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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Charles Wayne Hampton entitled "Working Class Heroes: Counter-Cultural Politics and the Singing Hero in Twentieth Century America." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Political Science.

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WORKING CLASS HEROES: COUNTER-CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE SINGING HERO IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Charles Wayne Hampton

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For Lisa and Abigail Rose.

Without their love and care this could surely never have been accomplished.

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of heroism in the social protest singing tradition in America in the twentieth century. Focusing upon Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan as heroic representatives of three historic eras of American cultural radicalism, my thesis sees such singing heroes as "totalizing agents," responsible for sustaining protest unity over time. The role of the singing hero is viewed as that of prophet-visionary, enlightening a mass public in a consciousness-raising endeavor, a process John Lennon candidly referred to as "mind games."

Using the example of John Lennon and much of his terminology (from "Working Class Hero," "Imagine," and "Mind Games"), I first constructed a model of the singing hero as a public personage infused with Mannheim's "utopian mentality," which is to say, infused with a sense of destiny and a desire to employ their art in the "mind guerilla" task of changing the world in the name of love, righting its wrongs, correcting its injustices, and generally attempting to remake the world into as close a likeness as possible to the imagined Brotherhood of Mankind. The example of John Lennon also offers insights into the fundamental importance of public suffering, death, and martyrdom in the canonization process which immortalizes the singing hero.

Lennon's term "working class hero" applies to the protest singing heroes only in the sense that these guerilla minstrels are closely associated with the rebellious youth culture of the American left, though not necessarily very popular among blue-collar workers.

In studying the lives and works of these "working class heroes" I tried to relate the politics of social protest singing to the utopian world view, arguing for the tendency of folk and popular protest singers to romanticize, methologize, and idealize the politics of revolution. By studying these three great minstrel mind guerillas, my purpose was to open up three windows into the culture of protest in successive stages of development in the twentieth century. In the process I attempted to summarize the growth and development of the protest song tradition through the eyes of its great folk and popular heroes, and to comment on the role of heroism and hero-worship in American cultural radicalism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: HEROISM, TOTALIZATION, AND THE PROTEST SONG CULTURE IN AMERICA

A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.

John Lennon, 1970

Thesis: Heroism and the Totalization Process

In the folklore of the American Left there are many heroic and legendary figures: philosophers and scholars, activists and political leaders, authors, artists, minstrels, and martyrs. The list is long and varied: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dewey, James, Daniel DeLeon, Eugene V. Debs, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Big Bill" Haywood, Joe Hill, Max Eastman, John Reed, Mabel Dodge, John Doss Passos, Sacco and Vanzetti, Mother Jones, Norman Thomas, John L. Lewis, John Steinbeck, William Z. Foster, Gus Hall, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Paul Goodman, C. Wright Mills, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Marshal McCluhan, Jack Kerouac, Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Mark Rudd, Carl Oglesby, Tom Hayden, Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, Bobby Seal, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Jane Fonda, John Lennon, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and maybe even Patti Hurst. To understand these public personages, their visions, insights, and prophecies, and their legendary exploits is to begin to understand the American Left.

The thesis of the study ahead is that this thing we so confidently refer to as the "left" is to a significant degree a composite of the cult-followings of these various heroes and heroines and the ideals and symbols they personify. It may be more than this, but certainly not less. In the discussion that follows it will be argued that heroism amd hero-worship are indeed of fundamental importance in the bonding process which attempts to forge unity out of the vast diversity of causes, movements, organizations, and ideologies that make up working class political culture in America.[1]

Through the vehicle of hero-worship the Left becomes more than a mere complex of abstract principles and partisan polemics. As these abstractions are embodied in the mythos of the hero, the Left attains its historicity--its life. Social values and ideals adhere

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[1]For background on the politics of heroism and hero-worship I have relied on the following sources. For information on the classical conception of the hero see C. Kerenyi, The Heroes of the Greeks, trans. H. J. Rose (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960). The modern conception of the hero begins with the work of Thomas Carlyle. See Archibald MacMechan, ed., Carlyle on Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (New York: Ginn and Company, 1901); B. H. Lehman, Carlyle's Theory of the Hero (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1928); and Eric Bentley, A Century of Hero-Worship (New York: Beacon Press, 1944). More recent works include Sidney Hook, The Hero in History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Dixon Wecter, The Hero in America (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963); Sidney Kraus and Dennis Davis, The Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behavior (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976); and James Combs, Dimensions of Political Drama (Santa Monica, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Co., Inc., 1980).

to an actual--though dramaticized--life story. A biography supports political abstractions, and an ideology is humanized. This is all part of a dialectical process Sartre called totalization: the process whereby social unity is synthesized out of diversity and chaos.[2]

The hero we speak of is more than a thinker, spokesman, or activist speculating on the problems of the world today, or waving a party platform. He is more than a mere source of propaganda and doctrine. The hero is a human being, and as such, he is a source of identity and allegiance. The hero is a power, a leader, and a source of authority. He is a totalizer.

The hero is a totalizer in this sense. He or she is a public personage and a mythos around which a social unity crystallizes. This totalization takes the form of a cult-following and is totalized out of a shared identity with the ideals the hero exemplifies. Hero-worship is our attempt to emulate this heroic example. When the many identify with the ways of one, a collectivity results. Heroism therefore presupposes totalization.

Heroism

There are several characteristics of heroism that should now be briefly discussed. First, heroism is a power. The hero is

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[2]See Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 45-57.

believed to possess a special genius, a great talent, a magnetic personality, a charisma, and a disarming charm and appeal. The follower is captured and swept away by the power of his heroine's charm and charisma.[3] Perhaps the greatest power of the hero is what Carlyle, in his 1840 Lectures on Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, called "original insight."[4] The hero is a seer, one who is gifted with the ability to comprehend the reality behind the facade. Through his words and deeds these fresh insights into the hidden inner workings of our reality are revealed to "ordinary" men and women who comprise the hero's cult following.[5] The visions of the hero, revealed to the chosen ones, become their world view, in our case, their "consciousness." It is in this way that the hero puts his stamp upon his generation.

Heroism also has a messianic quality.[6] At some level the followers perceive the hero as a savior. One whose insights, teachings, example, and leadership will deliver them from perceived evils (i.e., their oppressive and/or exploitative socio-economic conditions, the meaninglessness of their empty lives, the political

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[3]MacMechan, p. 44.

[4]Michael Morgan, "Carlyle Thomas," in Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., and the Free Press, 1967), Vol. II, p. 25.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Macmechan, p. 28.

injustices they perceive, etc.). The hero and the ideals he represents are a source of hope and inspiration for the followers. Hero-worship is thus a means of transcending alienation and despair by following a Moses to the Promised Land, or a Marx to the Communist Utopia. The hero is thus often perceived as a divine representative and his powers are often believed to be spiritual and sacred. His followers are devotees, in our case, to the religion of political radicalism.

Though imbued with divinity, the hero is mortal. He too suffers. A large part of his mystique is the sacrifice he endures to defend the principles he represents. Heroes like Socrates, Christ, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. have died for such principles. It is often the hero's destiny to pass through mortal suffering and the martyr's death into the immortality of legend and myth.[7]

And finally, through such legend and myth, the hero is connected to a cult, or a loose, amorphous collective following formed in the name of the fallen hero. Through a canonization process, the cult first mythologizes the hero, embodying within the hero's image the ideals to which the collectivity aspires. In other words, without the cult, there can be no hero. The hero is not the individual behind the image, but a collective idealization that is associated with that individual.[8] Here again is the linkage between the hero and the totalization process.

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[7]Kerenyi, p. 13.

[8]Ibid., p. 3.

The Singing Hero and the Social Protest Tradition

The heroes of this study are protest singers, left-wing minstrels devoted to working class consciousness and revolutionary change. They are part of a totalization process, supporting the greater Left, which we will refer to as the social protest singing tradition.[9] These are performers like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and the late Phil Ochs, who consistently put their politics--their "social consciousness"--ahead of artistic or commercial concerns in their careers. These are revolutionaries with guitars, Lennon's "mind guerrillas,"[10] marching off to glory in John Sinclair's "Guitar Army."[11] These are the revolutionaries we are referring to as "Working Class Heroes."

In twentieth century America, working class music--social protest music--has appealed primarily to left-wing intellectuals,

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[9]There is a sizable body of literature on the social protest singing tradition. The first attempt at a broad overview of the left-wing song tradition was John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (New York: Octagon Books, 1953). Another classic work is R. Serge Denisoff, Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left (Urbana, Ill.: The University of Illinois Press, 1971). An excellent brief survey of this tradition may be found in Jerome Rodnitzky, "The Evolution of the American Protest Song," Journal of Popular Culture, III, No. 1 (Summer, 1969), 35-45.

[10]From the song "Mind Games" by John Lennon, released as a single in conjunction with an album by the same title in October, 1973 by Capital-EMI, Inc., Hollywood, Calif. (SN-16068).

[11]See John Sinclair, Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings (New York: Douglas Book Corporation, 1972). Actually, the book's title was taken from a song "Guitar Army," by Scott Morgan and the Rationals.

artists, and bohemians, and has been either ignored or scorned by blue-collar workers. But, in spite of this, the proletarian ideal looms large in protest culture. Though they may rarely be exposed to manual labor, these minstrel mind guerrillas often wear work shirts and overalls. Those who have been successful are often embarrassed by their wealth and success. While they may not actually take a vow of poverty, they tend to romanticize that condition, and at least avoid the most conspicuous of bourgeois comforts. Once quite fond of Marxist rhetoric, their voices have sustained the message and symbolism of working class revolution, with or without the workers. It is in this sense only that the protest singer is a working class hero. They are heroes in the name of the working class, champions of the poor and oppressed.[12]

And, in many ways, for the protest singing hero, the medium is the message.[13] In the blending voices and sustained harmonies, our hero's political values and ideals are formed. Out of heavily syncopated rhythms or peaceful lilting melodies, his political world view is constructed. Protesting against the world of discord and strife, the protest singer sings the politics of harmony and peace. He or she is an idealist and a utopian. Although in recent years some have flirted with dark dystopic visions and totalitarian

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[12]See Denisoff, pp. 3-17.

[13]See Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extentions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), Chap. 1, "The Medium is the Message."

premonitions, even this pessimism is "utopian" in the sense that it is imaginary, dramaticized, and romanticized when set to music.

The protest singer's political weapons are his songs and his performances. He or she is a non-violent symbolic politician, involved in the politics of "consciousness development," seeking through music to change attitudes and values, to educate and enlighten. It is in this sense that his radicalism takes the form of "Mind Games."

What follows is a study of the role of the singing hero in the emergence of the political left in America in the twentieth century. More particularly, it is a study of Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan, three of the most prominent and influential protest song heroes from the three great eras of leftist activity in America this century: the teens, the thirties, and the sixties.

But since much of the jargon employed ("mind guerilla," "Mind games," etc.) comes from the works of John Lennon, and since the title of this study, "Working Class Heroes," is taken directly from an autobiographical song by the ex-Beatle and counter-cultural martyr,[14] it seems appropriate to begin our discussion of America's working class heroes through a brief look at the life of this famous Englishman and his place in the American Left of the sixties.

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[14]"Working Class Hero," by John Lennon, is from the 1970 album Plastic Ono Band (Apple Records SW 3372).

CHAPTER II

MIND GAMES: THE JOHN LENNON PROTOTYPE

We're playin' those mind games together,
Pushin' the barriers, plantin' seeds.
Playin' the mind guerilla,
Chantin' the Mantra, "peace on earth."

John Lennon, 1973

The story of John Lennon is a potent symbol of and for the generation of the 1960s.[1] As a creative giant, ex-Beatle, rock superstar, and international celebrity, his life story is a source of nostalgia and inspiration for millions of young people in search of personal identity. It takes you back to another time and place, back to a golden age where flower-power, long-hair, psychedelics, oriental mysticism, and mass politics were all the rage. It is the

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[1]Although the definitive biography of John Lennon is yet to be written (I understand that Albert Goldman is working on it now), there is nevertheless a wealth of information that has been published. But it is often difficult to separate out the tabloid journalism and hype from the more serious and objective works. Several good Beatle biographies are available: the first to appear was Hunter Davies, The Beatles: The Authorized Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, June, 1969), a somewhat shallow effort. For a more recent and extensive work, see Philip Norman, Shout!: The Beatles and Their Generation (New York: Warner Books, Inc., May, 1982).

A book by Cynthia Lennon, A Twist of Lennon (New York: W. H. Allen and Co., Inc., 1978), is interesting only because it was written by Lennon's first wife. Lennon's life and works are fairly well documented in the back issues of Rolling Stone Magazine. Lennon was very helpful by granting frequent interviews, but one must always keep in mind that these interviews were Lennon performances, and reflect more of the myth than the man. Probably the most famous from the early years of his post-Beatle

hippie version of J.F.K. and Camelot. While one stimulates the Liberal's imagination, the other warms the heart of the once young radicals.

As a story it has all the key dramatic ingredients: excitement, passion, scandal, romance, comedy, tragedy, and pathos. It could be a classic heroic tale from any era of greatness, but it

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era, was an interview with Rolling Stone's Jann Wenner, published in book form, Lennon Remembers (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1971). For more updated interview material see, G. Barry Gibson, ed., The Playboy Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), conducted by David Sheff just two months before Lennon's death.

Recorded interview material is also available. Much of this is commercial hype--The Beatles' Story (Capital/EMI, TBO 2222, 1964); Hear the Beatles Tell All (Vee-Jay, Pro-202, n.d.)--but some are more interesting and helpful: The Beatle Tapes (Polydor, 2683 068, n.d.), interviews with British rock columnist David Wigg.

There has also been a flood of information to come out in the aftermath of Lennon's death. Among the better memorial works are a collection of essays and interviews from Rolling Stone, Jonathan Cott and Christine Doudna, eds., The Ballad of John and Yoko (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1982); Vic Garbarini, Brian Cullman, and Barbara Graustark, Strawberry Fields Forever: John Lennon Remembered (New York: Delilah Communications Ltd., December, 1980); and finally there was a three hour interview with John and Yoko conducted by Andy Peebles of the British Broadcasting Company, conducted just 48 hours before Lennon's assassination and broadcast December 8, 1980 as The BBC Tribute to John Lennon. This interview has been subsequently re-broadcast over many American rock radio stations. I was able to tape these interviews.

The most recent and most demystifying of the works on the Lennons include John Green's Dakota Days: The True Story of John Lennon's Final Years (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), which is an expose' focusing upon the last five years of Lennon's life (1975-80). It uncovers the darker, occult side of the Lennons, Yoko's compulsive quest for supernatural powers, John's bout with a severe and debilitating depression, and the conjuring up of the "house-husbandry myth" to satisfy the inquiries of the press. May Pang, Lennon's lover during his separation from Yoko, has also just written a book with Henry Edwards, Loving John (New York: Warner Books, 1983), demystifying the story of John and Yoko's romantic reunion after their "lover's quarrel."

is the story of one man's struggle with personal, political, and artistic commitment and responsibility. It is a story of rags-to-riches success, and of the disillusionment, rage, and self-destructiveness of sudden overwhelming fame. It is a story of salvation achieved through public political conversion, commitment, and change; of dedication to love, altruism, and social conscience. But it is also a story of the subsequent ridicule, persecution, social isolation, and governmental repression that was to be the price of that commitment; and of the resulting mental, marital, and professional breakdown and depoliticization that followed. And, finally, it is the story of perseverance, reunion, and revitalization; and of sudden, senseless, tragic death.

The Lennon legend totalizes a whole system of values and an entire life-style. For like few other popular artists of his era, John Lennon was able to capture, articulate, and embody the very fleeting essence of his generation and his era: its madness as well as its brilliance, and the inherent contradictions of its dark nihilistic pessimism and its exuberant euphoric quest for an impossible utopian ideal.

The actual political impact of such a life and legend is probably impossible to measure. It is true that the impact was more symbolic than institutional, but changes did occur, attitudes were revolutionized, and life-styles were altered. For our purposes here, John Lennon's major contribution to the history of the American Left, was his role, following Bob Dylan's lead, in the

politicization of the already inherently revolutionary pop music culture of the 1960s.

Lennon and the Beatles

In John Lennon's public character we find all the heroic qualities of greatness and all the prerequisites of immortality: superstar-activist, prophet-seer, martyr, and saint. His outlandish manner, his bizarre and raunchy stage antics, and his generally anarchic demeanor, set the tone for two generations of punk rock and youth rebellion.[2] His creative powers, fresh insights, and uncanny abilities to sense and exploit the latest pop cultural trends, bordered on the mystical. His outlandish public statements and his repartee with the world press are now legends in the folklore of the world counter-culture. Memorable instances, such as the famous 1966 remark that the "Beatles are now more popular than Christ," got the blood boiling in the generation gap and brought into sharp focus the cracks in the superstructure of Western Civilization.[3] Such a remark

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[2]Lennon's on-stage antics, especially during the Hamburg tours of the early sixties before manager Brian Epstein calmed him down and cleaned up the Beatles' image for mass consumption, included shouting "Fuckin' Nazis" at his German audience and walking on-stage naked with a toilet seat around his neck. See Norman, pp. 114-16, 191-92.

[3]This remark came from an interview with Maureen Cleave of the London Evening Standard in February, 1966. The full remark was: "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that. I'm right and I will be proved right. We are more popular than Jesus now. I don't know which will go first--rock and roll or Christianity. Jesus was alright, but his disciples were thick and ordinary." See ibid., pp. 331-32.

also reveals the arrogance and self-assurance that came from riding the very crest of the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Lennon had always felt that he possessed a special genius, and was destined for greatness, but that he was being held back and beat down by an insidious system of institutionalized oppression. In Lennon Remembers, he said:

> People like me are aware of their so-called genius at ten, eight, nine. . . . I always wondered, "Why has nobody discovered me?" In school, didn't they see that I'm cleverer than anybody in this school? That the teachers are stupid, too? that all they had was information that I didn't need.
>
> It was obvious to me . . . . Why didn't anybody notice me? . . . A couple of teachers would notice me, encourage me to be something or other, to draw or to paint--express myself. But most of the time they were trying to beat me into being a fuckin' dentist or a teacher. And then the fuckin' fans tried to beat me into being a fuckin' Beatle or an Engelbert Humperdink, and the critics tried to beat me into being Paul McCartney.[4]

For the Beatles, discovery, success, and fame came only at a very high price: the loss of personal identity and integrity. Lennon always resented the artificial packaging and commercialization of the Fab Four. He told Jann Wenner:

> If I could be a fuckin' fisherman, I would, you know. If I had the capabilities to be something other than I am, I would. It's no fun being an artist. You know what it's like, writing, it isn't fun, it's torture. . . . And these fuckin' bastards there just sucking us to death, that's about all we can do, is do it like circus animals. I resent being an artist, in that respect, I resent performing for fuckin' idiots who don't know anything. They can't feel; I'm the one that's feeling, because I'm the one expressing. They live vicariously through me and other artists . . .[5]

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[4] Lennon Remembers, pp. 165-66.

