War I. While "Over There" had been an extremely popular song in the previous conflict, many isolationist anthems in the 1940s like "Go Back Over There," released in 1940, used Cohan's classic to argue the nativist point of view. Many messages in these songs encouraged dealing with "America first" before European affairs or were considered anti-immigrant.²⁹ Some songs of preparedness did exist in the early years prior to the U.S. involvement, but not many. One of the more popular songs on the subject of preparedness was

²⁷ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 42.

²⁸ Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, xiii.

²⁹ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 59.

actually from George M. Cohan: “We Must Be Ready,” released in 1939. It was nowhere near as popular as “Over There,” though both songs share similar themes.³⁰

Pearl Harbor changed America’s mind about the war. Following the attack, there were virtually no songs of isolationism, but a vast sea of them about going off to war and its effects on soldiers and their families. Tunes like Hughie Charles’ “We’ll Meet Again” may not have been popular in its 1939 release, but its re-release following Pearl Harbor became a hit and landed on the *Billboard* charts in spring of 1942.³¹

Many of the songs released during World War II were overtly pro-war in their messages. Cliff Friend and Charlie Tobias’ “We Did It Before and We Can Do It Again” was one of the first militant songs of the war that reached a national audience with its soldiering reminiscent of the last conflict. Other songs took a more nationalist approach with titles like “We’re Gonna Have to Slap The Dirty Little Jap” and “I’ve Got a Scrap with a Jap” that reveal a popular shared opinion of the Japanese following the Pearl Harbor attacks, albeit a racist one.³² Songwriters from Tin Pan Alley attempted to create music that gained support for the troops by encouraging all sorts of participation from letter-writing to saying prayers, from giving financial donations to planting Victory gardens.³³ While their motivation was profit, it is clear that they were influenced by the powerful National Wartime Music Committee.

The lyrics of many of World War II’s most popular tunes were simple with a soft melody; the sentimental nature of the messages of reuniting lovers led to many successes. These numbers became trendy during the war as troops began to deploy. One such song, “Lili

³⁰ Ibid., 70.

³¹ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 74.

³² Ibid., 125.

³³ Ibid., 184-186.

Marlene,” was originally a poem written by a German soldier in World War I. It was set to music on the Axis side and broadcast over German lines in 1941. The song became so popular among their troops that an English-version was released in the United States in 1943, the most famous rendition of which was sung by the anti-Nazi songstress Marlene Dietrich, who was a German native. The song’s story of Lili who waits for her loved one by the lantern’s light outside the barracks became a celebrated tale on both Axis and Allied lines.³⁴

Songs about hope were also prevalent during the war following Pearl Harbor. “(There’ll Be Blue Birds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover,” released in 1941, spoke about everything returning to normal “tomorrow when the world is free.”³⁵ The references to Dover and the use of English sweetheart Vera Lynn in its original version tend to mislead audiences into believing the song was imported from England, but it was actually written by Walter Kent and Nat Burton, both native New Yorkers.³⁶ It struck a nerve with audiences and became immensely favored throughout the war. The lyrics are simple but come attached with an emotional message, leading to the tune rising to the number one spot on *Billboard* in December 1941.³⁷

Other popular songs of the war included hits like “Sentimental Journey,” made famous by Doris Day, which describes the yearning to go home to loved ones and landed the number two spot on *Billboard* in May 1945.³⁸ Over the course of the war it became clear that listeners demanded music that reminded them of their families back home or loved ones overseas,

³⁴ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 77.

³⁵ Walter Kent and Nat Burton, “(There’ll Be Blue Birds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover,” 1941.

³⁶ Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 3.

³⁷ Paul Halsall, “There’ll Always Be An England and other War Music,” Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham University, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/ww2-music-uk.html>.

³⁸ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 221.

commonly referred to as “slush” songs. These melodies about affectionate relationships or the fear of separation, like “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree (With Anyone Else But Me),” recycle wartime romance scenarios. The majority of these “slush” songs became very popular, as the focus was on the “girl back home” instead of the war.³⁹

Another category of music that was popular was the upbeat dance songs featuring servicemen. Referred to as “khaki-wacky” songs, these hits described middle and working class girls becoming infatuated with the soldier persona. The phrase “every woman loves a man in uniform” comes to mind with many of these songs.⁴⁰ These melodies were rhythmic and equipped with positive messages designed to distract the listeners, such as “The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy (of Company B)” written in 1941 by Don Raye and sung by the Andrews Sisters.⁴¹ Other fun songs included “(There’ll Be a) Hot Time in the Town of Berlin (When the Yanks Go Marching In)” and “Rum and Coca Cola.” “Hot Time,” while upbeat and catchy, reminded the listener of the mission at hand: quell German dominance in the region. “Rum and Coca Cola” incidentally would be considered inappropriate in the 1940s if one read the original lyrics. With lines like “Both mother and daughter/ Workin’ for the Yankee dollar” and “They wear grass skirts, but that’s okay/ Yankee likes to ‘hit the hay’” the subject of the song is clearly the good time to be had thanks to native girls in Trinidad. When the Andrews Sisters sang the song with Bing Crosby, the lyrics were revised slightly, and the song became the most popular hit of 1945.⁴²

³⁹ Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 215.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴¹ Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 48.

Many of the songs that have been discussed to this point might be considered part of pop, but in 1942 we begin to see country music emerge as a national genre. “There’s a Star-Spangled Banner Flying Somewhere,” written by Paul Roberts Metivier, was the war song that brought country to a larger audience.⁴³ The artist credited with singing the song, Elton Britt, became the first country music artist to be awarded a gold record from the Recording Industry Association of America.⁴⁴ After its debut to national recognition, country music has remained an integral part of wartime music.

Few songs were considered successful that dealt with the war directly. Most of the songs that were popular discussed war indirectly, as many of their characters were soldiers or “the woman left behind.” As Young and Young remarked, “The best-selling, most listened-to pop songs...existed outside of time and place. This situation frustrated many in government looking for a stirring, chart-topping war song, but most Americans, men and women, in civvies or uniform, preferred to stay with the tried-and-true familiarity of the love song.”⁴⁵ This truth reflects the notion that the public may have supported the war, but they were ready for it to be over so life could return to normal.

Vietnam War: “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin” to Protest

The Vietnam War is the turning point in the study of war music. While many of the songs from wars in our past tended to lean in favor, Vietnam presents a startling shift in music. For the first time during a major conflict, the number of protest songs begins to outweigh the number of

⁴³ Louis Hatchett and W.K. McNeil, “‘There’s a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere.’: The Story Behind Its Success,” in *Country Music Goes to War*, ed. by Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington, K.Y.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005) 34.

⁴⁴ Young, *Music of the World War II Era*, 197.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

pro-war songs.⁴⁶ This can be attributed to a more unfiltered media presence able to spread more information to the public.

The change in relationship between war and music and patriotism can be linked with the changing role of the media in the 1960s. The emergence of television in particular provided more opportunities to question events as they streamed into America's living rooms. Social unrest in the 1960s, particularly related to Civil Rights efforts and demonstrations, were broadcast frequently. In the past information spread through newspapers and radio reports, but Americans had never actually seen the images beyond photographs and newsreels at the movies. Seeing the images tends to force participants to draw their own conclusions, and Americans were questioning authority long before Vietnam became their concern.

It should be understood that many citizens were unaware of Vietnam until the spring of 1965 with Operation Rolling Thunder. By then, it was too late for Americans to experience the "neutral period" that had existed in the World Wars because they were already suspicious of the federal government's decision-making capabilities. When the images of war streamed in, many questioned authority further, especially a government that constantly tried to convince citizens that fighting communism was a legitimate reason to go to war in Vietnam. It is easy to see why a large number of anti-war songs existed; many citizens were either upset or unable to understand the images they were seeing.

Prior to that time many musicians were silent about the war. It was not until Americans themselves began to change their opinion about their presence in Vietnam that many musicians in the record industry began to market protest.⁴⁷ As the music began to mirror American

⁴⁶ Tony Palmer, *All You Need is Love: The Story of Popular Music* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 199.

⁴⁷ Kenneth J. Bindas and Craig Houston, "'Takin' Care of Business': Rock Music, Vietnam and the Protest Myth," *Historian* 52 (1989): 3.

opinions more and more, the popularity of many of the anti-war songs soared. In fact, many of the tunes that are still remembered from this time were released after 1965.

Lee Andresen, an authority on music during Vietnam, argues that music “shaped and articulated public opinion in unprecedented fashion.”⁴⁸ Music played a significant role with lasting impressions, enough to the point that many Hollywood movies about the war, e.g. *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, often include music from the era to show its authenticity.