[5] Ibid., p. 11.

He became very disillusioned by the unreality of their unprecedented fame. It was impossible to fully comprehend the incredible mystique that surrounded the Beatles. Lennon told Wenner of cripples:

> Whenever we went on tour . . . [there were] always a few seats laid aside for cripples and people in wheelchairs. . . . Because we were famous, we were supposed to have . . . [supernatural powers]. And they were in our dressing room all the time. . . . And it's always the mother or nurse pushing them on you. They would just say hello and go away but [the mothers] would push them at you like you were Christ or something, as if there were some aura about you which will rub off on them. . . . And when we would go through corridors they would be all touching us. It got like that, it was horrifying.[6]

In 1971, looking back across the decade, Lennon felt that, in spite of the Beatles' supposed supernatural powers and phenomenal mass impact, nothing of substance had really changed:

> . . . The people who are in control and in power and the class system and the whole bullshit bourgeois scene is exactly the same except that there is a lot of middle-class kids with long hair walking around London in trendy clothes. . . . The same bastards are in control, the same people are running everything, it's exactly the same. They hyped the kids and the generation.
>
> We've grown up a little, all of us, and there has been a change and we are a bit freer and all that, but it's the same game, nothin's really changed. They're doing exactly the same things, selling arms to South Africa, killing blacks on the street, people are living in fuckin' poverty with rats crawling over them, it's the same.[7]

After 1966, Lennon had become increasingly cynical about his role as Beatle John. He had begun to see through the false consciousness of his superstardom. A young American folk idol,

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[6]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[7]Ibid., pp. 11-12.

Bobby Dylan, had shown him a more responsible way to utilize his medium, and introduced him to an illegal substance (marijuana) that promised to open his mind and release his most sensitive creative powers and insights.[8] In 1965, "Help!" had been a desperate plea for someone to rescue him from the emptiness of his existence, and "Nowhere Man" at the beginning of 1966 was a pessimistic view of his numbing sense of powerlessness and despair, while "Rain" released that Spring was the first of the metaphorical drug songs that would become so common in the pop music culture of the late sixties. And, if we are to believe the right-wing Christian press, "Rain" is not the only Beatle drug metaphor. "Norwegian Wood," from the 1965 LP Rubber Soul, is a psuedonym for a kind of marijuana imported from Norway, "Yellow Submarine" is a slang term for a type of amphetamine capsule, and everyone knows that "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" stands for LSD.[9] Clearly, the Beatles were an important part of the drug culture. Lennon in particular seemed to be resolving some of his despair and hopelessness through the euphoria of the marijuana high and LSD trip, and calling out to a new generation of disaffection to follow him out of the tedium of their boring and

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[8]See Norman, pp. 330-31, for an account of Dylan's influence upon the Beatles. The claim that Dylan introduced them to marijuana comes from Anthony Scaduto's biography of Bob Dylan, Bob Dylan (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 203-04.

[9]Bob Larson, Rock and Roll: The Devil's Diversion (McCook, Neb.: by the Author, 1967).

meaningless lives. No longer content to merely hold his public's hand, John Lennon now felt increasingly compelled to take the role of counter-cultural leader.

Lennon and the Counter-Culture

The year 1966 was a time of bewildering social and political turbulence.[10] The Johnson Administration's "War on Poverty" and the 1964 Civil Rights Act had not resolved the racial tension in America. In fact, the Civil Rights struggle was taking a turn toward increased violence. The black ghettos in many of America's major urban areas were exploding in riots and violence. The anger of the separatists and black power advocates was replacing the passive resistance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Administration's escalation of the war in Vietnam only fed the flames of domestic unrest as blacks began dying in disproportionate numbers to whites and as white middle class students began to lose their 2-S deferments.

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[10] In tracing the historical-political backdrop to the John Lennon story, a reader edited by Gerald Howard, The Sixties (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982), was very helpful, with articles by some of the leading thinkers, scholars, and journalists of the sixties (Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, Tom Wolfe, etc.), and articles on the philosophy, culture, and politics of that era; included also was an extensive chronology. For a more in-depth study of New Left politics, see Irwin Unger, The Movement: A History of the American New Left 1959-1972 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975). For an even more specific focus on the peace movement, see Lawrence Wittner, Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1941-1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); and Michael Ferber and Staughton Lynd, The Resistance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). And finally, probably the best work on the counter-culture of the sixties is still Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter

Although the rise of the new radicalism of the mid-sixties was the result of many causes, it was the war in Southeast Asia that served as the major catalyst to mass protest and radicalization. United States troop strength had risen suddenly and dramatically to almost 400,000 by the end of 1966 and American combat losses mounted. In just one week in September there were 970 United States casualties and 145 combat deaths. Over 5,000 United States soldiers were killed in action in 1966.[11]

The world press--and the world--became increasingly fixated on the war. With daily monotony war news interrupted evening meals around the country and around the world with body counts and bloody combat footage. The Vietnam war was the first truly mass media war, and it reached out through the air waves to touch more people more dramatically than any previous war in the history of the United States. The domestic impact was predictably unpredictable.[12]

Opposition to the war took two broad forms: radical activism and cultural dissent. One was called the "Movement" and the other the "counter-culture," and they became the twin pillars of what

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Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969).

[11]See George E. Delury, The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1978 (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc., 1977), pp. 329, 737.

[12]See Michael Arlen, "Television and the Press in Vietnam; Or, Yes I Can Hear You Very Well--Just What Was It You Were Saying," in Howard, pp. 425-42.

became known as "the New Left."[13] The Old Left had practically vanished in the communist paranoia of the Cold War and the McCarthy era. It had survived the 1950s only as the bare but resilient thread of the Peace Movement (against the spread of the new atomic weapons) and as the white appendage of the black civil rights movement.[14] The Vietnam war gave the Left a renewed vitality and sense of purpose unmatched since the Great Depression.[15]

Much had changed since the 1930s. Roosevelt's New Deal and the social security system, World War II and the defeat of facism, post-war economic prosperity and suburban affluence, atomic power and the super-power stalemate, television and the electric guitar all conspired to irrevocably alter the structure and format of the American Left. Its support base, its institutions and organizations, as well as its tactics and philosophy, would change dramatically.

By 1960, the communist and socialist parties in America were practically extinct, the victims of cold war hysteria and government repression. The unions and the working classes had become contented and conservative, the victims of affluence and bourgeois acculturation. A New Left was emerging from America's universities and

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[13]The label "New Left" seems to have first appeared in Great Britain during the late 1950s, where a group of young socialists and intellectuals differentiated from the Labour Party. In the early sixties they began to publish the New Left Review, which soon found its way into American college communities. See Unger, p. 18.

[14]See Ferber and Lynd, pp. 1-8.

[15]See John P. Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth

college campuses, instead of from her mines and factories. The new working class consisted of white middle-class students, professors, draftees, and drop-outs. This new Left was built upon a foundation of student organizations--such as the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee)--and only loosely following the blueprints of movement fathers like Herbert Marcuse, C. Wright Mills, Paul Goodman, and Norman O. Brown, who had begun to analyze the changed conditions and the new revolutionary possibilities.[16]

The new radicals dropped the Marxist-Leninist politics of class conflict, consciousness development, and worker revolution to embrace the Gandhian politics of love, confrontation of conscience, and conversion through example and dignity.[17] And along with all this came a new bohemianism based upon a cult-like devotion to pacifism, mind-altering drugs, oriental mysticism, uninhibited sexual experimentation, and rock and roll music.[18]

At first, folk music had been the young radicals' choice of music.[19] Bob Dylan had passed along the old proletarian topical-

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Century (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), pp. 177-86.

[16]Unger, pp. 25-50.

[17]See Matthew F. Stolz, Politics of the New Left (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Glencoe Press, 1971), p. 50.

[18]See Roszak, Chap. II, "An Invasion of Centaurs," pp. 42-83.

[19]Unger, p. 41.

folk-singing tradition of the Wobblies, Woody Guthrie, and the Almanac Singers, to a new generation of radicalism. Dylan, along with Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and Pete Seeger, had been a major popularizer of this music and its message in the early sixties.[20] But all that had changed in 1964 with the arrival of the Beatles onto American soil. The young radicals came to find their own distinctive sound in a revival of fifties rock and roll music.[21] Even Bob Dylan would be swept up in the phenomena of Beatlemania and the invasion of the British Rockers. Folk music was just too low key and square--too intellectual--for the new generation of dissent, who were in search of excitement, ecstasy, and existential fulfillment, instead of propaganda and polemics.

John Lennon can thus be understood as a working class hero only in this sense: as an extension of the counter-culture and the Youth movement in America and the West. The Beatles, along with Dylan, the Rolling Stones, The Who, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Jefferson Airplane, and the Doors, would become hip heroes and counter-cultural institutions. Psychedelic music (or Acid Rock) became the cultural bedcovers in the hallucinogenic dream world of the flower children and freaks who, in the spring of 1967, seemed to flood out of the American heartland by the thousands. Accompanied

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[20]See R. Serge Denisoff, Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left (Urbana, Ill.: The University of Illinois Press, 1971).

[21]See Albert Goldman, "The Emergence of Rock," in Howard, pp. 343-64.

by the strains of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, young runaways, outcasts, and drop-outs flocked into San Francisco's Haight Asbury district and New York City's East Village, and similar hippie enclaves in major cities around the nation and around the world.[22] They were literally fleeing from the "good life," rejecting the materialistic values and mores of their mostly middle class parents, fleeing the boredom and madness of suburban living, seeking adventure and purpose, and finding it in the brotherhood and oneness of the hippie life style;[23] getting by "with a little help from their friends."[24]

Long hair, which the Beatles had made a symbol of nonconformity and youth rebellion, had become the identity badge of the hippie subculture. The symbolic significance of long hair should not be overlooked. Earlier radicals were less conspicuous in their radicalism, and able to ease in and out of the mainstream and avoid confrontation with parents, bosses, and authority figures in everyday ordinary situations. As Abbie Hoffman said, growing long hair was the "coming out of the closet for the counterculture."[25] The

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[22]See Warren Hinkle, "A Social History of the Hippies," in Howard, pp. 207-32.

[23]See Unger, pp. 26-35.

[24]This line is of course from "With a Little Help From My Friends," by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, from the album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (London: Parlophone/EMI, PCS 7027, April, 1967), released by Capital Records in America in June, 1967.

[25]Abbie Hoffman, Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), p. 94.

harassment it generated from parents, teachers, and cops, along with the jeers from "straights," only served to reinforce the primitive tribal solidarity of the hippies.

The hippies further enhanced their outcast status by consuming large quantities of illegal drugs, and were thus always subject to arrest for possession. As a result, many lived in a constant state of paranoia, living literally as outlaws. But drug use also served an important political function by helping to break down the rational barriers, so as to allow the individual to transcend the fetters of social conditioning. After the mind-altering experiences of the marijuana high, or more particularly the LSD trip, the devotee who had seen through the hypocrisy of his parents' all-consuming materialism could never (so it was thought) return to the plastic life styles of the middle class.

Rock music was another important extension of the drug experience and the drug culture. Rock was another vehicle designed to explode one's false consciousness by setting free one's repressed feelings. The Beatles' new psychedelic sound was meant to be listened to stoned, and the combination of the drugs and the music was designed to lead the listener to a new sense of awareness.[26]

This inherently anti-rational and anti-intellectual experimentation with drug-induced mysticism and the frenzied

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[26]See Mike Jahn, Rock: From Elvis Presley to the Rolling Stones (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, 1973), pp. 209-13.

abandon of Acid Rock went hand in hand with a less inhibited sexuality. The hippies worshiped love and sexual freedom as a further extension of the process of freeing the pent-up passions of the oppressive Puritan morality of the American mainstream.[27]

After 1967, the hippie phenomena swept suddenly and dramatically throughout the West, like an out of control brush fire fed by the winds of the mass media. While the hard-core activists never fully accepted the flower power, long hair, and life-style politics of the counter-culture, they came to appreciate the political possibilities of cultural rebellion. After the onslaught of the hippies, new left politics began a more earnest shift toward more dramatic publicity-seeking stunts or "events" as they came to be known. The more traditional marches, rallies, and sit-ins gained more color and symbolic significance as teach-ins, be-ins, live-ins, and smoke-ins evolved.[28]

By 1968, the antics of the Yippies were eclipsing the more sober SDS, which was beginning to suffer from internal disputes that would usher forth the more extremist "Weathermen" who took their name and spirit from a Bob Dylan aphorism ("You don't need a

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[27]See Rex Weiner and Deanne Stillman, Woodstock Census: The Nationwide Survey of the Sixties Generation (New York: The Viking Press, 1979), pp. 163-77.

[28]See Unger, pp. 39-41.

weatherman to know which way the wind blows"),[29] taking the new left in new and more violent directions.[30]

But back in the spring of 1967, as if to launch the summer of love and the birth of the hippies, the Beatles appeared on the international satellite television program, Our World, which was broadcast in 24 countries and seen by over 40 million people, singing a new anthem of counter-cultural innocence: "All You Need is Love."[31] It was fitting testimony to the world's alienated youth, in search of belonging and discovering it in the camaraderie of the drug culture.

Lennon and Ono

The message of love would remain constant throughout the career of John Lennon after leaving the Beatles and teaming up with the Japanese-American avant-garde artist Yoko Ono. It was the only thing rescuing him and the millions he represented from a grim nihilism and total despair. For the message of love was aimed at the young radicals as well as the Cold Warriors. To the generals and politicians, the message was to stop the killing of young boys, the

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[29]This line is from "Subterranean Homesick Blues," which is from the album Bringing It All Back Home (Columbia Records CS 9128, March, 1965), side I, band 1.

[30]Unger, p. 90.

[31]See Tony Palmer, All You Need is Love: The Story of Popular Music (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), pp. 3-4.

butchering of Asian civilians, and the napalming of primitives' villages. To the kids, Lennon's message was to lighten up a little, burning yourself on the steps of the Pentagon to stop the war was going too far. Even pouring pigs' blood or your own excrement over draft records was not only in bad taste but also provocatively illegal.[32]

Lennon felt that such confrontational politics were counter-productive. It would only alienate the public and push the authorities into a corner, leaving them no choice but to come down hard on the protesters. He argued that it was more appropriate to confront the issues in ways that confused and frustrated the police and the court system. If everyone is in jail or dead, where will the revolution be? Instead, Lennon argued that the protesters should play politics at an existential level and in imaginary ways. If they concentrated on changing minds and life styles, politics and socio-economics would then follow.[33]

Lennon was advocating a symbolic approach to politics. To him it was revolutionary to grow one's hair long as a symbol of one's rejection of the more conventional life style. In a 1969 interview with British rock columnist David Wigg, Lennon put it this way:

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[32]See Ferber and Lynd, pp. 202-3.

[33]The Beatle Tapes, side I, track 1.

> . . . All we are saying is symbolically, instead of kickin' in a shop window, say, do something like grow your hair . . . or stay in bed. . . . Do something like that . . . something that can't be got, can't be smashed.[34]

This is also what he was saying in the controversial line in the 1968 Beatle single "Revolution," that "If you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't gonna make it with anyone any how."[35] Regardless of the issues he would face, Lennon's message in its essence would be consistently passivistic, and almost always with a touch of humor.

When asked by Wigg if he took his politics seriously, Lennon replied:

> I don't take it all too seriously, because I think that's the trouble with art, quote, music, quote, the peace movement, quote, and the world, quote, you know. I take everything with a pinch of salt. But I take life seriously, the serious job of being happy.[36]

When pressed by Wigg, who said that people were jeering and not taking him seriously, Lennon continued:

> That's good, that's part of our policy, not to be taken seriously. Because I think our opposition, whoever they might be, in all their manifest forms, don't know how to handle humor. . . . We stand a better chance under that

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Beatles Complete (New York: Warner Brothers Publications Inc., 1976), pp. 383-85.

[36] The Beatles Tapes, side I, band 1.

guise, because all the serious people, like Martin Luther King and Kennedy and Gandhi, got shot![37]

By 1969, the philosophy of Love, non-violence, symbolic radicalism, and the politics of humor had inevitably collided with the Vietnam war. "Love and Peace," along with "Drugs, Sex, and Rock 'n' Roll," had embarked on an imaginary crusade to end (or at least disrupt) the war in Southeast Asia. Lennon and Ono, like the greater counter-culture, came to focus their political energies upon the war and a campaign for world peace. Lennon summed up their ambitions in this 1969 quote: "We are both artists. Peace is our art. . . . We stand a chance of influencing other young people. And it is they who will rule the world tomorrow."[38]

Lennon's career after the Beatles became much more decidedly political, advocating Peace, first of all, but also the whole counter-cultural package of personal freedom, world-wide participatory democracy, feminism, and cultural revolution. Within the confines of the Beatles, Lennon's political consciousness was held in check by McCartney's more commercial pen. But in Yoko Ono, Lennon found someone who shared his eccentric approach to revolution. If anything, she was an even more seasoned cultural activist, having arisen out of the art underground of New York City's Greenwich Village. She had also been much more eccentric and absurdist in her approach to

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Cott and Doudna, p. 66.

politics. Her 1967 film Bottoms, for example, was publicized as a peace petition that 365 people had signed with their butts.[39] It was far more irreverent, farcical, and provocative than the boldest of Lennon's Beatle compositions like "Revolution," "Happiness is a Warm Gun," or "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?"[40]

Their professional and personal partnership, though always controversial, seemed to be a good match in terms of relieving the political and artistic inhibitions of each. John's celebrity status was so secure that he could now take risks, and Yoko had nothing to lose but her anonymity and a great deal to gain from her association with an ex-Beatle. Both had been flirting with radicalism for years. The catalyst was a long and passionate letter from film-maker Peter Watkins who, after spelling out all the world's troubles and problems, asked them what they were going to do about it. In a 1969 Canadian interview, Lennon recounted the story:

> He (Watkins) said people in our position and his position have a responsibility to use the media for world peace. And we sat on the letter for three weeks and thought it over and figured at first we were doing our best with songs like "All You Need is Love." Finally we came up with the bed event and that was what sparked it off. It was like getting your call-up papers for peace. Then we did the Bed event.[41]

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[39]See ibid., pp. 261-71. (J. Hoberman, "The Films of John and Yoko.")

[40]These songs are all from the Beatles "White Album," or The Beatles (Apple Records PCS7067-8, 1968).

[41]Cott and Doudna, p. 66.