With the Vietnam War escalating after 1964, “folk music” reemerged, carrying the beacon of protest for the duration of the conflict. James E. Perone, author of several books on music in the 1960s, defines the renewed folk music’s leaders and characteristics:

The new generation of folk revival musicians, including Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, emerged in the early 1960s. These musicians, which by 1964 would include Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton, sang older left-wing protest music and composed songs that were in the style of folk music, but that addressed the social issues of the 1960s, including racial integration, the threat of nuclear war, labor strike, and the Vietnam conflict.⁴⁹

Under the leadership of folk music, many became quickly involved in the anti-war movement. Participants included mostly young people, many of whom had already been influenced by the folk music revival on their college campuses.⁵⁰ One of the early protest songs of the war was P.F. Sloan and Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction,” released in the summer of 1965. At the time of its release it was criticized by several artists for being a poor expression of

⁴⁸ Lee Andresen, *Battle Notes...Music of the Vietnam War* (Superior, W.I.: Savage Press, 2003), 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰ Lydia M. Fish, “General Edward G. Lansdale and the Folksongs of Americans in the Vietnam War,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 102, no. 406 (1989): 392.

protest, and it was banned by several radio stations in the United States. Still, it managed to land the number one spot on the *Billboard* Top 100 pop charts.⁵¹

The protest songs begin to escalate with Tom Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation," released in 1965. In the song, Paxton exhibits great criticism of the president's policy in the chorus:

Lyndon Johnson told the nation,
"Have no fear of escalation.
I am trying everyone to please.
Though it isn't really war,
We're sending fifty thousand more,
To help save Vietnam from Vietnamese."⁵²

The lyrics demonstrate the frustration felt by Americans, many of whom were unable to find a good reason to "save" Vietnam from their own people and were upset that so many lives were lost when war had not been formally declared.

One of the most easily recognized anti-war songs of the Vietnam War was Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" released in 1969. The song's opening riff is famous, along with the impassioned vocals criticizing the draft. The "fortunate ones," according to the lyrics, are those that are from affluent families and have the means to avoid being drafted to serve overseas. The song shows traces of populist tendencies with the haves vs. have-nots struggle being implied throughout. The second verse is a good example of this:

Some folks are born silver spoon in hand,
Lord, don't they help themselves, oh.
But when the taxman comes to the door,
Lord, the house looks like a rummage sale, yes.
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no millionaire's son, no.
It ain't me, it ain't me; I ain't no fortunate one, no.⁵³

⁵¹ Perone, *Music of the Counterculture Era*, 15.

⁵² Tom Paxton, "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation," *Ain't That News*, Elektra, 1965, CD.

⁵³ Creedence Clearwater Revival, "Fortunate Son," *Willy and the Poor Boys*, Fantasy, 1969, CD.

The implication is that the “fortunate ones” have found ways to subvert the system and remain privileged; that is, they use their wealth to protect themselves from being drafted in ways the poor are unable to do. The notion of Vietnam being a war in which the poor men die was a commonly held one, so the fact that the “we-they” mentality emerges between the rich and poor in these songs should not be surprising. Other songs criticizing the draft can be found from several music groups. Steppenwolf, remembered for “Born to Be Wild,” also wrote “Draft Resister,” considered a tribute to men who left their families to avoid being drafted.⁵⁴

With America becoming more and more disenchanted as the war progressed, other bands came to the forefront with messages of revolution and protest. Jefferson Airplane’s “Volunteers” calls for listeners to join the revolution in the streets, and the Rolling Stones recognized the sounds of marching heard all around in “Street Fighting Man.” Other songs urged for an end to the fighting; John Lennon’s Plastic Ono Band gave the peace movement its anthem with “Give Peace a Chance” during the Paris Peace talks in 1970.⁵⁵

The culmination of the peace movement was Woodstock in the summer of 1969. Thousands gathered to hear the music and many memorable songs surfaced, including the infamous “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die-Rag” by Country Joe and the Fish. This upbeat song opened Woodstock with Country Joe shouting “f*ck” before the audiences in a rebellious exercise of free speech, an obvious deviation from the “Fish Cheer” on the album.⁵⁶ His song’s use of profanity actually cost him a spot on the Ed Sullivan show,⁵⁷ but the song remains a

⁵⁴ Perone, *Songs of the Vietnam Conflict*, 59.

⁵⁵ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 53.

⁵⁶ Perone, *Songs of the Vietnam Conflict*, 40.

⁵⁷ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 63.

memorable anthem that spoke out against the war. Several verses find jolly ways to protest what some considered a meaningless venture in the jungle:

And it's one, two, three,
What are we fighting for?
Don't ask me, I don't give a d*mn,
Next stop is Vietnam;
And it's five, six, seven,
Open up the pearly gates,
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,
Whoopee! We're all gonna die.⁵⁸

Beyond the sarcastic lyrics and fast-paced tempo of the song lies significance. The number expresses discontent over the reasons for going overseas, and makes clear that many who go will perish, evidence of which was streamed into American homes on a daily basis.

But all the songs during Vietnam were not necessarily part of the anti-war movement. For those Americans who saw the war as part of the larger “domino theory,” or believed that Vietnam was a major battlefield in the war against Communism, songs that were pro-war or acknowledged the importance of U.S. intervention were well-received.⁵⁹

The most well-known anthem of patriotism during Vietnam was “Ballad of the Green Berets” by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler, released in 1966. Sadler himself was a Vietnam veteran in the Special Forces, although many of his fans were probably unaware that he also worked as a mercenary.⁶⁰ The song’s pro-government leanings were not heavy-handed; rather, the song focused on the Green Berets as a stellar fighting unit. The fighting in Vietnam was not glorified to a large extent. These little tweaks helped “Ballad of the Green Berets” become number one on the *Billboard* top 100 chart in 1966, making it arguably the most popular war song in the

⁵⁸ Country Joe and the Fish, “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag,” *I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die*, Vanguard, 1967, CD.

⁵⁹ Perone, *Songs of the Vietnam Conflict*, 72.

⁶⁰ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 65.

sixties.⁶¹ Had the song been more evident of Vietnam support, it definitely would not have sold so well.

Moreover, with the debut of country music in World War II, we find that many country music artists were also in support of the U.S. presence in Vietnam and expressed those views musically. Johnny Wright's "Hello Vietnam" was one of country's first songs of support during the war. Released in August 1965, it came onto the scene closely after the first major buildup of troops had been deployed on the ground.⁶² Lines from the song reflect the belief in the domino theory: "America has trouble to be stopped/ We must stop communism in that land/ Or freedom will start slipping through our hands."⁶³ This recognizes the idea that America—and democracy—will be at risk should Vietnam fall under Communist control.

When considering which areas of the United States were more likely to be "pro-war," it should be made clear that if any part of the country remained steadfastly supportive of the United States' involvement in the war, it was the South. Even after 1965 when a large portion of the country grew angrier about the conflict, the listeners considered part of the "country music audience" were receiving more and more pro-war tunes out of Nashville.⁶⁴ It is not entirely clear why this is the case, but there is a likely connection between the prevalence of country music and the increasing numbers of soldiers drafted from the South.

One of country's most renowned artists during the 1960s was Merle Haggard. Remembered for contributing several country hits, he also wrote war songs. His song "The Fightin' Side of Me," was released in 1969 and is considered an anti-protester anthem, and the

⁶¹ Ibid., 132.

⁶² Perone, *Songs of the Vietnam Conflict*, 75-76.

⁶³ Johnny Wright, "Hello Vietnam," *Full Metal Jacket*, 1965.

⁶⁴ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 105.

lyrics show an upset side of some Americans: “Let this song I’m singin’ be a warnin’/ If you’re runnin’ down my country, man/ You’re walkin’ on the fightin’ side of me.”⁶⁵ As the words express, there was a bit of a social backlash in the face of the protesters that we commonly associate with the peace movement, and a great number of them were represented through country music.

After looking over several songs of the Vietnam War, one can notice some long-term social themes that have carried over from previous wars. One dominating theme is the fear of losing a son. Like the World War I classic “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,” this war also addressed the apprehension of having loved ones overseas. Several songs in the 1960s communicate the heartache of losing a son, such as Dorothy Gorman’s “Happy Birthday Son,” Jan Howard’s “My Son,” Bonnie Guitar’s “The Tallest Tree,” and of course Loretta Lynn’s “Dear Uncle Sam.”⁶⁶

While we have been looking over war songs on the home front, music also changed overseas in the jungles of Vietnam. During the war there was some censorship of music from the Armed Forces Radio (AFR), but it did not prevent protest music from making it overseas. Many of the hits from back home were played in the AFR, but not many that were anti-war in nature or any music that was considered to have a “French flavor.” Any music that was undeniably against the war could be heard from the tape players of the soldiers, who frequented shops that sold the music.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Merle Haggard, “The Fightin’ Side of Me,” *The Fightin’ Side of Me*, Capitol, 1970, CD.

⁶⁶ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 125-126.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

Pirate radio stations existed overseas, and many of the popular ones actually operated out of major U.S. military bases.⁶⁸ These stations sought to counter the influence of the Armed Forces Radio in the minds of soldiers. One station, Underground Saigon, made frequent use of profanity and was quick to tell its listeners where to find the best marijuana and massage parlors in Vietnam.⁶⁹ The prevalence of a demoralized armed force could then be linked to the military's inability to control the media influences on the warfront, especially those linked with the protesting voices back home.