The first bed event occurred in Amsterdam in March, 1969. The occasion was the honeymoon of newlyweds John and Yoko. Knowing that the press would be out in full force, they decided to do something positive with all the publicity. So they concocted the famous "Bed-in for Peace," where the press was invited into the bedroom of the presidential suite of the Amsterdam Hilton for a week of peace talk. They intended it as an advertisement for peace, to counteract all the publicity the war was getting. The Lennon's repeated the bed event twice in May: first in the Bahamas and then in Toronto, where they recorded their first post-Beatle single, "Give Peace a Chance."[42] In the 1980 Playboy interview, Lennon explained their motives like this:

> . . . When we got married, we knew our honeymoon was going to be public anyway, so we decided to use it to make a statement. Our life is our art. That's what the bed-in was. We sat in bed and talked to reporters for seven days. It was hilarious. In effect, we were doing a commercial for peace instead of a commercial for war. The reporters were going "un-huh, yea, sure," but it didn't matter because our commercial went out irrespective. As I've said [referring to an earlier comment], everybody puts down TV commercials, but they go around singing them.[43]

But while they dedicated their lives and their art to the Peace movement and to the counter-culture generally, Lennon and Ono steadfastly shunned any notion of leadership, refusing to wear the hippie crown. For this would have violated a fundamental

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[42]Ibid., p. 37.

[43]Sheff and Golson, p. 91.

counter-cultural tenet, set down in 1965 by Bob Dylan in "Highway 61": "Don't follow leaders, watch the parking meters."[44] Again, from the 1980 Playboy interview:

> . . . That's what I'm saying (still). Produce your own dream. If you want to save Peru, go save Peru. It's quite possible to do anything, but not if you put it on the leaders and parking meters. Don't expect Carter or Reagan or John Lennon or Yoko Ono or Bob Dylan or Jesus Christ to come do it for you. . . . I can't wake you up. YOU can wake you up. I can't cure you. YOU can cure you.[45]

Thus with the message of Love and Peace came a new utopian anarchism. The concept of leadership was in direct violation of the concept of Oneness. Even the Beatle Lennon had been saying "Come Together"--form the tribal one--but form it "over me," not behind or under me.[46] He was willing to totalize, but not dictate. Leaders only become dictators. Was that not the lesson of the old left, watching and witnessing Lenin and Stalin, Mao and Castro? According to Lennon:

> . . . The idea of leadership is a false god. If you want to use the Beatles or John and Yoko or whoever, people are expecting them to do something for them. That's not what's going to happen. But they (the followers) are the ones who didn't understand any message that came before anyway. And they are the ones that will follow Hitler or follow Reverend Moon or whoever. Following is not what it's all about, but leaving messages of "This is what's happening

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[44] From Highway 61 Revisited (Columbia Records CS 9189, August, 1965), side II, band 2.

[45] Sheff and Golson, p. 110.

[46] See John Lennon-Paul McCartney, "Come Together," from the

> to us. Hey, what's happening to you?" We're sending postcards and letters. That's what we do. And that's the difference. Do you see?[47]

In spite of all his efforts and arguments to the contrary, Lennon, after leaving the Beatles, was retained in the counter-cultural aristocracy as a kind of court jester and guru combined. Like it or not, Lennon and Ono became a source of vicarious politics for many of the disaffected and rebellious, as symbols of revolutionary consciousness and the utopian values of the sixties tribal One, as it rushed confidently into the seventies. Not unlike the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who in 1968 had become the personal guru for the Beatles and a few other pop stars (Donovan, Mia Farrow, and Mike Love of the Beach Boys), who attended a six-weeks course in transcendental meditation in India, the Lennons became a guru-couple to the youth culture in the West. While Lennon later demystified and satirized the Maharishi in "Sexie Sadie" from the Beatles "White Album," as a seductress who had made "a fool of everyone," he was playing his own fool's game.[48]

This leaderless One, to which the Lennons gave their public allegiance, but which they could never accommodate in their private lives, was ultimately an imaginary construct, a utopia. Lennon put it this way to Playboy in 1980:

LP Abbey Road (Apple Records PCS 7088, October, 1969), released as a single along with George Harrison's "Something."

[47]Sheff and Golson, p. 32.

[48]See John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "Sexie Sadie" from the

> . . . We can have examples, but leaders is what we DON'T need. It's the utopian bit again. We're all members of the conceptual utopia. So let's not go round and round it: It's one world, one people, and it's a statement as well as a wish.[49]

But before this counter-cultural oneness could materialize and revolutionize the world, individuals had to break out of the conventional society's "bag" (to use a favorite Ono metaphor) and seek the real, the genuine "bag" which we humans are all in together. From an egalitarian perspective much older than John Lennon or Yoko Ono, it was being argued that the name of the game was not just to belong, ". . . but to belong to the whole thing, not to one little section of it."[50]

This theme runs very deep in Lennon's solo work: that of the need to break out of the narrow "bag" of class or race or sex or nation, and seek the universal bag or what the early Diggers called the Common Treasury, and the Wobblies called the Commonwealth of Toil or the One Big Union.[51] Lennon's imaginary construct is the same as Steinbeck's One Big Soul, or what the Communist International was all about.[52]

"White Album." See also Norman's account of the Beatles' infatuation with the Maharishi, pp. 374-77, 401-04.

[49]Sheff and Golson, p. 17.

[50]Ibid., p. 102.

[51]The Diggers phrase is from Gerrad Winstanley, "The True Levellers' Standard Advanced," in Sheila Delany, ed., Counter-Tradition: The Literature of Dissent and Alternatives (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971). For the Wobblies concept of the One, see Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., Rebel Voices An I.W.W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1965), Chap. 1, pp. 1-9.

[52]See John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York:

Unfortunately, most people find it very difficult, if not impossible, to abandon their own narrow bag. You must be forced out through the rips in the seams, and this is what the Lennons attempted to do with their music and their public image. In his first solo album, Lennon berates his followers, characterizing them as passive sheep: pathetically apathetic, trapped inside their bag, with "cock in hand," wallowing in sex, doped with religion, or numbed by TV. He refers to them as "fuckin' peasants," in a decidedly condescending manner, and challenges them to break the chains of alienation and apathy, to stand up for and by themselves, and not to sheepishly follow dictators, idols, and gurus.[53] For, as he would later say in "Freeda People" from the Mind Games LP (10/73), "We don't want no Big Brother scene" because "a million heads are better than one."[54] He felt that we were all responsible for the state of the world that we live in. Again from the Canadian interview of 1970, Lennon summed up his political ideals:

> As soon as people realize that they have the power [we will reach a state of world peace]. The power doesn't belong with Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Wilson, or Mr. Nixon. We are the power. The people are the power. As soon as people are aware that they have the power, then they can do what

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Viking Press, 1939), especially pp. 87-88, 462-64; for the communist concept, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist (1848) (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1964).

[53]John Lennon, Plastic Ono Band (Apple Records SW 3372, December, 1970), side I, band 4.

[54]John Lennon, Mind Games (Capital Records SN 16068,

they want. And if it's a case of they don't know what to do, let's advertise to them and tell them they have an option.[55]

Sometime in New York City

With the 1971 release of the single "Power to the People," the Lennons' career moved into its most politically active phase.[56] They had just moved to New York City's Greenwich Village where they became associated with the local radical underground, befriending, among others, Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, who had gained national attention and underground notoriety as a result of their trial for conspiracy in conjunction with the student riots of the 1968 Democratic Convention at Chicago. During the course of their stay in the Village, the Lennons joined in a protest march by native Americans in Syracuse, played a benefit at the Apollo Theater for the prisoners at Attica State Prison, and performed at a benefit concert for an Ann Arbor, Michigan, political figure, John Sinclair, who had been sentenced to 10 years for possession of two marijuana cigarettes.[57]

Three years earlier the Lennons had had first hand experience with the injustice of the marijuana laws, and the use by public

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October, 1973). Actually, "Freeda People" is the subtitle of the song "Bring on the Lucie," side I, band 5.

[55]Cott and Doudna, p. 67.

[56]By John Lennon, released by Capital Records in May, 1971; also on the album, Shaved Fish, a collection of Lennon's greatest hits (Capital SW 3421, October, 1975); and more recently on the LP The John Lennon Collection (Geffen Records, December, 1982).

[57]Cott and Doudna, p. 40.

officials of the drug bust as a form of political harassment when they had been publicly arrested and fined £150 for possession of hashish in London.[58] Thus, in the John Sinclair case, they found something to which they could relate personally.

While the Lennons were becoming more heavily involved in the New York underground and radical activism, their singles released in 1971 continued to reflect the same basic utopian passivism that had become, and would remain, their political trademark. Perhaps Lennon's most famous song, "Imagine," was released in October, 1971.[59] And for the Christmas market, they released "Happy Xmas (War is Over)" reminiscent of their 1969 Christmas peace campaign, when they had billboards put up in 12 major cities around the world with the slogan "War is Over if You Want it," an early experiment in collective wish fulfillment.[60] The idea of attaching a political message to a Christmas song was a stroke of advertising genius. It was intended to play every season, to perhaps replace "White Christmas." And, since there was sure to be a war somewhere each Christmas, the song's political significance should be retained over the years.

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[58] Ibid., pp. 431-35.

[59] By John Lennon, released as a single in October, 1971; also on the LP Imagine (Capital Records SW 3379, September, 1971); also on the Shaved Fish LP and The John Lennon Collection.

[60] The slogan "War is Over if You Want it" was also used in the song by John Lennon, "Happy Xmas (War is Over)" released as a single in December, 1971; also on the LP Shaved Fish (Capital Records SW 3421, October, 1975).

Meanwhile, the Lennons' activist involvement was not without its problems. A fundamental gap separated these pop cultural radicals from movement activists like Rubin and Hoffman. On the issue of peace and the desire to end American involvement in Vietnam, they were as one. It was the tactical issues of how to achieve peace, or how to stop the American war machine, that separated the artists from the activists. The conflict centered on the issue of violence, which the Lennons emphatically rejected on principle. The Lennons had no intentions of overthrowing the government or disrupting the Pentagon. They only wished to overthrow the people's conception of the government and the American war machine. The Lennons' conception of revolution remained imaginary and symbolic. They were still doing the mind guerilla.[61]

This is not to imply that the Lennons' conception of revolution was not genuine, or that it was held in bad faith, but only that it was utopian. They felt that revolution was something that should originate and occur within people's heads and hearts, and not in the streets or with violence. The authenticity and validity of this concept of revolution was to be affirmed by none other than the Nixon Administration. While from the point of view of the activists the Lennons may have been politically naive, from the Administration's point of view they were perceived as a genuine subversive threat. The Lennons were subsequently subjected to a

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[61]Sheff and Golson, pp. 96-97.

barrage of Nixon's "dirty tricks": phone taps, surveillance, and a long, exhausting court battle over John's immigration status.[62]

In the midst of all this, the Lennons released the most politically radical LP of their career, which surely must have confounded the situation. Entitled Sometime in New York City, it was a journalistic parody of their adventures in the radical underground of the past year.[63] The album's cover art was intended to simulate newsprint, with song titles as headlines, song lyrics arranged in newsblock columns, accompanied by black and white news-style photos as illustrations. This was one of the few rock albums ever to contain 1930s style topical-political songs, as opposed to mere abstract protest songs (in the tradition of "Blowing in the Wind").

The songs of Sometime in New York City touched every radical base, taking the listener on a tour through the revolutionary news of the day. There was a song about the Irish home rule movement, an ode to Angela Davis, the black activist who had just been indicted in connection with the kidnapping and murder of a judge in California, and a song about the uprising at Attica State Prison which ended as 1,000 state troopers stormed the prison, killing 28 inmates and nine hostages in the process. The album also included a song for John

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[62]See Pete Hamill, "Long Night's Journey Into Day," in Cott and Doudna, pp. 142-55. Recently, a new book on Lennon by Jon Wiener of the University of California has attracted national media attention (on NBC's "20/20," March 31, 1983, and "Today," March 23, 1983). Through the Freedom of Information Act, Wiener was able to obtain 26 pounds of F.B.I. files on John Lennon, detailing the government's "dirty tricks" campaign against the Lennons.

[63]John Lennon and Yoko Ono and the Plastic Ono Band, with the

Sinclair, and a couple of anthems to the feminist movement ("Woman is the Nigger of the World" and "Sisters, oh Sisters") which were also released as a single.[64]

In addition, the LP contained a second record featuring a live performance of John and Yoko along with Frank Zappa at the Filmore East. Included on the live set was a version of John's 1969 song "Cold Turkey," about his withdrawal from heroin.[65] Although most of the album's material was morally provocative and/or blatantly radical, it was the cover art that created the most controversy. Like their very first LP venture, Two Virgins (1968),[66] with the notorious cover photo of John and Yoko standing there nude staring

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Elephants Memory Band, Sometime in New York City (Apple Records SVBB 3392, June, 1972).

[64]Released in May (1972); the A side ("Woman is the Nigger . . .") is by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, the B side ("Sisters . . .") is by Yoko Ono.

[65]Included in a second disc of a "Live Jam" with John and Yoko and the Plastic Ono Band with Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, from a performance at the Filmore East, June, 1971.

[66]Actually, Sometime in New York City was the fourth Lennon/Ono collaboration, but the first three were so wildly uncommercial that they have been practically unnoticed by fans and rock critics alike. Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopedia, for example, lists only two of the three and has them confused. The first was Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins, an Apple Records product, but because of the controversy over its nude cover, it was released in Great Britain on Track Records and in America on Tetragrammaton. It was released in November, 1968 and consisted of an abstract collage of experimental electronic sounds recorded by John and Yoko in his private studio on the night they first got together. The cover art is a black and white photograph of the two "virgins" facing their fans totally disrobed and thus, theoretically, demystified. The album suffered greatly from censorship and musical incomprehension, and is practically impossible to find today. The second co-production,

into the camera, much of the reaction to Sometime in New York City came from the album's cover which featured a faked photograph of Richard Nixon dancing with Chairman Mao in the nude. And also, like Two Virgins, much of the negativity was directed at Yoko Ono for corrupting our Johnny into a pervert and a wild-eyed radical. Needless to say, the album was not a commercial success and was clearly offensive to the Nixon Administration. The public reaction was so bad to Sometime in New York City that the Lennons gave up co-production until 1980 and the issue of their final LP together, Double Fantasy.

But the icing on the cake of the Lennons' radical phase was the week of February 21-25 (1972) which they spent co-hosting, of all things, The Mike Douglas Show. To stunned housewives and shut-ins around the country, the gurus of the youth counter-culture talked radical politics and performed many of the most inflammatory songs from Sometime in New York City.[67]

Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions (Apple Records, May 9, 1969), consisted of their performance of an avant-garde "jazz" concert in March, 1969, mostly electronic screech, electric guitar feedback, and a few seconds of heartbeat from the fetus Yoko later miscarried. This album also went largely unnoticed and is impossible to find. Their third joint venture, Wedding Album (Apple Records, October 20, 1969), was intended as a wedding announcement to their fans, and included a photo of a piece of wedding cake. I understand it is possible to order this LP, but it is very expensive.

Thus by comparison, Sometime in New York City is almost mainstream popular music, at least in the sense that it utilizes the traditional song form format. It is readily available today.

[67] I have a bootleg, John Lennon Telecasts (Buffalo Records JL 517, 1979), which contains portions of the Mike Douglas performances.

Lennon Domesticated and Depoliticized

The immigration battle went on for three years (1972-75), and during this period Lennon seemed to be toning down his politics and trying to maintain a lower public profile. A great deal of his time and energy was spent on legal maneuvers, simply trying to stay in the United States. The John and Yoko artistic partnership as well as their marriage began to suffer under all the strain. Since Yoko's contributions seemed to so enrage the public, Lennon took to performing and recording alone as a solo act. But his projects from this period--Mind Games (October, 1973), Walls and Bridges (September, 1974), and Rock 'n' Roll (March, 1975) received only a lukewarm public reception.[68] His career was finally on the down swing.

In October, 1973, John and Yoko's marriage finally broke down and they began an 18 months separation. John took a lover (May Pang) and moved to Los Angeles, where he teamed up with Harry Nilsson, Ringo Starr, and Keith Moon (drummer for The Who), and began a drinking and carousing binge that cost him a great deal of adverse publicity. He would later refer to this period as his "lost weekend."[69]

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[68] Mind Games (Capital Records SN 16068); Walls and Bridges (Capital SW 3416); and Rock 'n' Roll (Capital SN 16069), a collection of classic rock and roll numbers by Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Gene Vincent, and others, arranged, produced, and sung by John Lennon.

[69] Cott and Doudna, p. 42. May Pang, Lennon's lover from the "lost weekend," has written her account of those months, contradicting much of the "official" version released to the press by Lennon and Ono; see May Pang and Henry Edwards, Loving John.

But in November, 1974 John and Yoko were reunited. The reunion ultimately resulted in the birth of a son, Sean, born on John's birthday, October 9, 1975. The birth of their first child had a calming effect on the Lennons. They settled down into domestic life and dropped out of sight, living "underground" in the splendor of their compound in the fashionable, aristocratic apartment building, the Dakota, opposite New York City's Central Park.[70]

In an interview with Barbara Graustark of Newsweek in September, 1980, Lennon revealed that during the period of seclusion he and Yoko had gone through a kind of role reversal. She went off to the office every morning and John stayed home and took care of the baby. He described this as a kind of Zen experiment in housewifery and the beginning of his feminist education.[71]

The Newsweek interview was part of the Lennons' coming-out-of-seclusion campaign, part of the hype surrounding a new LP collaboration, their first since 1972's Sometime in New York City. The birth of Sean had rekindled the flames of the great Lennon-Ono romance. Their latest LP was a tribute to their renewed love. It was called Double Fantasy, and it was released in conjunction with

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[70]See Chet Flippo, "The Private Years," in Cott and Doudna, pp. 158-81, for the myth of Lennon's seclusion; see Green's Dakota Days for a contrasting account.

[71]"Two Virgins: An Exclusive Newsweek Interview" (September, 1980), reproduced in Garbarini and Cullman, pp. 95-134. This interview has also recently been exposed as a deliberate mythical construction by John Green's Dakota Days.

a new single "(Just Like) Starting Over."[72] This was to be John Lennon's last recording venture. He was murdered just one month after its release.