Some songs produced back in the United States were used for other purposes in the jungle. One use of war songs was to disorient the enemy at nighttime. Soldiers returned home with tales of using Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Run Through the Jungle" on night guard duty to warn Viet Cong fighters that all troops nearby were awake and alert. If captured, American prisoners of war were played music as a means of being psychologically broken. Music used for these purposes ranged from Johnny Cash to Christmas carols, all for the purpose of making soldiers more emotionally vulnerable.⁷⁰

The images of war on television gave battle a new face that many were not ready to see or understand, and it likely contributed to why public opinion shifted during Vietnam. As more citizens grew upset, the music reflected a greater lack of support for the war. As many recall, the Vietnam soldiers were not well received when they returned home. Given the popularity and messages behind many of the hits of the time, it should be no surprise that public opinion shifted in that direction, especially if one belongs to the school of thought where music is believed to be

⁶⁸ Cleveland, "Singing Warriors: Popular Songs in Wartime," 172.

⁶⁹ Andresen, *Music of the Vietnam War*, 180.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

a major reflection of public opinion. If the majority of popular war songs were against the war, then it can be inferred that a large number of Americans, especially the young baby boomers, held this view.

Wars in the Middle East: America Still Divided, “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue” and “American Idiot”

The music describing the Wars in the Middle East is the latest chapter in the present discussion of war songs. This is essentially uncharted territory for several reasons, the first of which is the question: When did these wars really begin and when will they end? For the sake of exploring the music of the present, it is necessary to go back to music from the Gulf War in the early 1990s and continue to the songs of the War on Terror in Afghanistan and the War in Iraq, both of which are still ongoing.

The fact that these wars are still ongoing means that any conclusions are highly debatable. Without seeing the bigger picture the outcomes and results have not yet been realized in their entirety, and consequently there has been very little discussion about the role of music in wartime post-Vietnam. Although the outcome of these later wars is uncertain, the music remains, and there are lots of songs that discuss the wars in the Middle East. There are enough present to recognize common themes and draw conclusions. Given what is already known about the relationship between music and previous wars, it can be inferred that music will continue to be a reflection of public opinion during wartime.

Some marked themes permeate many of the songs pertaining to the Middle East. Similar to the Vietnam War, the majority of tunes that would be categorized as war songs contain negative messages that criticize the government or find fault with the presence of American troops in other countries. The lyrics become more metaphorical, yet more explicit and angry. It

should be noted that the lyrics from the current wars are more extreme than their predecessors, indicating a large lack of support.

Songs that express disdain for the government were present during the Gulf War, but there were not many. Several of these numbers were released by bands that are commonly associated with subversive messages. One such song, “Guerilla Radio” by Rage Against the Machine, paints elected officials as villains: “Was [the ballot] cast for the mass who burn and toil/ Or for the vultures who thirst for blood and oil?”⁷¹ The elected representatives are the “vultures” and as many anti-government songs will illustrate, a commonly held belief is that the United States is present in the Middle East only to benefit from its oil industry. This song was very popular within its genre, gaining the number seven spot of the *Billboard* Alternative charts in 1999.⁷²

Other Rage Against the Machine songs have similar messages. “Testify” from *The Battle of Los Angeles* album equates the deaths overseas with the oil industry: “Mass graves for the pump and the price is set/ And the price is set.”⁷³ The implication is that the price of oil is blood, yet Americans are lulled by the media into believing that the U.S. are committing good acts:

Mister anchor assure me
That Baghdad is burning
Your voice is so soothing
That cunning mantra of killing
I need you my witness
To dress this up so bloodless
To numb me and purge me now⁷⁴

⁷¹ Rage Against the Machine, “Guerilla Radio,” *The Battle of Los Angeles*, Epic, 1999, CD.

⁷² “Alternative Songs,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/charts/alternative-songs?chartDate=1999-12-04#/charts/alternative-songs?chartDate=1999-12-04>.

⁷³ Rage Against the Machine, “Testify,” *The Battle of Los Angeles*, Epic, 1999, CD.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The lyrics describe the news networks as soothsayers that can influence public opinion with their eloquent news reports. The destruction of Baghdad mentioned is made a “bloodless” event, one that will have little effect on society because they are “numb” to the stories. This definitely supports the notion that the media can have a profound impact on the opinions of Americans because they can manipulate the images on television. “Testify” asks that the media continue on their job well done.