Double Fantasy

Double Fantasy utilized a symbolism consistent with Imagine and Mind Games, but in a setting totally devoid of social and/or political commentary. In this sense, the new LP was a total departure from the Lennons' earlier works which had a consistent, if diminishing, political tone. Double Fantasy was simply a dialogue between two lovers who had quarreled and gone their separate ways, and then had reunited in a much tighter bond formed by the birth of a son. As a result, they had withdrawn into the security of the self-contained and isolated family unit. In an interview with David Sheff of Playboy just two months before his death, Lennon explained their withdrawal from the public and from politics:

> . . . we got back together and we decided that this was our life, that having a baby was important to us and that everything else was subsidiary to that, and therefore everything else had to be abandoned.[73]

Double Fantasy was the vehicle of their public resurfacing. The five years of seclusion, Lennon continued, had allowed them ". . . the

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[72]John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Double Fantasy (Geffen Records GHS-20001, November, 1980), side I, band 1.

[73]Sheff and Golson, p. 14.

space to breathe and think and re-establish our dreams."[74] Double Fantasy was to be an expression of these revived, shared dreams.

The LP reveals some of the seamier sides to this great romance. Some of the fantasies have an almost nightmarish caste. Yoko sings "Give me something that's not cold . . ." and "I'm moving on . . . it's getting phony," while John screams back, ". . . I know I hurt you then . . . / . . . do you still have to carry that cross?"[75] These are rather vivid indications that all was not happiness and bliss in the Lennon household.

But most of the album has a more positive tone. Their reunion and the birth of Sean are celebrated as the very fulfillment of their romance. Now the gods were back in the heavens and the oracle had spoken and there were "No rats aboard the magic ship of perfect harmony."[76] And now, after five years of self-imposed seclusion to get their marriage in order, five years away from the merry-go-round of super-stardom, it was time to spread their professional wings and make a new beginning at recording.[77]

But there is something very disturbing in the tone of this album, an almost reactionary quality to the Lennons' remarks that

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[74]Ibid.

[75]"Give Me Something," and "I'm Moving On," by Yoko Ono; "I'm Losing You," by John Lennon, Double Fantasy.

[76]From "Clean Up Time," by John Lennon, ibid.

[77]Paraphrased from "Watching the Wheels" and "(Just Like) Starting Over," by John Lennon, ibid.

"Hard Times are Over" and that it was now "Clean Up Time." For the first time in their career they seem to be seriously missing the political mark. The LP is almost totally focused upon the narrow Lennon-Ono personal relationship and family, with absolutely nothing aimed at the utopian One. Was the mature Lennon, now approaching middle-age, suddenly de-radicalized and apolitical? Had politics for the Lennons, as for so many of their generation, merely been the expression of the idealistic passions of youth? Had fame and success finally worked a kind of counter-revolution upon the Two Virgins?

Of course, in all the hype surrounding such celebrities it is very difficult to answer these kinds of questions. And yet in press releases from this period, the Lennons discussed Double Fantasy as a political fantasy in the tradition of Imagine and Mind Games. In the Playboy interview they speak of their intentions to end the album with the chant "One world, one People."[78] And in the Rolling Stone interview Lennon describes the inner vinyl label as containing the same slogan, and offers this as evidence of his continuing political concerns.[79] In both of these interviews, Lennon seems to be describing the Double Fantasy as a shared dream with a positive political purpose. When David Sheff attempted to interpret Double Fantasy as the next step after Imagine, saying that now the hard

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[78]Sheff and Golson, pp. 16-17.

[79]Cott and Doudna, p. 190.

times were over, the world was ready to become one. Lennon quickly corrects him:

> No, no, no. We're one world, one people whether we like it or not. Aren't we? I mean, we can PRETEND we're divided into races and countries and we can carry on pretending that until we stop doin' it. But the reality is that it is one world and it is one people.[80]

But listening to the album that was finally released, one hears none of this. The "One World, One People" chant was, for some unknown reason, dropped from the final product. And, as a result, the album is almost completely devoid of political statement.

The only possible political significance to this record comes from its form and not its content. In the lyrics of Double Fantasy, only in the whispered introduction to Lennon's song "Woman"--Chairman Mao's aphorism, "Woman is the other half of the sky"--is there even a hint of social consciousness.[81] All else is romantic sentimentalism: "Let's take a chance and fly away somewhere . . . ALONE"[82] (my emphasis). Where is the humanistic altruism of "one world, one people?" The focus of the LP is upon the narrow love of two individuals for each other, told in the first person. It is the story of two people lost in their own personal struggle for love and happiness, in total isolation from the utopian One. It is

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[80]Ibid., p. 16.

[81]Lennon credits the introduction to Mao in the 1980 BBC interview with Andy Peebles.

[82]From "(Just Like) Starting Over," by John Lennon, Double Fantasy.

dedicated to the imaginary orgasm instead of the imaginary utopia.

Nevertheless, the Double Fantasy does carry the symbolism of the new feminist concept of love and relationships, and therein lies its political significance. The LP is a genuine co-production by Lennon and Ono. It is a truly shared effort, with each contributing seven songs in an alternating sequence that forms a dialogue. In discussing the album with the Lennons, Rolling Stone's Jonathan Cott said ". . . that no rock & roll star I can think of has made a record with his wife (or girl friend) and given her fifty percent of the disc."[83] But this was actually the fifth such Lennon-Ono co-production. The first three--Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins (November, 1968), Unfinished Music No. 2: Life With the Lions (May, 1969), and Wedding Album (October, 1969)--were perceived as wildly eccentric and self-indulgent, and therefore are practically unknown, except by the most ardent and devoted fans and collectors. The fourth was Sometime in New York City (June, 1972), which was only somewhat more commercial. Thus, the Lennons had a long history of co-production, but the results had always been highly controversial and the reaction almost always public bewilderment and hostility. So much so that the Lennons had given up working together, until Double Fantasy.

Double Fantasy was a reaffirmation of the public image of John and Yoko. But it was also a reaffirmation of John Lennon's

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[83]Cott and Doudna, p. 187.

feminist conversion. His concept of relationships had always been the traditional male-dominant one. On the Sgt. Pepper LP he had confessed: "I used to be cruel to my woman / I beat her and kept her apart from the things that she loved."[84] This natural machoism--learned in the street culture of 1950's Liverpool--was, of course, greatly exacerbated by his rise to super-stardom. The head-Beatle, the King of British Rock, was used to having girls as sexual play-things and servants. In his Beatle wit, he had once said that women should be "obscene and not heard."[85]

Yoko's demand for equality filled him with both awe and perplexity. She insisted on being treated as an artist and a person in her own right. She would not cower to the famous John Lennon. Lennon put it this way:

> I was a working-class macho guy that didn't know any better. Yoko taught me about women. I was used to being served, like Elvis and a lot of the other stars were. And Yoko didn't buy that. She didn't give a shit about the Beatles--what the fuck are the Beatles?
> . . . From the day I met her, she demanded equal time, equal space, equal rights. I didn't know what she was talking about.[86]

The Lennon-Ono relationship was probably not so much a feminist experiment as a test of wills that formed the central tension in

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[84]"Getting Better," by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Beatles Complete, pp. 271-73.

[85]Garbarini and Cullman, p. 100. Lennon did not originate this line, it may come from Groucho Marx.

[86]Ibid.

their romance and was responsible for a great deal of pain and struggle, and ultimately their 1973 split.

But John would also have cited his experiment in house-husbandry as the most visible manifestation of his feminism. He discussed his five years of domestic isolation as a kind of "Zen experiment" in learning how it felt to be a housewife, and as a major step in his feminization.[87] But Lennon's learning to bake bread and his determination to take an active part in his son's upbringing must be put into perspective. House-husbandry with a staff of full-time servants and a nanny is only imaginary feminism.

Robert Christau has commented that Yoko's feminism suffered from a lack of sisterliness. She may have imagined her sisterhood in public, but in private had very few women friends and associates. She has always tended toward the aggressive competitiveness of the traditional ambitious male.[88] Yoko's feminist image--like John's working class image--suffered from the egoism of the artist and a life of wealthy isolation. But here politics is not as important as imagery. The politics is buried in the public image. The Lennon-Ono ego battle, the test of wills, the public split and reunion, turned the story of John and Yoko into a great romance, to which the symbolism of feminism adhered, along with that of love and peace and the utopian One. Especially after the Vietnam war, they seemed to

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[87] BBC Tribute to John Lennon, 1980.

[88] Cott amd Doudna, p. 302.

consciously pursue a feminist public identification. In doing so, they were able to maintain a radical edge to their public image.

But one need only consider the many failed show business romances in the field of popular music--Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, Ike and Tina Turner, Sonny and Cher, George Jones and Tammy Wynette, Delaney and Bonnie, Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, Leon and Mary Russell--to grasp the significance of John and Yoko's romantic-professional achievement. Just to have survived as a couple for over 10 years was an extraordinary feat, but to do so within the context of super-stardom, and to have maintained a reciprocity of respect and an egalitarian public face was truly beyond public expectations as well as the norms of their peers. As a result, John and Yoko's marriage became a bright and hopeful symbol of the possibilities of the merger of feminist consciousness with the more traditional counter-cultural notions of love, romance, and marriage.

Double Fantasy, thus, takes its political significance from its representation of, and testament to, a new revolutionary concept of romance. Not the meek-woman-serves-the-he-man tradition that was practiced by the revolutionaries of the largely patriarchal movements of the sixties, but a true shared love where "the two of us are really one."[89] And where the resultant One is much stronger than either individual alone. The John Lennon of Double Fantasy--in terms of his public image--had indeed come a long way. All

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[89]From "Dear Yoko," by John Lennon, Double Fantasy.

this just made the tragedy of his murder even more poignant.

Martyrdom and Canonization

On the night of December 8, 1980, John Lennon was gunned down outside the entrance to his New York apartment complex by a deranged fan who, just 24 hours earlier and at the very same location, had received his idol's cherished autograph on a copy of Double Fantasy.[90] In this single act of madness Mark David Chapman had made a name for himself by adding the final chapter to the Lennon legend. But it was the widow, Yoko Ono Lennon, who would take charge of the canonization process.

Back on 1969, John Lennon had unknowingly prophecized his own death in "The Ballad of John and Yoko" with a second controversial comparison of himself to Christ. Lennon had punctuated the story of his marriage to Yoko and the Bed-in in Amsterdam, and the adverse publicity that surrounded it, with the refrain:

> Christ! You Know it ain't easy,
> You know how hard it can be.
> The way things are going,
> They're gonna crucify me.[91]

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[90]For a detailed account of the events surrounding John Lennon's death see Cott and Doudna, pp. 196-211; also Garbarini and Cullman, pp. 6-26.

[91]"The Ballad of John and Yoko," by John Lennon and Paul McCartney (London: Northern Songs Limited, 1969). The song was written by Lennon while still contractually linked to McCartney. It was released as a Beatles single in June, 1969, but it was recorded by Lennon (guitar and vocal) and McCartney (bass and drums). It was also included on the Hey Jude LP released only in the United States in February, 1970 on Apple.

However, Lennon's utopian tendencies, and sense of humor, had usually kept him away from such dark visions and death wishes. When asked about death in an interview from this period, he had said that he was prepared for death because he did not believe in it. In the language and imagery of pop art mysticism, Lennon had compared death to getting out of one car and into another.[92] And yet, after so recently and successfully coming out of seclusion and starting over, death seems to have caught John Lennon and the world completely by surprise.

By 1980, Lennon had long foresaken his more offensive public imagery. He had dropped his anarchic demeanor, his political radicalism, and his public use of alcohol and hallucinogenic drugs. His outrageous public antics were part of another era. He and Yoko had opted for the cleaner life style and public image symbolized by love and family. In his last interview with Rolling Stone, Lennon described their new mature image in a story that is told almost as a parable:

> I get truly affected by letters from Brazil or Poland or Austria--places I'm not conscious of all the time--just to know somebody is there, listening. One kid living up in Yorkshire (in England) wrote this heartfelt letter about being both Oriental and English and identifying with John and Yoko. The odd kid in the class. There are a lot of those kids who identify with us. They don't need the history of rock & roll. They identify with us as a

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[92] The Beatles Tapes, record I, side 1.

> couple, a bi-racial couple, who stand for love, peace, feminism and the positive things of the world.[93]

And Lennon was no longer combative and condescending with his public. He was more mature and calm. He had seemingly come to terms with his mystique. And this made his death even more bewildering.

Moreover, Lennon's death was unique in the history of popular music. He had not died as a result of a drug-crazed life-in-the-fast-lane self-destructiveness which seems to be the norm, as in the examples of Hank Williams, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley. Nor was it a lingering or tragic illness as in the cases of Woody Guthrie and Bob Marley; nor was it a tragic plane or car crash as in the deaths of Buddy Holly, Jim Croce, and Harry Chapin. John Lennon's death was unique in that it was a full-fledged assassination.

Death at the hands of an assassin is usually reserved in history for great political leaders: Julius Ceasar, Abraham Lincoln, John and Robert Kennedy, and Anwar Sadat, as well as great political revolutionaries: Rosa Luxemburg, Pancho Villa, Mohandas Gandhi, Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Assassination is an inherently political phenomenon and has historically been an integral part of the greater struggle for power among competing conceptions and symbols of social order, community, and government. Assassination

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[93]Cott and Doudna, p. 190.

is the murder of a public figure because of what the person may have stood for or represented politically.[94]

It is thus more than a metaphor to say that John Lennon's assassination was linked somehow to his position as an elder statesman in the 1960s counter-culture, or what Abbie Hoffman called the Woodstock Nation.[95] Lennon died in the fashion and style of Kings and Presidents. And in counter-cultural circles around the world, his death had all the impact of the death of John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr.

One of the more respectable journalistic tributes that came out following his death summed up the public reaction in this manner:

> A fuse had blown out in our lives, and we stumbled around in the dark, bumping into each other in ways we had almost forgotten. For a while, in that global village of the sixties, we seemed to breathe with the Beatles, and by virtue of their very existence, we all seemed to breathe the same breath. Within an hour of the release of a new Beatles song, everyone in the world, or in a particular world, heard it, knew it, and assimilated it. We all listened to the same radio. Monday night [the night of Lennon's assassination] we all listened to the same radio again: the community that had fragmented and disintegrated was suddenly reunited, but this time the radio was playing a different song.[96]

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[94]See H. L. Nieburg, Political Violence (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), p. 9.

[95]From a book by that title: Abbie Hoffman, Woodstock Nation (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

[96]Garbarini and Cullman, p. 2.

But the motives of the assassin seemed to have been more confused and delusionary than political. There is no conspiracy theory here. Mark David Chapman reported hearing voices and being driven to this action by the devil.[97] In the press, Chapman was portrayed as a mixed-up drugie turned Jesus freak with a super identification with John Lennon, right down to his marriage to an Onoesque Japanese American woman in Hawaii.[98] But, for some unknown reason, the identification had gone sour. Robert Christgau of the Village Voice gave this explanation:

> John Lennon held out hope. He imagined, and however quietistic he became, he never lost that Utopian identification. But when you hold out hope people get real disappointed if you can't deliver. You're famous and they're not--that's the crux of your relationship. You command the power they crave--the power to make one's identity felt in the world, to be known. No matter that you're even further from resolving anyone's perplexities than the next bohemian, artist, or intellectual. You're denying your most desperate admirers the release they need, and a certain percentage of them will resent or hate you for it. From there, it only takes one to kill.[99]

Upon his arrest, Chapman's possessions consisted of 14 hours worth of Beatle music on tape, a copy of the Bible, two thousand dollars in cash which he had evidently borrowed from his mother for the trip to New York, and a copy of J. D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, which he was casually reading while awaiting the arrival of the police after dropping the gun that he had used to kill John Lennon.[100]

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[97] Ibid., p. 16.

[98] Ibid., p. 13.

[99] Ibid., p. 3.

[100] Ibid., p. 18.

But in the minds and hearts of the mass public, the assassination just made no sense at all. How could a Beatle fan kill John Lennon? It simply defied explanation, and left the public bewildered. And since rational explanation seemed so futile, the mourners turned to spiritual explanations and mystical solutions to the frustration that overcame those who felt they had lost some part of their own souls.

Ritual pilgrimages brought masses of the faithful to New York City and the Dakota, which became a kind of instant shrine to the memory of John Lennon. And there the mourners began a long, sad vigil standing reverently in the rain, placing flowers and poems and pictures on the gate of the Dakota, and periodically breaking out into spontaneous singing: "All we are saying, is give peace a chance . . ."[101]

Despite the overwhelming stress of the shock and grief, Yoko Ono somehow gathered the strength to face up to the situation. Reports of two suicides by fans unable to cope with Lennon's death and of riots in his home town of Liverpool, convinced her that she had to face the public and plead for calm, restraint, and optimism. She was determined to continue the Double Fantasy and the positive vision of "Starting Over." The Mind Games had to go on. Information dispersal had always been her specialty, and her public relations and image

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[101]"Give Peace a Chance" was also written by Lennon while still in contract with McCartney and therefore credited to John Lennon and Paul McCartney (London: Northern Songs Ltd., 1969).

management in the aftermath of her husband's death were a masterful performance carried out with all the finesse of a veteran practitioner of popular cultural-guerilla events and mass ritual.[102]

Lennon had once said that Yoko was as important to him as Paul McCartney and Bob Dylan rolled into one.[103] Her performance during the period of public mourning only reaffirms this assessment. Her image management was consistent with the utopian politics that she and John had come to represent. While, from the perspective of the political activists, their symbolic politics had been, in the words of Robert Christgau, "short on dialectics and long on yin-and-yang," it was nevertheless a valid statement of the counter-cultural consciousness of the sixties.[104]

Yoko first made secret arrangements to have the body quietly cremated and the ashes privately interred in England. And, instead of a funeral, she asked the public to join her in a 10 minute silent prayer in John's memory the following Sunday (December 14) at 2:00 P.M. In announcing the silent vigil, she included the following statement:

> John loved and prayed for the human race, please pray the same for him. Please remember that he had a deep faith and concern for life and, though he has now joined the greater force, he is still with us here.[105]

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[102]See Garbarini and Cullman, pp. 6-26.

[103]Lennon Remembers, p. 167.

[104]Cott and Doudna, p. 302.

[105]Ibid., p. 207.

On the day following the assassination, Yoko released this letter to the press:

> I told Sean what happened. I showed him the picture of his father on the cover of the paper and explained the situation. I took Sean to the spot where John lay after he was shot. Sean wanted to know why the person had shot John if he liked John. I explained that he was probably a confused person. Sean said we should find out if he was confused or if he really had meant to kill John. I said that was up to the court. He asked what court--a tennis court or a basketball court? That's how Sean used to talk with his father. They were buddies. John would have been proud of Sean if he had heard this. Sean cried later. He also said "Now Daddy is part of God. I guess when you die you become more bigger because you're part of everything."
>
> I don't have much more to add to Sean's statement. The silent vigil will take place December 14th at 2 p.m. for ten minutes.
>
> Our thoughts will be with you.
>
> Love, Yoko & Sean.[106]

That Sunday, by 2:00 P.M. New York time (7:00 P.M. London time), 30,000 had gathered in front of St. George's Hall in Liverpool and thousands more at London's Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square. Formal and informal vigils were held in major cities across America: Seattle, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, as well as in many smaller cities (like Knoxville, Tennessee). Many millions more participated via the radio in the privacy of their own homes and apartments. In New York City, the largest gathering took place as 100,000 gathered in Central Park. What follows is Rolling Stone correspondent Chet Flippo's account of the New York vigil. He began by describing that Sunday as a "grey afternoon," then continued:

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[106]Garbarini and Cullman, p. 19.

> The band shell was empty except for some garlands of evergreen, a wreath and a picture of Lennon. Two stacks of speakers were playing some of his quieter music: "In My Life," "You've Got to Hide You've Got to Hide Your Love Away," "Norwegian Wood." The sun broke through during "All You Need is Love," and most of the crowd responded by singing along and flashing the V sign--a reminder of an era that suddenly seemed long ago. The clouds reappeared at the end of "Give Peace a Chance," the final song before the ten-minute silence.
>
> At two sharp, every radio shut off, every hot-dog vender shut down, every button peddler shut up. As a body, the crowd seemed to freeze. The meditation ended with the playing of "Imagine," leaving the crowd with "I hope someday you'll join us / And the world will live as one" as Lennon's last words of the afternoon. Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" accompanied the people out of the park, as the clouds grew more threatening. And then, for a few minutes on an otherwise dry afternoon, snow fell on New York City.[107]

Later that afternoon, the crowd drifted back to the Dakota to continue the vigil. Yoko sent down a message in verse: "I saw John smiling in the sky . . . I saw all of us becoming one mind."[108]

Undoubtedly, this had been another great--if melancholy--moment in the history of the counter-culture. Probably the largest mass experiment in collective telepathy in the history of Humanity. A freshly evolved mass communications technology was utilized for an exercise in mass shamanism, literally a spiritual coming together of a mass conscience and consciousness. Perhaps only with the death of Elvis Presley had a similar public outpouring of emotion and sorrow been bestowed upon a popular singer. But never had a pop star's mourners so successfully utilized the mass media.

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[107]Cott and Doudna, p. 208.

[108]Garbarini and Cullman, pp. 25-26.

Conclusions and Theoretical Assumptions

So what is John Lennon's place in the Left of the sixties? What did he come to represent? What are we to make of his politics? How can we assess his contribution to the radicalism of his day? And how can his story be used to introduce what lies ahead?

Here we have attempted to reveal not the real John Lennon behind the facade, but to reconstruct the public image, the legend, and the myth. John Lennon is a larger-than-life image and a mirror of the counter-cultural experience of the 1960s and 1970s. Lennon came to represent a relatively affluent and materially comfortable youth, struggling to overcome a burden less tangible--and perhaps even more difficult to carry--than the burdens of the past: a vague existential alienation. Lennon is a symbol of Western youth's attempt to penetrate the malaise of modern bourgeois life in an overly rational, impersonal, and dehumanized society. With the aid of hallucinogenic drugs, oriental mysticism, sexual and life-style experimentation, and excursions into radical activism, they sought to transcend the numbing boredom of life in a mass society.

Lennon's radical left-wing appeal is enhanced by the legend's elements of prejudice, persecution, and exploitation. There are scenes of police harassment and government surveillance. Our hero struggles with a lingering paranoia and a throbbing conscience: struggling to keep his system of values intact, and his chin up, in the face of Big Brother. It is a story of political intrigue and violence.

It is also of fundamental importance to recognize that John Lennon became a symbol of love and romance. Here is a passionate and scandalous love story. It is indeed a great romance, where love is translated into utopian politics, and romance becomes almost a paradigm for the ideal community. Even in the final chapter, the politics of love triumphs over the politics of hatred as the mourners expulge their grief by holding hands, singing of love and peace, and embracing the positive symbols and hopes of their youth.

John Lennon is also a great example of the awesome power of the mass media and those who have access to it. In the age of electronic communication perhaps all politics has a dramatic edge, where performance is more important than policy, and politics is played to the camera. Today, realists as well as utopians and partisan politics of the Right, Left, and Center, must all come to terms with the mass media. In the age of mass media and mass culture, presidents must be actors and revolutionaries must understand histrionics. And both must manipulate broad and positive political symbols, if they are to play successfully to the mass audience.

The Lennon-Ono romance was also a parable of 1970 feminist values. It was a symbol of the New Marriage, more open, loving, and passionate. The marriage of the new woman--career-oriented, single-minded, and non-subservient--to the new man--less macho, more domestic and caring. The story of John and Yoko also contains

an image of the new post-sixties racial attitudes. It is the story of a bi-racial marriage, symbolic of international harmony and the oneness of the emerging global village. In John Lennon and Yoko Ono, man meets woman face-to-face; East meets West in mutual respect; and white meets colored in awe and with passion. Here is an imaginary soujourn into a utopian love fantasy.

But above all, the story of John Lennon is a great tragedy. It was, perhaps more than any other single factor, the shocking and senseless nature of his death, at a time when he had overcome so many obstacles, that contributed to the canonization and mystification of John Lennon.

The story of John Lennon has much to tell us about the nature of the working class hero. He had always harbored a certain ambivalence towards radical politics, and he therefore only came to accept the role of working class hero reluctantly. But, with the aid of wife Yoko Ono, and as the politically charged events of the late 1960s finally overwhelmed him, Lennon came to accept the social responsibility of his fame, and began to speak out against the war in Vietnam and other areas of social injustice. He began to see his duty and mission in life was to use his unprecedented media access and powers of mass communication for what he would candidly refer to as "Mind Games," doing the "mind guerilla," molding and shaping the consciousness of his fans and followers, introducing them to the utopian concepts of universal

brotherhood, preaching the power of love to overcome the evils of the world, and the promise of world peace.

CHAPTER III

DOING THE MIND GUERILLA: TOTALIZATION, THE UTOPIAN SENSIBILITY, AND THE PROTEST SINGING HERO

Imagine no possessions,
I wonder if you can,
No need for greed or hunger,
A brotherhood of man,
Imagine all the people,
Sharing all the world.
You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one.

John Lennon, 1971

With the example of John Lennon to draw upon, we may now expand upon the theoretical assumptions presented briefly in Chapter I. Much of what is being argued here is centered upon the Sartrean notion of "totalization."[1] We must, therefore, begin by more carefully developing this concept and relating it to this dissertation's other major concepts; namely, "heroism" and "utopianism." It is the interrelatedness of these three concepts that is the subject of this chapter. It will be argued that the notion of totalization has inherent utopian possibilities that are exaggerated through the impact of left-wing singing heroes, like John Lennon, who have embraced the

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[1]The concept "totality" did not originate with Sartre, but his writings have probably developed this concept more fully than any other scholar or philosophical writer. See Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Atlantic Highlands Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 45-47.

role of "totalizing agent," by lending their public image to the political task of developing the imaginative constructions we will be referring to as left-wing (or counter-cultural) totalizations.

Totalization

A totality is simply any social whole unified out of diverse elements which share some quality among or between themselves.[2] In other words, a totality is a socio-cultural community integrated out of shared values, beliefs, or practices. Here we are concerned with totalities of the American political left, and the extent to which they have been unified out of a shared musical culture. To the generation of the 1960s, the music of John Lennon and the Beatles provided a common groundwork for an otherwise heterogeneous mass to integrate into a shared culture and a social totality. An entire generation of American youth raised on radio, television and popular music experienced a togetherness through their common assimilation of Beatle recordings, television appearances, and concert tours. Literally millions of individuals transcended their individuality by carrying within themselves Beatle memories, music, and values. The Beatle phenomenon had an impact that tended to reinforce leftist ideals and practices through a loose association with a generalized non-conformity, the desire for socio-political change, and the popularization of anti-establishment attitudes and values.[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 45.

[3] See Rex Weiner and Deanne Stillman, Woodstock Census (New

Sartre refers to the totality as a "synthetic unity" brought together through a process that is ultimately symbolic, that is, the resultant oneness is to a large extent imaginary in that, like Yoko's silent vigil after Lennon's death, it comes together only within the mind of the observer or participant.[4] Sartre uses the example of a painting, where a "complex of dried pigments" is given oneness, or totalized, only through an act of imagination.[5] The socio-cultural totality is likewise subject to differing perceptions. To much of the youth of the sixties, the Beatle-led British invasion and the rock revival was viewed as something approaching the Second Coming of Christ, while many (or most) of their parents saw it only as the romanticism of juvenile delinquency, if not the twentieth century revival of satanism.[6] It is in this sense that the socio-cultural totality is an imaginary construct.

Thus the totality, if it is anything at all, is but the fleetingly temporary residue of an ongoing and continuous process of understanding and making sense of one's social situation. It is a process that produces both citizens and revolutionaries. It is the

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York: Viking Press, 1979), pp. 80-81.

[4]Sartre, p. 45. [5]Ibid.

[6]See Greil Marcus, "The Beatles," in Jim Miller, ed., The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll (New York: Random House and Rolling Stone Press, 1976), pp. 172-80; and for the parental perspective in the extreme, see Bob Larson, Rock & Roll: The Devil's Diversion (McCook, Neb.: published by the author, 1967).

process which links the individual to the community; the process which links any individual to any community. In our case it is the process of developing a "consciousness," that exhilarating feeling of oneness and solidarity with one's oppressed, exploited, alienated, or otherwise de-humanized brothers, locked in a mythic contest to overcome evils, both real and imagined.[7]

But this is a struggle taking place under many guises and at many different levels. For, in any actual sense, the totality, in the language of Sartre, is a multiplicity of diverse unifying processes; each distinct within itself, differentiated from the others, yet locked in a dialectical process which ultimately contributes to the unification of all.[8] Thus it makes more sense to speak in terms of "totalization," as opposed to "totality." Totality implies the imagined ideal, the abstraction, but totalization refers to the actual process, or complex of processes, which support and promote the understanding and acceptance of that ideal.[9] In other words, totalization is the process which supports the idea of totality; the activities which maintain the sense and sensibility of community. It is the process that Lennon called "mind games," and it proceeds through the activities of various "totalizing agents,"

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[7]See Maurice Duverger, The Study of Politics (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), p. 140.

[8]Sartre, p. 45.

[9]Ibid.

including the cultural revolutionaries Lennon called "mind guerillas."[10]

The totalizing agent is the human agency which mediates totalization. The totalizing agent produces and maintains the connections, actual and imaginary, which bring the totality together.[11] Just as the art professor or museum guide helps you make sense of the painting, the totalizing agent, within a socio-political context, helps us make sense of, or understand, our community and our culture. It is in this sense that Yoko Ono was a totalizing agent in the aftermath of her husband's death, in that she was the human vehicle through which the Beatle totality was brought back together for one last unifying experience. Her silent vigil was the last act in the Beatle mind guerilla.

The totalizing agent, like the totality, is a symbolic entity, a public personage with an heroic image, who, in effect, humanizes the totalization process by providing a human referent for collective symbols and ideals. The totalizing agent becomes the personification of the ideals he or she is communicating and disseminating among a population of followers. The resulting social totality is formed of shared symbols and ideals, through the force of idolization, hero-worship, and vicarious identification. It is most accurately described as a cult: a totality totalized via a charismatic human agency.

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[10]See above, p. 61.

[11]Sartre, p. 57.

Totalization is thus the continuous process of creating and sustaining a collective sensibility, a view of one's social situation, a political identity; in short, a consciousness. Totalization is an imaginary process in that it proceeds through activities that are symbolic and perceptual. And whether this totalization is merely a dream or a policy platform, it is orchestrated through a human agency, that is, through the mediation of exceptional individuals, gifted with "original insight" and the charisma and determination to propagate their visions persuasively. It is in this sense that the heroic serve the totality. Totalization is thus the dance of the mind guerilla in the heroic quest for the imagined and idealized human condition.

Perhaps this quest for the imaginary defines all politics: left, right, and center. But clearly this is the case within the political theory of the left, where there exists a long and well-established history and cultural tradition of idealism. This is the utopian tradition. It is that tradition we must now briefly explore.

The Utopian Sensibility

The word "utopia," meaning nowhere, was coined by Thomas More in his famous 1516 depiction of an imaginary society.[12] The utopian writer employs the imaginary fable to project his political

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[12]See Edward Surtz, S. J., ed., St. Thomas More: Utopia (London and New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964).

ideals. In political theory, the tradition dates back to Plato's Republic (c. 370 B.C.), but probably experienced its greatest flowering in the early nineteenth century in writings of St. Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen. The modern Left has always had its utopian side. The radical tradition as far back as the Diggers of the English Civil Wars of the 1640s have contained utopian elements. Marx and Engel's view of the classless, stateless communist society is essentially utopian.[13] And, in the twentieth century, social protest song writers have consistently utilized utopian themes and images.[14]

The term "utopian" may be applied to practically any through-going idealism; any set of impractical, unrealizable ideals, or as Mannheim in Ideology and Utopia states it: any state of mind that is "incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs."[15] Thus, in the most general sense, utopianism refers to any orientation which departs from or transcends the reality of actual situations. This definition may apply to a broad variety of belief and value

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[13]For a brief summary of the utopian tradition, see George Kateb, "Utopias and Utopianism," in Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., and the Free Press, 1967), Vol. 8, pp. 206-15; for a more extensive discussion, see Frank E. Manuel, ed., Utopias and Utopian Thought (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

[14]For a discussion of protest music and utopianism, see R. Serge Denisoff, Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1971), Chap. 1, "Folk Consciousness as Utopian Ideology," pp. 3-17.

[15]Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1968), p. 173.

systems, both religious and ideological. Accordingly, both Platonic idealism and Christian fundamentalism are "utopian." Both Plato's "Republic" and Christ's "Kingdom of Heaven" were imagined situations, for which there are no actual historical examples.

However, in the modern era (where the term "utopia" originates), its usage has usually been reserved to connote certain kinds of secular ideological beliefs, namely certain beliefs of the political left. In its modern usage, the term is inherently revolutionary. For Mannheim (who has been instrumental in developing the modern sociological conception), an idealism only becomes utopian when specific social groups embody these ideals into their actual conduct, and thereby attempt to realize them in the world.[16] Utopianism is a totalizing wish that is acted on, or that becomes a part of one's life style. Utopianism is thus a form of revolutionary consciousness. The utopian embraces a life style at odds with socio-political convention.

Perhaps the major characteristic of this left-wing revolutionary idealism is something we might call the "communal ideal."[17] This is the idealization of the totalization process, which is captured within the symbolism of social harmony and brotherhood, and a value system which emphasizes altruism and love.

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[16]Ibid.

[17]See Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Communes: Creating and Managing the Collective Life (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), p. 9.

The utopian has a fundamental concern for social unification. He seeks solidarity and oneness with his fellows. With Lennon, he imagines all the people sharing all the world.

In preferring collective to private ownership, and communal as opposed to individualistic modes of social organization, our utopian is a socialist. And yet, even within the socialist tradition, the utopian is an outsider. Ever since Engel's Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (1880) the term "utopian" has taken on a negative political connotation in radical circles.[18] For Engels, "utopian" was a partisan polemical slur used against essentially all non-Marxist socialists. With all the certainty of the utopian, Engels asserted that among the writers of the Left only Marx's firmly stated, rationally grounded, historically verifiable, and thoroughly systematic works were "scientific" and therefore worthy of the name Socialist. He found the works of earlier socialists (St. Simon, Owen, and Fourier) and contemporaries like Proudhon, to be wildly speculative, unsubstantiated mysticism, which he scored as "utopian."[19]

Although Engels' critique of the utopian socialists was no doubt unfair and highly charged with his own biases, his polemics did manage to draw the major theoretical-ideological boundaries

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[18] Socialism: Utopian and Scientific was taken from a larger work, Anti-Duhring, Engels' famous polemic against Dr. E. Duhring of Berlin University (1877), and reworked into a separate pamphlet which appeared in 1880. The text I will be referring to was published in 1975 in Peking by the Foreign Languages Press.

[19] Ibid., pp. 48-62.

between utopian and Marxist socialism. Without going into great detail, there are three fundamental distinctions made by Engels that are relevant to this discussion. First, and most general, is the argument that, unlike Marx's historical materialism, the works of the utopians lacked a positive historical referent. As a result the utopians confused causes and results, and failed to understand the economic determinants of the social dissatisfaction that underlies all radical thought. The utopians misplaced their emphasis upon the resulting imaginary ideals and abstract empty speculations of the superstructure, without the vital recognition and understanding of the economic substructure which were the source of those ideals.[20]

Secondly, Engels' argued that the utopians did not properly understand the role and purpose of the working class, and instead focused their hopes unrealistically upon the imagined brotherhood of all mankind. Here are Engels' words:

> One thing is common to all three [Owen, St. Simon, and Fourier]. Not one of them appears as a representative of the interests of the proletariat . . . they want to emancipate not a particular class to begin with, but all humanity at once.[21]

Finally, and perhaps most fundamental, there is an important tactical difference. The utopians lacked the Marxists' concrete class-based revolutionary strategy (i.e., the seizure of the economic means of production and the establishment of the dictatorship of the

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[20]Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[21]Ibid., p. 48.

proletariat). Instead of a positive revolutionary policy, the utopians were depending merely upon the force of persuasion, education, and example as their naive approach to the transformation of society. Engels gave this assessment of the utopians' approach to revolution:

> It was a question of inventing a new and more perfect social order and of imposing it on society from without, by propaganda and wherever possible by the example of model experiments. These new social systems were foredoomed to be Utopias; the more they were worked out in detail, the more inevitably they became lost in pure fantasy.[22]

In short, Engels saw the works of St. Simon, Owen, and Fourier as highly speculative, unsubstantiated political philosophy grounded in loose conceptualizations and wish-fulfillment. He presented Marxism as the scientific alternative: a positively formulated radical policy grounded in historical fact and socio-economic reality. In other words, Engels critiqued the utopians as mere idealists and felt himself and Marx to be realists. But we should not lose sight of the fact that in his undying devotion to Karl Marx and his determined faith in dialectical materialism, Engels was guilty of another form of idealism, the idealization of science. And yet the distinctions he made in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific remain. In their scorn for abstract speculation, Marx and Engels idealized historically (though not necessarily empirically) verifiable hypotheses, and therefore their idealism

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[22]Ibid., p. 52.

differed fundamentally from that of the utopians who idealized imagined ideals. Revealing a similar deep-seated utopianism, Leo Tolstoy once wrote:

> I used to believe that there was a green stick on which words were carved that would destroy all the evil in the hearts of men and bring them everything good, and I still believe today that there is such a truth, that it will be revealed to men, and will fulfill its promise.[23]

Marx could never have believed that. History, economics, and the logic of the dialectic were his green stick, and that is the essential difference between Marxism and utopianism.