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001 music returned to familiar ground. During times of war the character of the “heroic, male, blue-collar American worker, the man of few words but strong deeds” returned to the forefront.⁷⁵ The television bombarded us for weeks with images of smoke and fire and New Yorkers running away while the police and firefighters rushed into the chaos to rescue lives. It brought new reality to major events, as many of the images were not recorded by news stations, but captured by regular people who uploaded their videos online. September 11 was one of the first major events in American history where media images were seen completely unfiltered and were contributed by regular citizens.

Not unlike the reaction America had after Pearl Harbor, the attack on American soil prompted patriotic feelings. It did not matter what one’s opinion of the United States had been before; now that so many Americans had suffered and survived the same catastrophe, many tended to pull together and acknowledge that they are all Americans and they are all “in this together.” That mentality was carried through to music, and given what is already known about patriotism and music, it should be no surprise that country led the charge.

⁷⁵ Aaron A. Fox, “Alternative to What? *O Brother*, September 11, and the Politics of Country Music,” in *Country Music Goes to War*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 172.

One of the earliest and certainly the most successful song that directly addressed 9/11 was Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)."⁷⁶ The somber melody of the song and the "simple man" perspective allowed the message to reach a number of people. It also identified the various reactions that Americans had to the event, including "dust[ing] off that Bible at home," spending more time with loved ones, watching *I Love Lucy*, and purchasing firearms.⁷⁷ At the time of its release, it became the fastest single to reach the top of the *Billboard* country charts since 1997.⁷⁸

Other memorable country songs in the wake of 9/11 came from Toby Keith, who presented an angrier response to the attacks. Some of the controversy caused by his lyrics actually led to his exclusion from a 9/11 memorial broadcast that was set to air on national television,⁷⁹ but he gained lots of fame and sold many albums during the war. His most recognized musical tribute is "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)," which describes a very impassioned response to the attacks as stated in the song title. The portion of the song that prompted the largest reaction was the fifth stanza:

Justice will be served and the battle will rage
This big dog will fight when you rattle his cage
And you'll be sorry you messed with
The U.S. of A.
'Cause we'll put a boot in your *ss
It's the American way⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Alan Jackson, "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," *Drive*, Arista Nashville, 2002, CD.

⁷⁸ "Alan Jackson earns fastest #1 of any country artist in 4 years," *ThatsCountry.com*, December 18, 2001, http://www.thatscountry.com/artman/publish/printer_54.shtml.

⁷⁹ Fox, "Alternative to What? *O Brother*, September 11, and the Politics of Country Music," 172.

⁸⁰ Toby Keith, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)," *Unleashed*, DreamWorks, 2002, CD.

Obviously, when a songwriter says that “putting boot to *ss” is the American thing to do, he is clearly not looking for a diplomatic solution. The lyrics even sparked opposition from other country musicians, notably Natalie Maines from the Dixie Chicks, who stated that the song made county music appear “ignorant.”⁸¹ Shortly after the controversy surrounding the song, Keith put out another potentially offensive number.

Sung from the point of view of a “middle-aged, Middle-Eastern, camel-herdin’ man” Keith attempts to describe the impact that the Taliban have had on communities in Afghanistan with “The Taliban Song.” The song may be humorous for many listeners, but the song also acknowledges lots of commonly held beliefs of the time, the primary one being that Saddam Hussein was linked with the Taliban and partially responsible for the events of 9/11: “Mr. Bush got on the phone with Iraq and Iran and said, ‘Now you sons-of-b*tches you better not be doin’ any business with the Taliban.’”⁸² The extent to which Hussein was or was not involved with the Taliban was hotly debated at the time of the song, and these lyrics recognize that the link between the two was thought to have existed, although later events indicated its falsehood.

While “The Taliban Song” was not played on the radio, likely because of the potentially offensive lyrics, it was sung in public venues and before fans at every concert. In fact, the only version of the song that is available anywhere is the concert version. While the song as a whole could be seen as an expression of patriotic fervor, natives of the Middle East may find some lines offensive, like the referral of the homestead as a “two-bedroom cave” or a burqa as a “scarf.” Probably the most insulting part of the song is when the United States entered Afghanistan:

⁸¹ Calvin Gilbert, “CMT News Special Explores Maines-Keith Controversy,” *CMT.com*, June 6, 2003, <http://www.cmt.com/news/feat/tkeith.nmaines.062003.jhtml>.

⁸² Toby Keith, “The Taliban Song,” *Shock’n Y’all*, DreamWorks, 2003, CD.

“They dropped little bombs all over their holy land/ And man you should have seen ‘em run like rabbits, they ran (the Taliban)”⁸³ It is doubtful that members of the Muslim community would celebrate the bombing of their homes, regardless of whether or not they were associated with terrorist groups.