But this proleterian-based scientific socialism of Marx and Engels has never generated a substantial following in America. The American worker has traditionally possessed a stubborn conservative streak. Perhaps it was the vast frontier--which served as a buffer and a safety-valve, slowing the growth of urban populations and bolstering the hopes of the propertiless with the ubiquitous dream of the West--that prevented the increasing misery of the working masses that Engels felt would lead to revolution. Or perhaps it was America's ethnic mix of such a variety of competing immigrant nationalist groups as to impede the "normal" development of a broad revolutionary working class consciousness and solidarity. Or perhaps more than anything else it was America's vast and abundant natural resources and untapped wealth that perpetuated the myth of the

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[23]From Henri Troyat, Tolstoy, trans. from the French by Nancy Amphoux (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 16.

promised land and soothed the revolutionary potential of the American proletarian. Relative to Europe, America did seem to offer a greater chance for social mobility, and because of her lack of a rigid and traditional class system, her people seemed to possess a greater faith in the dream of upward mobility, and less confidence in the dream of working class revolution.[24] In any event, Marxism, while clearly the foundation of all modern radicalism, remains, to this day, a distinctly European political philosophy.

Also distinctly European, utopianism too has had an uneven history on American soil. Speaking very generally, America's bourgeois origins--its foundation in the liberal political tradition--has entrenched the cult of the individual, private property, and capitalism. And because of this, the American mainstream has viewed the communal ideal with suspicion, as something rather odd and eccentric, if not downright subversive.[25] And yet, the American frontier of the nineteenth century saw a flurry of communal experiments. There were the religious communes of the Rappites, the Quakers, and the Shakers; the transcendentalist commune at Brook Farm, Massachusetts; and a variety of socialist communes, inspired by the ideas of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier.[26]

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[24]See John P. Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), pp. 44-45.

[25]See Philip E. Slater, The Pursuit of Loneliness (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 7-9.

[26]See Paul Kagan, New World Utopias (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1975).

The communal ideal was also an important element in the syndicalism of the early labor movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Especially in the cases of the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World, the union was a powerful symbol of working class solidarity and the brotherhood of labor.[27] But both of these examples lie outside the mainstream of the American labor movement. The American worker and the labor movement have been traditionally much more concerned with wages, working conditions, and benefits than with the imagined syndicalist commonwealth.[28] The labor movement and the American left generally have never really been able to transcend their heritage of liberal individualism sufficiently to embrace with anything but the mildest enthusiasm the communal ideal. The American radical has generally tended to seek the peace and isolation of Walden Pond, and to shy away from the totalizing fantasies of Owen's New Harmony.[29]

But there is more to utopianism than the idealization of collective living and the consciousness of brotherhood. The utopian sensibility is more than a particular set of beliefs and values. It is also the manner in which one accepts and holds to these beliefs. The utopian is a zealot. He is a man possessed, one who is smitten by the vision of oneness. One who finds his sole purpose in life as

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[27]See Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, 4 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

[28]See Diggins, pp. 44-48.

[29]See David Schuman, A Preface to Politics (3rd ed.; Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1981), pp. 150-72.

a glorious mission, proselyting for the togetherness he feels the world lacks.[30] Both the Christian missionary and the union organizer possess this utopian mentality. Both are selflessly, perhaps irrationally, dedicated to the communal ideal in one form or another. Both are totalizing agents doing the mind guerilla with the determined enthusiasm that only the true believer can bring to that "dance."

So the utopian sensibility is a fervent idealism, usually--though not necessarily--associated with the non-Marxist left. It is characterized by a strong commitment to the communal ideal, in one form or another, and a faith in the brotherhood and equality of all mankind. But only when held by zealots bent on changing the world with the force of their dedication, and according to their ideals, do we find the true utopian mind guerilla.

The Utopian Conception of Politics

The utopian views politics in terms of collective action, that is, as a process aimed at the generation of group consciousness, solidarity, identity, and allegiance. Working class radicalism, for example, involves the generation of "class consciousness" and "worker solidarity." In short, the utopian tends to view politics as the totalization process. Utopian politics attempts to actualize the communal ideal. Moreover, the communal ideal is usually conceived

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[30]Mannheim, p. 177; see also Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

in the broadest sense possible. Utopian politics is thus often identified with the quest for the oneness of a universal community of Mankind.[31]

Utopianism, like all politics of the left, begins with an abhorrence of existing socio-economic and political conditions. There is a fundamental sense of injustice, a deeply held feeling that something is wrong with the world in its present form.[32] Often this sense of injustice is accompanied by eschatological fantasies, visions of the impending apocalypse. There is, typically, a sense of urgency flowing from the fear that, unless something is done immediately, the world is irreversably doomed.[33]

The utopian usually perceives this fundamental injustice and this impending doom in conjunction with institutions and practices which somehow violate the condition of universal oneness. It is often argued that these institutions and practices frustrate the totalization process by aggravating man's primitive tendencies toward divisiveness.[34] Thus, from the perspective of the communal

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[31]See Hoffer, pp. 57-60; also Mannheim, pp. 215-22.

[32]See Margaret Cole, "Socialism." in Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., and The Free Press, 1967), Vol. 7, pp. 467-70.

[33]See Paul Goodman, The Empire City (New York: Macmillan, 1964); also Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America (New York: Random House-Bantam edition, 1971), pp. 4-8.

[34]See Kanter, pp. 5-10.

ideal, capitalist institutions such as private property and the profit motive are typically viewed as unjust and exploitative in the sense that they foster inequality and therefore violate the oneness of humanity.[35]

The nature of the transcendental oneness which the utopian seeks tends to affect the political strategies put forth to achieve it. This utopian oneness, captured poetically by Charles Fourier as "Harmony," is an idealized condition sustained through non-coercive means. Fourier, for example, felt that his utopian scheme was so obviously superior to the conventional way of life that, in due course, the world would naturally come to accept it.[36]

Persuasion, not force, is the utopian's weapon. The primary social bond in utopia is imagined to be love, sexual and altruistic. Utopians have a long history of free-love experimentation. Plato's guardians were to have practiced communal marriage, and Fourier's phalansteries were to have contained special rooms for sexual play.[37] To the utopian, reckless romantic that he is, love is a force sufficient to hold any community together. Generally speaking, the utopian is thus a passivist who practices the politics of love and non-violence.

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[35]This is basically the thesis of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels; see Richard T. De George, Patterns of Soviet Thought (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970), pp. 57-63.

[36]See Lee Cameron McDonald, Western Political Theory: Part 3, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), pp. 452-53.

[37]Kanter, pp. 3-6.

Since utopia is an imagined condition, rarely actualized in practice, and more an ideal than a reality, it can best be achieved through perceptual politics, or the politics of persuasion. The utopian thus tends toward symbolic politics. Almost all utopian schemes, from Plato's Republic to B. F. Skinner's Walden II, place great emphasis upon education. Utopian converts are conditioned non-coercively, through a rigorous and systematic training program, to accept the ways of utopia.[38] Accordingly, it can be argued that the political processes of developing group consciousness and solidarity, and the imaginary pursuit of the utopian One, are of a non-violent and symbolic nature. However, it is ironic that it is often this aspect of utopianism that invites criticisms of brain-washing and mind-game politics. And, to the extent that such criticisms are valid, utopian totalities, while imagined as conditions of peace and harmony, often turn out in practice to be dystopic totalitarian corruptions of the communal ideal.[39]

Regardless of the ultimate consequences of the conditioning of group identification and communal sensibility, and the controversy over the methodology of inducing allegiance to the imagined universal totality, the political rationale is almost always the same. If we (the people, the working class, blacks, women, Jews, Poles, etc.) all stick together, if we could at least temporarily

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[38] Ibid., p. 5.

[39] See W. Cleon Skousen, The Naked Communist (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Ensign Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 114-15. This book is representative of a whole body of anti-communist literature, from a Christian fundamentalist perspective.

discard our differences and form a united front, then we could actually remake or reorder the world, right its wrongs, stamp out injustice, and thereby perfect the relation of man to man and man to woman in a peaceful and harmonious society and world community. Preacher Casey, in this famous passage from John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, sums up the utopian conception of politics:

> An' I got thinkin', only it wasn't thinkin', it was deeper down than thinkin'. I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang--that's right, that's holy . . .[40]

But it often takes a Preacher Casey, a gifted visionary, to perceive and then pass along the utopian vision. The quest for oneness and solidarity almost always involves the mediation of charismatic leadership.[41] Accordingly, the Indian independence movement was dependent upon the charisma of Mahatma Gandhi, the black civil rights movement in America was in many ways a function of the public magnetism of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Polish Solidarity movement is being guided by the force of Lech Walenza's personality. Those heroic public personages who define, articulate, and proselytize the vision and ideals of utopia have the effect of focusing the confused tangle of disaffection,

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[40]John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 88.

[41]Kanter, p. 18.

dissatisfaction, and disillusionment into positive collective action. Social totality and political solidarity crystallize around the heroic image. The hero is thus a totalizing agent. The force of charisma and the power of idolization are important factors in the totalization of the utopian vision. Through hero-worship, the vision of one is transformed into the vision of many. This is how utopianism and heroism come together to support totalization.

I have defined utopianism as a political sensibility that is based upon an idealization of an imagined social condition where peace and harmony and love among all men and women form the basis of social living. These imagined conditions, these perceptual totalizations, these world views, form within the individual as a "political consciousness," and among individuals as "solidarity," "camaraderie," and "brotherhood." The result is a strongly felt sense of community and purpose, and a determined sense of mission to extend this community spirit out beyond its boundaries to encompass as broad a community as is possible. Such a consciousness, while non-Marxist, is nevertheless revolutionary in the sense that it is held in spite of, and in opposition to, actual or existing social conditions. It is also revolutionary in the sense that it is acted upon and taken directly into the being of the individual. The utopian lives his or her politics and adapts it as a life-style.

The sense of solidarity and oneness that sustains the utopian vision must be cultivated, and heroic charismatic visionaries walk behind the plow. Utopian personages (working class heroes and

mind guerillas) are important, perhaps crucial, totalizing agents. This gives the left a human quality and a cult-like structure. The utopian sensibility is a loose, fluid, and amorphorous formation of idealistic dreamers, dreaming the dreams of their heroes vicariously.

If the utopian sensibility has any validity as a description of the left generally, it is even more valid as a way of describing the song culture of the left.

Utopianism and the Protest Song Hero

American popular artists, especially those in the super-star category, have rarely associated themselves with social causes. Only since the 1960s has political radicalism found its way into the pop culture arena. Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers recorded and performed protest material in the 1930s and 40s, but never generated anything approaching a mass following. Their appeal was confined to the rather narrow left-wing labor circles. Their performances attracted hundreds and not thousands. They were recorded on minor underground labels--Keynote, Disc, Timely, Stinson, and Folkways--and, because of their radical politics, were shunned by the major recording companies.[42]

Truly popular artists--Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and Elvis Presley--have been too comfortable sitting on their thrones (and too intimidated by record company executives) to

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[42]See Denisoff, Chap. 4, "The Almanac Singers," pp. 77-105.

stand up for social causes. In the popular music business, egoism and greed have always been occupational hazards which have also tended to negate political expression. Commercial success has an insulating effect. The star system and the hit parade have been incompatible with radical politics. Moreover, access to the mass media has been tightly controlled by businessmen who have found radical politics unsavory and distasteful.[43]

However, in the early sixties, when the first protest singers began to gain access to the mass media and penetrate into America's popular culture, their superstar status tended to instill in them an exaggerated faith in their ability to remake the world. In 1964, at the height of their fame, Peter, Paul, and Mary bragged to an interviewer:

> Do you realize the power of PP and M? We could mobilize the youth of America today in a way that nobody else could. We could conceivably travel with a presidential candidate, and maybe even sway an election.[44]

Of course, this remark was made on the very eve of the Beatles' arrival in America, which quickly doused the professional and political aspirations of PP and M and other folk groups. Only Bob Dylan would survive the transition to Rock, carrying the torch of the protest tradition with him.

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[43]See Tony Palmer, All You Need is Love: The Story of Popular Music (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), pp. 195-209.

[44]Alfred G. Aronowitz and Marshal Blonsky, "Three's Company: Peter, Paul, and Mary," Saturday Evening Post, May 30, 1964, p. 32.

But even before they gained access to the mass-media, protest singers in America, while genuinely committed to the politics of the Left, participated only at an abstract and ritualistic level, and their perception of political radicalism was essentially idealistic and utopian. In forming the Almanac Singers, Pete Seeger was not in it for the money, for they made none. And he was not doing it to promote rural folk music to urban audiences, though his impact here is incalculable. His motivation was, and has always remained, political. In his mind, his musical career and his politics have always been inseparable. Seeger is an idealist and a zealot. From the very beginning, he was determined to use folk music to organize the workers and build the One Big Union. His goal was nothing short of the utopian One.[45]

And if you look closely at the role of the protest singer in actual political activities, you will see the dramatization of this same utopian vision. At strikes, mass demonstrations, protest marches and rallies, or even on the campaign trail, the singer's role is quite different from that of the promoters and organizers who have laid the material and legal groundwork for the event, or the political speakers who will attempt to rationalize the event and put it on the appropriate ideological footing. Imagine Joan Baez at the Washington Monument leading the masses in singing "We Shall Overcome." She is there, not just to lend her

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[45]For a very informative account of Seeger's life and politics, see David King Dunaway, How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981).

celebrity status to promote the cause, but to entertain and inspire the audience's political consciousness. Her role is symbolic. She is performing a ritualistic act designed to stir the political imagination of the audience. The tangible effects are the collective swaying of 100,000 people, connected together by clasped hands, forming a single reified entity, singing in unison in one voice. The effect is moving and inspirational. At this moment, they all believe they can indeed overcome.

This is probably the most tangible evidence of the totalization process to which one can point. Even if it has only occurred momentarily and is confined to this specific 100,000 individuals, it has residual effects that, with the aid of the six o'clock news, may reverberate throughout the entire nation. And on that particular afternoon, the utopian One, the Left Totality, has in some sense been made real.

The utopian vision is also reinforced by the nature of the medium itself. The song form, the long playing record, the radio or video spot, or the mass sing described above, all exert pressure in a romanticized utopian direction. It is not appropriate or possible for the song form to spell out in detail political platforms and ideological arguments. In the song form it is more appropriate to utilize a few simple, repetitive symbols to project broad, abstract ideals designed to sway the collective consciousness and provide a convenient and ritualized format for the

dramatic presentation and expression of the utopian vision.[46]

Changing Conceptions of Utopia

The utopian One has been the goal and the dream of all the great protest writers and singers of twentieth century America, from Joe Hill to John Lennon. But the conception of the One, and the role of the protest singer in the totalization process, has undergone some very significant transformations.

At the beginning of the century, the Wobblies' utopian vision was of the One Big Union, perhaps best represented in Ralph Chaplin's "Commonwealth of Toil!"

> But we have a glowing dream
> Of how fair the world will seem
> When each man can live his life secure and free;
> When the earth is owned by Labor
> And there's joy and peace for all
> In the Commonwealth of Toil that is to be.[47]

Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers continued this tradition through mid-century. Among Guthrie's many tributes to the Union is this portrait of the One:

> I can see my union shining like the sun! Like the sun!
> I can see my union shining like the sun! Like the sun!

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[46]See Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), p. 291.

[47]I.W.W. Songs, 14th ed., April, 1918.

Well it draws us all together and melts us into one.
It's that good old union feeling in my soul![48]

In the 1960s, the working class conception of the One was almost completely lost, and along with it the institutional vehicle and symbol of the Union. There is not a single Bob Dylan song about the union. The 1960's conception of the One either suffered from egocentricity and cryptic vagueness, as in Lennon's "I Am the Walrus" ("I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together"),[49] or mystical nihilism, as in Dylan's "The Gates of Eden":

With a time-rusted compass blade
Aladdin and his lamp
Sits with Utopian hermit monks
Side saddle on the Golden Calf
And on their promises of paradise
You will not hear a laugh
All except inside the Gates of Eden.[50]

Lennon's vision in "Imagine," of "all the people sharing all the world,"[51] is perhaps a notable exception, but it suffers from this same lack of social referent (without reference to class or race or nation), and therefore comes across as too quixotic to be taken seriously.

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[48]Moses Asch, ed., American Folksong: Woody Guthrie (New York: Oak Publications, 1961), p. 33.

[49]John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "I Am the Walrus" (London: Northern Songs Limited, 1967); see Beatles Complete (New York: Warner Brothers Publications, Inc., sixth printing, December, 1977), pp. 280-83.

[50]Bob Dylan, Writings and Drawings (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 169-70.

[51]See Milton Okun, Pocket Beatles (New York: ATV Music

At the beginning of the century, social protest was undertaken for the sake of all. But as the century proceeded, social protest has been increasingly for the sake of the individual. In almost every case in the union-era, one finds the protest singer presenting his utopian visions in the second person plural (we). After the sixties, one finds the visions presented in the first person (I, me, or you).

The role of the singing hero in the protest cultures of the twentieth century has also undergone a significant transformation. In the union era, the protest singer had firm political convictions. An air of certainty permeated his works:

> Workers of the World awaken
> Break your chains, demand your rights
> All the wealth you make is taken
> By exploiting parasites.[52]

There was a deeply held feeling that the One Big Union could be achieved, and that it would become a vehicle for social justice:

> Join the Union Fellow Workers
> Men and women side by side
> We will crush the greedy shirkers
> Like a sweeping surging tide.[53]

The lyrics had all the naivete of the religious zealot. The problems were presented in black and white, and the solutions were always obvious. Moreover, the singer was much more inclined toward the selfless pursuit of the totality and, more important, he felt

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[52] I.W.W. Songs, 9th ed., 1916.

[53] Ibid., 3rd verse.

himself a part of that totality, as opposed to clinging to an idolized position above and beyond it.

After the sixties, certainty gave way to ambivalence. The problems were now buried in deep symbolism and dark imagery:

> Darkness at the break of noon
> Shadows even the silver spoon
> The handmade blade, the child's balloon
> Eclipses both the sun and moon
> To understand you know too soon
> There is no sense in trying.[54]

The answers are no longer obvious, they are now left merely "blowing in the wind."[55] The motives of the protest singer had become increasingly ignoble. Perhaps, as most of the literature suggests, by entering into the realm of pop culture, protest politics was corrupted by commercialism.[56] The protest singer came to value his career and his artistic integrity above the utopian One. His purpose had changed. No longer seeking glory in association with the One, the working class hero had become just "something to be."[57]

Utopianism and Music

The use of music in the gentle art of persuasion has had a long association with the utopian tradition.[58] They go together well.

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[54]Dylan, p. 171. [55]Ibid., p. 33.

[56]See Denisoff, pp. 164-197.

[57]This is from the chorus of John Lennon's "Working Class Hero," in Dan Fox, ed., John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band (New York: Maclen Music, Inc., 1970), pp. 16-19.

[58]See Denisoff, pp. 3-17.

Harmony, after all, is a musical metaphor. The metaphor seems to fit the communal condition quite well. The harmony of the One is a life that is shared in the same way as the notes of a chord are shared frequencies that create a transcendent musical harmony.

The musical metaphor fits in another way. The chord may only be sustained for a brief, beautiful moment. It is here and then it is gone. Music, like utopia, has an amorphous, mystical quality. It is almost an imaginary construct, with only a fragile and temporary existence. However, the age of electronics may have changed all this. The chord may now be sustained indefinitely, but only through artificial means. This kink in the metaphor holds out the promise of the dehumanized totalitarian One, and not the dream of the humanistic utopia. Technology has grafted an electro-magnetic handle onto music that has taken it out of the control of the people.

But in spite of the controversy over its ultimate effects, music has figured prominently in most utopian educational schemes. As far back as Plato, the awesome power of music, and its political significance, was well understood and appreciated. Plato's views on music were reactionary, and sound as though they could have come from the right-wing reaction to sixties rock music:

> The introduction of novel fashions in music is a thing to beware of as endangering the whole fabric of society, whose most important conventions are unsettled by any revolution in that quarter . . .
>
> It would be harmless . . . were it not that, little by little, this lawless spirit gains a lodgement and spreads imperceptibly to manners and pursuits; and from thence with gathering force invades men's dealings with one another, and

> next goes on to attack the laws and the constitution with wanton recklessness, until it ends by overthrowing the whole structure of public and private life.[59]

As if they had all read Plato, the protest singers of twentieth century America believed they were armed with a weapon more powerful than guns and clubs. And they felt that they had no need to resort to violence. Music cannot be used violently (although the high decible sounds of a rock band might conceivably cross the threshold of pain). But primarily, the tactics of protest singing have remained largely symbolic. The inscription on Pete Seeger's banjo head goes a long way toward articulating the utopian philosophy of music: "This Machine Surrounds Hate and Forces it to Surrender."[60]

Ritualized Singing as a Non-Violent Weapon

Singing is ritualized and dramatized speech, and it is only through such ritualized activities that "hate" may be surrounded and conquered through non-violent means. In American protest cultures, singing has always been an important part of the ritual of union meetings, strikes, rallies, sit-ins, mass demonstrations, and marches. Musical rituals are designed and intended to instill empathy in the cause at hand, and to inspire the participants' political consciousness. It is used the same way primitive cultures chant and sing to evoke magic, and as holiness churches sing to

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[59]Francis MacDonald Cornford, ed., The Republic of Plato London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 115.

[60]See Dunaway, photo section following p. 246.

evoke "the spirit." Radical politics has used music to generate group consciousness and solidarity, in other words, to evoke the "utopian spirit."[61]

Singing in the early union meetings, for example, closely resembled church singing. Old and familiar hymn tunes were often used as vehicles for radical lyrics. Joe Hill's transformation of "Power in the Blood of the Lamb" into "Power in a Band of Workingmen" illustrates this process.[62] The resultant song was then referred to as a "labor hymn."[63] The union meeting was likely to be opened and closed by group (or congregational) singing of labor hymns. "Solidarity Forever" became a kind of doxology. The meeting's business affairs were also likely to be punctuated at predetermined intervals by special performances by choral groups who functioned as union choirs.[64]

In the 1930s and 40s, the communist and socialist parties also utilized group singing and employed "worker choruses" at their official functions.[65] The folk groups of the 40s, 50s, and 60s--The Almanac Singers, the Weavers, the Kingston Trio, Peter, Paul, and Mary--were modeled on these choral groups, and were responsible

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[61]Denisoff, pp. 3-17.

[62]I.W.W. Songs, 5th ed., 1913.

[63]John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. 12-29.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Denisoff, pp. 41-45.

for continuing the union singing tradition into the age of popular culture.[66]

Similarly, black radical movements in America have utilized politicized spirituals--"Go Down Moses," "Freedom is a Constant Struggle," "People Get Ready," and "We Shall Overcome"--as very effective non-violent weapons in the struggle for civil rights.[67] The power of ritualized singing to sustain the utopian inspiration even in the face of horrible defeats, can be seen in this account of the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by Gordon Baxter of National Public Radio:

> . . . I followed the mules from way down in the ghetto where King was, on up the road, on up to the shining city of Atlanta. We walked real slow, and we sang the song to the cadence of it. And it was as beautiful as anything that you've ever heard out of the furl-the-banner legacy of the dying Confederacy, as beautiful as anything you've heard from Lee's march or any other of the grand music played a little too slow. And this song just rose up out of their voices as they came up out of the valley and on to the hillside in Atlanta: "We Shall Overcome . . ."[68]

This was from a public radio tribute on the 20th Anniversary of the 1960 Sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, which touched off the Civil Rights Movement. Former Student Non-Violent Coordinating

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[66]Ibid., pp. 165-97; see also Oscar Brand, The Ballad Mongers: The Rise of Modern Folk Song (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., Inc., 1962).

[67]See Greenway, pp. 67-120; also Guy and Candie Carawan, eds., Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Songs of the Freedom Movement (New York: Oak Publications, 1968).

[68]"All Things Considered," National Public Radio broadcast, February 3, 1980.

Committee head, John Lewis, spoke more directly to the philosophy of non-violence and the use of singing when he said: "The movement without songs would have been like birds without wings."[69]

Somehow this analogy reaches out to the very essence of the utopian vision from the point of view of protest music. In the protest imagination, birds are a symbol of love and non-violence. The "snow-white dove" of peace is a folk expression. The dove's only weapon is flight, but she can soar above the madness. But song is also a kind of flight, and singers have wings, like angels and doves. The singer's voice is his wings, and through his songs he too may soar above the madness of non-utopian life; of life as it is. And we are invited to soar with him vicariously into the realm of what might be.

Summary and Conclusions

In the study ahead, we will be exploring the cultural politics of the protest singing hero. I will be arguing that, within the American left, the totalizing support of the protest hero, his songs, and the myths surrounding both, have been very significant, perhaps crucial, factors in the proliferation of working class political culture in America. What we refer to here as working class political culture has been characterized as a form of "utopian sensibility," which is to say, a determined political idealism that has carried over into the life style of a social group. What is being argued here is that prominent protest heroes--folk and popular

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[69] Ibid.

singers like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and the late Phil Ochs--have been the source as well as the inspiration for the continuing utopian sensibility. They are thus mind guerillas who provide for the nourishment of revolutionary consciousness, and through their public image, they are also a kind of vicarious gateway into the utopian lifestyle: its norms, customs, and conventions; its manners of dress and speech. It is in this sense that the protest hero is an agent of totalization: as an ontological ideal-type and a popular mythos, imbued with utopian symbolism, supporting leftist unification.

Moreover, the phenomena of the protest singing hero, by penetrating further and further into the realm of popular culture over the course of the twentieth century, has taken on increasing totalizing significance. It is my contention that, over time, left-wing singing heroes have been instrumental in the development of the protest song as a musical genre in and of itself. Through the work of these guerilla minstrels, the protest song has evolved into a highly effective and widely accepted political weapon and strategy. And as a result, protest singing has become one of the cornerstones of the counter cultural tradition in America.

I will attempt to expand upon this contention, and discuss some of the implications for American radicalism, through a study of three of the most prominent heroes of the protest song tradition in America in the twentieth century: Joe Hill, the Wobbly organizer and martyr from the first decade of the century; Woody

Guthrie, the great dust bowl balladeer from the era of the Great Depression and World War II; and Bob Dylan, the protest poet who revolutionized rock 'n' roll music and, in the process, politicized the popular music and culture of the generation of the 1960s. Through a careful analysis of the lives and songs of these grand minstrels of protest, we will explore the role of the heroic mythos, the medium of song, and a variety of associated rituals, dramatic practice, and symbolic activities designed to promote the revolutionary sensibility. The mythos and the songs have promoted utopian consciousness and solidarity, by propagating the ideals of "love," "peace," "freedom," and "equality," and the vision of the imaginary oneness that allegedly envelops all humanity. It is a study of the mind guerilla politics of America's cultural left.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN WHO NEVER DIED

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,
Alive as you or me.
Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."
"I never died," said he.
"I never died," said he.

Alfred Hayes, 1925

Joe Hill at Woodstock

On a hot Friday night in late August, 1969 at the very crest of the wave of social protest that marked the decade, Joan Baez walked out onto the stage at the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival to greet the "people" of this new youthful utopia, a sea of nearly a half million waving faces caught up in the spirit of this historic event, inspired by the very ecstasy of their youthful solidarity.[1] It was to become the single largest counter-cultural festival in history. Ms. Baez, far past her professional peak, seemed somewhat out of place, like someone's older sister. The silver-throated folk singer and peacenick stood in stark contrast

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[1]The Woodstock Music and Arts Fair was filmed and recorded: Woodstock, the movie, was produced and directed by Michael Wadleigh and Bob Maurice (Wadleigh-Maurice Ltd. Producations for Warner Brothers, 1970); the recording was a three-record set, Woodstock, Music From the Original Soundtrack and More, produced by Eric Blackstead (Cotillion Records, a division of Atlantic Recording Corporation, SD 3-500, 1970); see also Robert Stephen Spitz, Barefoot in Babylon: The Creation of the Woodstock Music Festival, 1969 (New York: The Viking Press, 1979); and Joseph J.

to the violent high-voltage antics of The Who or the pain-wrenching spasmodic gurglings of Joe Cocker. Ms. Baez represented an intellectual, political-ideological element in an otherwise recklessly anti-rational, uninhibited revolution-for-the-hell-of-it sixties counter-culture.

At age 28, Joan Baez was indeed an elder at Woodstock. Professorial and even a bit preachy, but perhaps more than any of the other performers that weekend, she was well versed in the history of the American left and its counter-cultural traditions. Her contribution to this historic occasion was the resuscitation of the legend of the Wobbly martyr Joe Hill. In doing so, she was consciously linking up the wild, drug-crazed passions of the summer of 1969 with the class-conscious idealism of the winter of 1915:

> "The Copper bosses killed you Joe
> They shot you Joe," says I.
> Says Joe, "What they can never kill
> Went on to organize,
> Went on to organize."[2]

Acting out the song's theme, Ms. Baez was reinvigorating the Joe Hill legend as the embodiment of an ageless youth rebellion and idealism, and the grand quest for the harmony of the utopian One:

Sia, Woodstock 69 (New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1970); and Abbie Hoffman, Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

[2]From a poem written by Alfred Hayes, "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night," written in 1925; with music added by Earl Robinson it became the song "Joe Hill," copyright 1938 by Bob Miller, Inc.; see Waldemar Hille, ed., The People's Song Book (New York: Boni and Gaer, 1948; Oak Publications edition, 1961).

From San Diego up to Main,
In every mine and mill,
Where workingmen defend their rights,
It's there you'll find Joe Hill,
It's there you'll find Joe Hill.[3]

And, to a large degree, because of her performance of this Alfred Hayes-Earl Robinson protest classic, upon this historic occasion, the legend of Joe Hill has never died. The reincarnation at Woodstock of the legendary Wobbly poet and martyr takes us back in time to the very birth of the culture of protest at the beginning of this century.

The Pageant of Patterson

Back in the summer of 1913, at the crest of America's first wave of political radicalism this century, the Industrial Workers of the World, the flamboyant labor union formed in 1905 by a coalition of socialists, anarchists, and radical trade unionists, popularly known as the Wobblies,[4] produced the first great counter-cultural festival and media-event of the twentieth century: The Pageant of the Peterson Strike.[5] It took place at New York City's Madison

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[3]Ibid.

[4]The term "wobbly" first entered into I.W.W. vernacular in 1912, during a strike by railroad workers in British Columbia, when a Chinese restaurant keeper accidentally coined the term while attempting to say "IWW." See I.W.W. Songs, (34th ed., 2d printing; (Chicago: I.W.W. Publishers, 1974), p. 58.

[5]The best source on the Pageant of Patterson and Wobbly folklore and culture generally is Joyce L. Kornbluh, Rebel Voices: an I.W.W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press,

Square Garden on the night of June 7 and was a great and genuine celebration of love and compassion for the plight of the striking mill workers over in nearby Patterson, New Jersey. Sponsored by the I.W.W., it was also a grand dramatization of worker solidarity and class-consciousness.

The Wobblies were pioneers in the field of revolutionary art and culture, and early practitioners of the art of symbolic politics. Always media-wise and publicity conscious, the Wobblies were the first truly modern, organized mind guerillas in the American Left. In many ways it was I.W.W. organizers who were responsible for the romantic Wobbly image, hyping themselves, for political effect, as defiant idealistic class warriors.

The strike at Patterson was the result of a complex set of conditions centering around a labor crisis in the silk industry of New Jersey, at a time when doctrines of revolutionary trade unionism were being rapidly disseminated throughout America's working classes. A recent influx of Jewish, Italian, and Polish immigrants had offered enterprising textile entrepreneurs a convenient source of cheap, exploitable labor for the new silk garment industry. Ninety-one percent of the silk workers were women and children, who worked 10 hour shifts and were forced to accept wages as low as five dollars a week to supplement their husbands' starvation wages in the mines and factories.[6] The women and children worked in dark, damp, noisy,

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1965), see also Frederick S. Boyd, The Pageant of the Patterson Strike (New York: Success Press, 1913).

[6]Kornbluh, p. 206.

overcrowded mills that were unheated in the winter months and improperly ventilated in the summer months, and always choking with suffocating steam and acid fumes. Maimings from accidents were common, and tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases were widespread.[7]

In addition to the traditional abuses in measuring worker production, kick-backs to foremen, and the exploitation of child labor, the mills at Patterson had just introduced a new four-loom system that had doubled the production load per worker, forcing wages down, and contributing to unemployment and hardship generally. On January 27, 1913, 800 employees of the Doherty Silk Mill walked off their jobs after four members of a workers' committee were fired for trying to talk to management about the elimination of the four-loom system. By the end of February, the strike had spread throughout the entire silk industry of Patterson. Over 25,000 silk workers were out on strike and almost 300 mills were idle.[8]

I.W.W. organizers, fresh and confident from a major victory the previous winter in the textile mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts, found their way to Patterson to take charge of the strike. Lawrence had propelled the Wobblies into national prominence, crystallizing their image as defiant and romantic revolutionaries. I.W.W. membership was up to its highest levels and sales of the "Little Red Songbook" and other Wobbly literature had risen dramatically. A new militant class-consciousness was spreading throughout the working

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[7]Ibid., p. 197.

[8]Ibid., p. 198.

population that threatened to tear apart the fragile and worn fabric of American labor relations.

While there was a great emotional outpouring of sympathy for the plight of immigrant mill workers, there was an equally emotional reactionary backlash directed against labor organizers and union advocates. Factory and mill owners, capitalists, and government authorities had become alarmed at what they perceived as the spread of lawlessness and subversion. Economic polarization was giving way to class warfare.

It was also a time when new, talented, young intellectuals like author and theorist Walter Lippman, NAACP founder William Walling, and Max Eastman, editor of the radical arts journal The Masses, were becoming infatuated with left-wing politics and working class causes. Political radicalism had become a fashionable and popular topic of polite conversation.[9] It was a time not unlike the late sixties, a time ripe for a grand and glorious counter-cultural happening.

Another young intellectual, John Reed, a recent Harvard graduate, was living in New York City's Greenwich Village and frequenting the home of Mabel Dodge, a wealthy widow, intellectual, and radical whose apartment in the Village was functioning as a salon for the new left-wing intelligentsia.[10] It was at Mrs. Dodge's

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[9]See John P. Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 27-33.

[10]For Reed's own account of his adventures in Patterson, see John Reed, "War in Patterson," International Socialist Review, 14,

salon that the young, idealistic Reed had met "Big Bill" Haywood, the fiery I.W.W. president and labor agitator. Through Haywood, Reed learned of the Patterson strike. Like the thousands of young idealists who flocked south in the freedom rides of the early sixties, Reed was seeking adventure and political fulfillment in the cause of an oppressed people with whom he had little in common.

Reed's adventure in Patterson resulted in his arrest with some other strikers, touching off a flood of publicity in the New York papers, where stories of the Harvard boy jailed with immigrant strikers became hot copy. Upon his release, Reed solicited the financial assistance of Mrs. Dodge and the backing of the I.W.W., rented Madison Square Garden, and directed a cast of 1,000 strikers in a ritualistic reinactment of the Patterson strike.

The Pageant of Patterson featured the walk-out, the confrontation with police, the funeral for the innocent bystander shot down by the police, the sending away of the strikers' children to homes in other cities where they could be properly cared for until the strike ended, the fiery speeches by labor leaders Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who played themselves, and the final establishment of the workers' utopia. Throughout the evening there were periodic outbursts of singing. At times the entire audience of 15,000 joined in singing the songs from the Wobblies' "Little Red

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(July, 1913), 43-48; see also, Granville Hicks, John Reed: The Making of a Revolutionary (New York: Macmillan, 1936).

Songbook." The effect was deeply moving. Mabel Dodge described the Pageant in this way:

> . . . for a few electric moments there was a terrible unity between all those people. They were one: the workers who had come to show their comrades what was happening across the river and the workers who had come to see it. I have never felt such a high pulsing vibration in any gathering before or since.[11]

Like Woodstock, the Patterson Pageant was a financial failure. At Woodstock, the flood of young souls so overwhelmed the logistics of ticket gathering that the promoters gave up trying to collect them. At the Patterson Pageant, the price of admission was deliberately kept low so that out-of-work strikers could attend. Those who could present their red I.W.W. membership cards gained free admission. The promoters took deliberate losses so they could fill the arena to capacity.

But, like Woodstock, the Patterson Pageant was a great publicity success, a great and lasting experiment in the mind guerilla. Likewise, as a political movement and as a labor organization, the I.W.W. was almost a complete failure, but as a cultural revolution it was a great success. Although perceived as violent anarchists, the Wobblies were actually great pioneers in the tactics of passive resistance and non-violent symbolic politics. The Patterson Pageant is but one example, and yet it is an example that

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[11]Mable Dodge Luhan, Intimate Memories, Vol. 3, Movers and Shakers (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1933), p. 205.

points out the distinctiveness of the Wobblies as a revolutionary phenomena.