Other musical trends outside of country with regards to the Wars in the Middle East should also be recognized. Rap and other genres from the urban areas have become the frequent communicators of anti-government messages in recent years. President George W. Bush is often a target of ridicule for his foreign policy decisions during his presidency. In one song “Son of a Bush” by Public Enemy, the election of George W. Bush is critiqued:

I been through the first term of the rotten
The father, the son, and the holy Bush
It we all in
Don’t look at me
I ain’t callin’ for no assassination
I’m just sayin’ “Who voted for this a**hole of the nation?”⁸⁴

The members of Public Enemy must have assumed that Gore would be elected in 2000, and expressed their unhappiness at the results given their memories of the elder Bush’s administration. This could be seen as a reflection of the public outrage of the election results, whereby Gore won the popular vote but lost the election.

As the Wars in the Middle East progressed, the images of war streamed through American televisions like they did during Vietnam. This reality of war was also amplified thanks to new technology that allowed for war participants to record the war unfiltered and upload their findings on the internet without any censorship from the authorities. The debate on whether or not this kind of amateur journalism should be allowed is for another time, but the important thing

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Public Enemy, “Son of a Bush,” *Son of a Bush*, Koch Records, 2003, CD single.

to understand is that the media presence, however unofficial, has a profound influence on what we see at home. If the presence of video cameras and television in Vietnam was any indication of the future, then the presence of unfiltered Internet footage can be even more influential on the public opinion of the war. As the public's opinion changes, the music produced will continue to realign itself to reflect it.

Other rappers were more explicit with their outrage at President Bush than Public Enemy, in part because they too had seen the war footage unfiltered. Prior to the 2004 presidential election, Eminem recorded a protest song and music video called "Mosh" that was made available online. Although it was not an official single, it does carry on the revolution spirit of Jefferson Airplane and the Rolling Stones from the Vietnam era. Eminem portrays himself as a leader of a movement in the United States that would prevent Bush from continuing his presidency and continuing the War in Iraq. In the third verse, he considers anarchy as an effective solution for the Bush administration:

Let the President answer a higher anarchy
Strap him with an AK-47, let him go fight his own war
Let him impress Daddy that way
No more blood for oil
We got our own battles to fight on our own soil⁸⁵

The lyrics speak for themselves. He later raps that what America needs to do is "to disarm, THIS weapon of mass destruction that we call our President," a jab at the allegation that Saddam Hussein was keeping "weapons of mass destruction" from UN inspectors.

Eminem's lyrics reflected a commonly held opinion that can be seen as a repeat of Vietnam: the reasons why the United States are involved in war are not shared by the American people. It also recognizes the idea that our presence in the Middle East may be linked with our

⁸⁵ Eminem, "Mosh," *Encore*, Aftermath, 2004, CD.

dependence on oil, a theme pointed out by Rage Against the Machine in the late 1990s. As these opinions can be considered highly subjective, it is nonetheless important to understand that the public opinion on any event can change based on what it sees on television or online. This is especially true when the information Americans receive is more unfiltered. By the time “Mosh” was released, Americans were able to download daily any missile strikes footage or videos of improvised exploding devices (IEDs) in action from the comfort of their home office. This degree of digital freedom is significant for its ability to present images that force Americans to draw their own conclusions about the scene, whether or not they understand what they see.

The last musical genre that must be addressed is rock, simply because it has effectively carried the anti-war tradition of Vietnam with the least amount of change over time and produced the majority of popular protest songs for the wars in the Middle East. One of the most comprehensive protest songs of the Middle East must be “Hands Held High” by Linkin Park. It addresses several aspects of the war, from the opinions of the people watching television in the United States, to the actions of the soldiers, to the perspectives of the children in Iraq.

This song is also reminiscent of “Fortunate Son” in its message of the “rich man’s war,” which presents frustration at the continuing social stratification:

‘Cause I’m sick of bein’ treated like I have before...
Like this war’s really just a different brand of war
Like it doesn’t cater to rich and abandon poor
Like they understand you in the back of the jet
When you put gas in your tank
These f*ckers are laughin’ their way to the bank and cashin’ the check⁸⁶

Like the “rummage sale” in “Fortunate Son,” the rich in this song have also managed to find ways to stay wealthy at the poor’s expense. Linkin Park also implies that the wealth was

⁸⁶ Linkin Park, “Hands Held High,” *Minutes to Midnight*, Warner Bros, 2007, CD.

derived from oil companies, which for many were thought to be linked with the wealth of the Bush family.

Perhaps the most vocal rock band in terms of their protest of the U.S. presence in the Middle East is Green Day. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, they have been writing protest songs, two of which became big hits and led to their receiving the Grammy for Best Rock Album for both 2004 and 2009.⁸⁷ The first, “American Idiot,” off their album bearing the same name finds an upbeat way to say that America is brainwashed by paranoia and hysteria. Lines from the song are very catchy, yet still criticize the Bush administration for stirring fear in the minds of Americans: “I’m not part of a redneck agenda/ Now everybody do the propaganda/ And sing along in the age of paranoia.”⁸⁸ The “redneck” agenda is an allusion to Bush’s plan for the country, as many considered him nothing more than a redneck from Texas. The encouragement to “do the propaganda” implies that the “propaganda” is a group dance to which everyone would know the steps.

Presently heard on the radio is their most recent protest song of consequence, “21 Guns.” It is not overtly anti-war and while the jury is still out on the true meaning of the song, many listeners have interpreted the number as an anti-war anthem because of the frequent references to the twenty-one gun salute performed at the funerals of fallen soldiers. The salute is repeated for every chorus:

One, twenty-one guns
Lay down your arms, give up the fight
One, twenty-one guns
Throw up your arms into the sky

⁸⁷ “Grammy Award Winners,” *Grammy.com*, http://www2.grammy.com/GRAMMY_Awards/Winners/Results.aspx?title=&winner=u2&year=0&genreID=0&hp=1

⁸⁸ Green Day, “American Idiot,” *American Idiot*, Reprise, 2004, CD.

You and I ⁸⁹

This song does not spell out its anti-war stance, but given Green Day's reputation as protestors of the wars in the Middle East and the previous success of "American Idiot," it is safe to assume that they at least implied protest by having these words in the chorus.

Conclusion

By examining the war songs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there are several conclusions that we can draw based on the research available. The most important conclusion is that music during times of war is a reflection of the opinions of Americans at that moment, or at least the songwriters that claim to represent them, but they are subject to change based on the information available through media outlets and the degree to which they are unfiltered. The public opinion of World War I prior to the sinking of the *Lusitania* was that of neutrality, and the music reflects that. Only when Americans read about the tragedy in the newspaper did their opinions begin to change. Some still clung to neutrality, but many were affected by the news of death, and so altered their perception about America's role in the conflict.

World War II followed a similar pattern with the neutrality songs at the forefront. The attack on Pearl Harbor changed everything. Soon after, the songwriters were churning out songs that called for war and support of the troops at home. The radio replaced the newspaper as the primary source of war news, and provided a greater outlet for the music industry. As World War II carried on, it became more and more obvious that music was not only a reflection of opinion, but perhaps an influence as well. For this reason the government and record companies went to

⁸⁹ Green Day, "21 Guns," *21st Century Breakdown*, Reprise, 2009, CD.

great lengths to create the perfect war song, but the truth is that most people in the forties wanted a love song that reminded them of better times, as these were the best-sellers of their time.

The major shift from predominately pro-war attitudes to those that were anti-war came with Vietnam. A stark difference between that war and the World Wars was the lack of an American attack that the public would take seriously, like the *Lusitania* or Pearl Harbor. If that event had occurred, more pro-war songs would likely have been made. The lack of that event meant that the only pro-war songs would have come from the school of thought that considered Vietnam a pivotal link in the “domino theory.” The large following of the anti-war sentiment came from Americans exposed to the war through their television, the new technological medium for media and information. The events they witnessed from their screens affected many of their beliefs and fears, and their music reflects an outlook of anger and frustration over war in a country that many Americans felt needed to be left alone.

The wars in the Middle East, as of 2010, seem to be following the tradition of Vietnam, although they began like the World Wars because of the events of September 11. Most of the pro-war songs that were popular were country songs like they had been for Vietnam, but occurred very soon after the attacks on the United States. After the U.S. became involved with the war and the images began pouring into American homes again, the music shifted to mirror the feelings of Vietnam. Many of these anti-war messages were further fueled by the presence of the internet and more sophisticated digital equipment that allowed for users to record footage and share it with the world without being censored by the government.

Perhaps the lesson here is that many Americans cannot comprehensively understand the images of war; obviously no one would want to see their loved ones in battle on television, but how can the United States, or any modern nation, ever have lasting support for the war effort

with such graphic images streaming in daily? It would be nearly impossible, based on the war songs that are continuing to emerge from musical artists. The current public opinion for many that are living through this war seems to be the desire to end the war soon and to bring the troops home.

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