The Wobblies--as great propaganda specialists and forerunners in the practice of revolutionary drama, ritual, and festival--were the first of the radical organizations in America to fully exploit the arts for political purposes. They were responsible for some of the classic American radical poster art and political cartoons. They were pioneers in guerilla theater, which they used, not just in grand extravaganzas like the Patterson Pageant, but more often to entertain and bolster the spirits of strikers on the picket line. Their newspapers--Solidarity, The Industrial Worker, The One Big Union Monthly--were great experiments in radical journalism. And finally, probably their most lasting contribution was in the field of revolutionary singing.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the flamboyant Wobbly organizer, in an analysis of the Patterson strike, clearly outlines the full dimensions of revolutionary agitation, and the role and purpose of symbolic and cultural politics:

> What is a labor victory? I maintain that it is a twofold thing. Workers must gain economic advantage, but they must also gain revolutionary spirit, in order to achieve a complete victory. For the workers to gain a few cents more a day, a few minutes less a day, and go back to work with the same psychology, the same attitude toward society, is to have achieved a temporary gain and not a lasting victory. For workers to go back with a class-conscious spirit, with an organized and determined attitude toward society means that

> even if they have made no economic gain they have the possibility of gaining in the future.[12]

The revolutionary spirit, of which Gurley Flynn spoke, is the major purpose and by-product of cultural events like the Patterson Pageant and the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival. The revolutionary spirit is what keeps the people's causes alive long after the historic confrontations of labor and capital, of segregationists and integrations, of draftees and draft boards, of chemical waste victims and chemical companies, and of peacenicks and the masters of war have long passed from public consciousness. It is the same spirit that Joe Hill continues to symbolize: the spirit of oneness among all who have suffered from social injustice and economic oppression.

Hill and Lennon

The counter-culture of the 1960's was the spiritual grandchild of the Wobblies. John Lennon, so indelible a symbol of the children of Woodstock, was very well connected--if only subconsciously--to the spirit of Joe Hill and the Wobblies. On his first solo album, Plastic Ono Band (1970), in the song "I Found Out," Lennon pilfered the "pie in the sky" line and the watch-out-for-the-false-prophets concept from Hill's 1911 song "The Preacher and the Slave." Hill's original lyric was:

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[12]Elizabeth G. Flynn, "The Truth About the Patterson Strike," from a speech given before the New York Civil Club Forum, January 31, 1914. The unpublished manuscript is in the Labadie Collection, the University of Michigan Library; in Kornbluh, p. 215.

Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked, "How 'bout something to eat?"
They will answer in voices so sweet:
  You will eat, bye and bye,
  In that glorious land above the sky;
  Work and pray, live on hay,
  You'll get pie in the sky when you die.[13]

Lennon transformed this for popular consumption in 1970:

Old Hare Krishna got nothing on you.
Just keep you crazy with nothing to do;
Keep you occupied with pie in the sky,
There ain't no guru who can see through your eyes.
  I, I found out!
  I, I found out.[14]

Both songs were popularizations of the famous aphorism of Marx that "Religion is the opiate of the people."[15] Hill's rendering was from the perspective of traditional dialectical materialism, while Lennon's was from a more modern existential perspective. The point at which Hill and Lennon merge, in spite of the differences of half a century, is in the gospel of the utopian One. Both dreamed the dream of all the people sharing all the world, and both were great and daring practitioners of the art of the mind guerilla.

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[13] I.W.W. Songs, 3rd ed., 1911.

[14] Copyright 1970, Northern Songs Ltd.; from the LP John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band (Apple Records SW 3372, 1970), side I, band 3.

[15] Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right" (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 131; originally published in 1932 from the 1843 manuscript.

In this chapter, we will be exploring the legend of Joe Hill. It is one of the Wobblies' greatest mind games, the story of America's first great working class hero.

The Wobbly Bard

By the time of the Patterson Pageant, Joe Hill, a young Swedish immigrant seaman and saloon piano player, was making a name for himself as a Wobbly song-writer.[16] His earliest known song, "Casey Jones, the Union Scab," a parody of the popular song, was written in 1911 during a strike in San Pedro, California, by shop workers on the Southern Pacific Railroad, where engineers and some other skilled workers continued to operate the trains.[17] It was a satirical and playfully vindictive attack on those workers who violated class solidarity by continuing to work after the strike had been called, a practice referred to in the vernacular of labor as "scabbing." The song had a positive and immediate effect by helping to keep up the strikers' spirits on the picket lines and in the jails where many eventually landed. It was printed on red cards and sold for a strike fund. It quickly became popular among workers in

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[16]Probably the best introduction to Joe Hill is Kornbluh, Chap. 5, "Joe Hill: Wobbly Bard"; see also Gibbs M. Smith, Labor Martyr: Joe Hill (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969); Philip Foner, The Case of Joe Hill (New York: International Publishers, 1965); and Wallace Stegner, "Joe Hill: The Wobblies' 'Troubadour,'" New Republic, 118 (January 5, 1948).

[17]Kornbluh, pp. 133-34.

California, and then spread throughout the nation with immigrant workers, and across the oceans with merchant sailors:

> The workers on the S.P. line to strike sent out a call;
> But Casey Jones, the engineer, he wouldn't strike at all;
> His boiler it was leaking, and its drivers on the bum,
> And his engine and its bearings, they were all out of plumb.
> Casey Jones, kept his junk pile running,
> Casey Jones, was working double time;
> Casey Jones, got a wooden medal,
> For being good and faithful on the S.P. Line.[18]

Another of Hill's early compositions was the famous "pie in the sky" song referred to earlier. "The Preacher and the Slave," sometimes known as "Long Haired Preachers," appeared in the 1911 edition of the I.W.W Songbook, Hill's first contribution to the famous Wobbly songster.[19] It was a parody of the hymn "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and became a popular satire of the Wobbly's principal adversary in the propaganda battles among California's unemployed immigrants, hoboes, and migrant laborers, the Salvation Army. The preachers promised only salvation, or "pie in the sky," while the unemployed and homeless sought food to eat and shelter from the cold. It is considered Hill's masterpiece and it retained its original popularity well into the 1930s. Twelve years after Hill's death the song was included in Carl Sandburg's collection, American Songbag, and from there passed into America's folk traditions.[20]

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., pp. 132-33.

[20]Carl Sandburg, American Songbag (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927), p. 222.

Hill's colorful, lampooning, and sardonic songs dominated the fourth and fifth editions of the Wobbly songbook in 1912 and 1913, and have remained an important part of all subsequent issues. In the few short years before his death in 1915, Hill contributed as many as 25 songs to the "Little Red Songbook," as it was popularly known. The thirteenth edition in 1917 was a special Joe Hill Memorial Edition.[21]

The songbook, formally entitled I.W.W. Songs: Songs of the Workers, and provocatively subtitled To Fan the Flames of Discontent, had begun publication back in 1909 as a tactical spin-off of the famous Wobbly free speech fights out in California.[22] While the free speech campaigns were to become one of the Wobblies' greatest contributions to the tactics of passive resistance, the songbook was to become a lasting contribution to the history of symbolic politics and the culture of protest. Between 1908 and 1912, primarily on the West Coast, the I.W.W. provoked the so-called "free speech movement" in reaction against the unscrupulous practices of employment agencies who preyed upon the unemployed by selling them jobs. These employment agencies often worked in collusion with employers who would insure that the jobs were only temporary, lasting only a few days or weeks at most, forcing workers through a cycle of exploitation

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[21]See Smith, Appendix A, "A Joe Hill Song List Compiled by Archie Green," pp. 231-60.

[22]See Richard Brazer, "The Story of the I.W.W.'s 'Little Red Songbook,'" Labor History, 9 (Winter, 1968), 91-105.

where only the employees and the employment agencies profited.[23]

The I.W.W. began to organize street meetings, speaking out against the unjust practices of the "slave market" and the employment "sharks." Many towns, unsympathetic to the problems of the unemployed and fearing the spread of unionism, quickly passed out ordinances against street speaking. Such a serious breech of basic First Amendment rights could not go unchallenged. Through I.W.W. publications the call went out for help. In response, Wobblies by the thousands flooded into these towns. Then, in an unending procession, each Wob in turn would mount the soapbox in defiance of the ban on street speaking and begin his speech: "My Fellow Workers . . ." He would then be immediately arrested for disorderly conduct and hauled off to jail, only to be immediately replaced by the next speaker. Soon the jails would be overflowing with defiant Wobblies, loudly singing their songs and generally causing as much disruption as possible, paralyzing local court systems in a dramatic test of the Constitution.

The Salvation Army was the Wobblies' greatest competitor for the attention of the street people, and because of it's status as a religious organization, it was often not subject to the ordinances

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[23]See Kornbluh, Chap. 4, "Soapbox Militants"; see also Theodore Schroeder, Free Speech for Radicals (New York: Free Speech League, 1916); and Elizabeth G. Flynn, "The Free Speech Fight at Spokane," International Socialist Review, 10 (December, 1909), 483.

banning street speaking. According to an account by folklorist John Greenway, it was out of this competition with the Salvation Army that Wobblies first grasped the political significance of singing.[24] It seems that one Jack Walsh, an organizer for the Spokane, Washington chapter of the I.W.W., was attempting to recruit the unemployed hoboes and migrant workers into the One Big Union, when the Salvation Army mounted a challenge.

The Army's technique was simple and effective. It would simply march it's band into the crowd surrounding Walsh and drown him in a "cacophony of coronets and tambourines."[25] But Jack Walsh was not one to be easily outwitted. He immediately organized his own brass band, with Mac McClintock (a Wobbly songwriter famous for having written "Hallelujah I'm a Bum!") playing the E-flat baritone horn and a giant lumberjack beating on the bass drum, and took the Salvation Army to task. Wobbly ingenuity eventually proved too much for the marching hymn-singers. The Wobblies would sing their own radical political lyrics to the Salvation Army's old standard hymn tunes. The Salvation Army band might play a familiar hymn like this:

> Hallelujah! Thine the glory,
> Hallelujah! amen;
> Hallelujah! Thine the glory
> Revive us again.[26]

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[24]John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. 173-177.

[25]Ibid., p. 174.

[26]William P. Mackay and John J. Husband, "We Praise Thee, O God" ("Revive Us Again"). See Walter Hines Sims, ed., Baptist

and the Wobbly band would irreverently transfigure the lyrics thusly:

> Hallelujah! I'm a bum!
> Hallelujah! Bum again!
> Hallelujah! Give us a handout
> To revive us again.[27]

The Salvation Army was finally forced to back down and, in the process, Walsh and the I.W.W. had discovered a new organizing tool: union singing.

Building upon the foundations laid down by Walsh and McClintock, the Spokane I.W.W. produced the first edition of the now famous "Little Red Songbook" in 1909. This was preceded by a song card containing four parodies of popular Salvation Army tunes. The songbook would become the Wobbly bible.[28] From the very beginning it was conceived of as a political propaganda device where I.W.W. philosophies could be readily disseminated among politically unsophisticated workers. It was so obviously superior to the traditional leaflets containing "dry-as-dust polemics" that it quickly gained popularity throughout the nation and then made its way across the oceans with merchant seamen and into foreign countries.[29] It was designed to fit easily into the overall pocket

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Hymnal (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956), p. 205.

[27] I.W.W. Songs, 34th ed., 1973, p. 9.

[28] Greenway, p. 176.

[29] Brazier, p. 96.

of the worker for ease of transport among the rambling unemployed, and contained not only songs, but poems and stories as well. Its bright red cover symbolized the radical left. The inside cover of each edition contained a copy of the I.W.W. Preamble, which began with the stirring and provocative lines:

> The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.[30]

A copy of the latest edition of the songbook was given out along with each new membership card. In union meetings it served a function very similar to that of a hymnal in a religious service. Moreover, its pocket size allowed for a portability which made it an invaluable aid at strikes, demonstrations, and even in the jails, forever fanning the flames of discontent, keeping the revolutionary spirit of the Wobblies simmering.

Without a doubt, the single greatest contributor to the "Little Red Songbook" was Joe Hill. In the history of the songbook, Hill's contribution, in terms of quantity as well as quality, is far greater than any of the other famous Wobbly songwriters: Ralph ("Solidarity Forever") Chaplin; Richard Braizer, who participated in the original songbook committee and wrote such classics as "Meet Me In the Jungle, Louie," "They Are All Fighters,"

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[30] I.W.W. Songs, 34th ed., inside front cover.

and "The Eight-Hour Song"; E. S. Nelson, who wrote one of the earliest Wobbly songs, "Workingmen Unite!"; and Jim Connell, who wrote "The Red Flag." In an unpublished study of I.W.W. songs, this author found that, out of a sample of 86 known Wobbly songs, Joe Hill had written 20, or 23.8 percent.[31] This is indeed a remarkable accomplishment when one considers that the overwhelming majority of the songs came either from unknown workers (30 percent), laymen as far as songwriting is concerned, who might contribute a single song in an entire lifetime; or were songs of unknown origin (26 percent), many arising spontaneously at strikes or street meetings. One must keep in mind also that, while the songbook had an active life of 11 years (from 1909-1920), Hill only contributed songs from 1911 to 1915, or about four years. Thus, Joe Hill was clearly the most prolific Wobbly songwriter--no one else even comes close--and is by far the most important protest writer in the history of American Labor.

The Songs of Joe Hill

In a recent work on Hill, laborlorist Gibbs Smith lists 32 songs attributed to Joe Hill.[32] In addition to the 24 songs and two

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[31]See Charles Wayne Hampton, "The Politics of Music: A Study of the Political Song as Used by the Industrial Workers of the World." A Master's thesis submitted to the faculty of the Department of Political Science, Appalachian State University, August, 1977, pp. 84-87.

[32]See Smith, Chap. I, "Joe Hill's Song."

poems that have appeared in Wobbly literature, Smith included three fragments from the memory of an old Wobbly organizer, Louis Moreau, interviewed in 1967 by I.W.W. scholar Fred Thompson: "Martin Welch and Stuart"; "Skookum Ryan, the Walking Boss"; and "We Won't Build No More Railroads for Overalls and Snuff."[33] All three were written for the construction workers' strike against the Canadian Northern Railroad Company in British Columbia in the winter of 1912. Smith also dug up three sentimental love songs, two of which were found among Hill's possessions at the time of his arrest. The third was uncovered in the Joe Hill file of the Archives of the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, Sweden.[34] These songs stand in stark contrast to the class-conscious propaganda of Hill's Wobbly verses and his working class hero image. It seems that Hill could produce pop verses as trite and sentimental as "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" or "Love Me Do." One example should make the point:

> Come take a joy-ride in my aeroplane tonight,
> Way beyond the clouds, where all the stars are shining bright.
> There I'd like to look into your loving eyes of blue,
> And if I should fall, then I'd know I'd fall in love with you.[35]

The quality of the artistry of Hill's music is not really important here. Hill's medium--his LP--was the "Little Red Songbook" and other I.W.W. literature. Hill was a child of print culture. The melody was not as important as the lyric. These songs were

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[33]Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[34]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[35]Ibid., p. 38.

"airs"," written to be sung to the tunes of well-known hymns and popular songs.[36] While most of his melodies were borrowed from Salvation Army hymns and popular show tunes, he did compose some original melodies, most notably "Workers of the World Awaken!" and "The Rebel Girl."

By today's standards, Hill's lyrics are stiff and ideological. Many, like "Casey Jones," are topical and tied to obscure incidents in labor history and may seem medieval to the modern listener. In other words, they are products of an era. The 1912 strike in British Columbia referred to above, for example, was also the inspiration for one of Hill's more well-known songs, "Where the Fraser River Flows":

> Where the Fraser River flows, each fellow worker knows,
> They have bullied and oppressed us, but still our Union grows.
> And we're going to find a way, boys, for shorter hours and better pay, boys!
> And we're going to find a way, boys, where the Fraser River flows.[37]

Hill also wrote a song about the despised A.F.L. leader, John Golden, who attempted to persuade the strikers at Lawrence in 1912 to return to work. It was irreverently written to the tune of the holiness hymn "A Little Talk With Jesus":

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[36]Besides Smith, there are several other good sources on Hill's songs, most notably Kornbluh, Chap. 5; and Barrie Stavis and Frank Harmon, eds., The Songs of Joe Hill (New York: People's Artists, 1955).

[37]I.W.W. Songs, 4th ed., 1912.

A little talk with Golden makes it right, all right;
He'll settle any strike, if there is coin in sight;
Just take him out to dine and ev'rything is fine,
A little talk with Golden makes it right, all right.[38]

Hill's outstanding characteristic, the thing that distinguishes him so from his fellow songwriters, was his humor. His two most enduring songs, "Casey Jones" and "The Preacher and the Slave," both possess a genuine humor and authenticity that has assured them a place in the folklore of the American Left.

Hill's humor always had a rather caustic edge and sometimes a scathing sarcasm. His description of the Salvation Army's "long-haired preachers"--as "holy rollers and jumpers" who "holler, jump and shout" until they get "all your coin on the drum," to deliver only "pie in the sky" in return--is a classic example.[39] The imagery is every bit as compelling as Lennon and McCartney's "Eleanor Rigby" or "The Fool on the Hill."

Most of Hill's satires are mocking and vicious attacks on the false-conscious worker. These bumbling characters--like Casey Jones, Scissor Bill, or Mr. Block--are portrayed as dimwits too stupid to recognize their own oppression:

Oh, Mr. Block, you were born by mistake,
You take the cake, you make me ache.
Tie a rock on your block and then jump in the lake,
Kindly do that for Liberty's sake.[41]

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[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 3rd ed., 1911.

[40]See Beatles Complete (New York: Warner Brothers Publications, Inc., 1976), pp. 224-25, 268-70.

[41]I.W.W. Songs, 4th ed., 1913.

Hill's hymn parodies have the same biting humor. He interposed "pie in the sky" for "in the sweet bye and bye," "There's Power in a Band of Workingmen" for "Power in the Blood of the Lamb," and "Nearer My Job to Thee" for "Nearer My God to Thee."

But Joe Hill did have a more serious side. His lyrics could be quite didactic, as preachy as any holy roller hymn. Always playing the mind guerilla, all his songs carried the predictable political message. As a rule, this was contained in the last verse, where the concluding comments would end with the song's political moral. Hill resolved the problem of the "long-haired preachers" in typical Wobbly style and language, but with a twist of Hill's unique wit:

> Workingmen of all countries unite,
> Side by side for freedom we will fight;
> When the world and its wealth we have gained
> To the grafters we'll sing this refrain:
> You will eat, bye and bye,
> When you've learned how to cook and to fry;
> Chop some wood, 'twill do you good
> And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye.[42]

In other words, Hill's purpose was always "organizational," the goal was always totalization, the quest for the utopian One. In a letter to the editor of Solidarity in November, 1914, Hill explained his (and the Wobblies') philosophy of song:

> A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and

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[42]Ibid., 3rd ed., 1911.

> over; and I maintain that if a person can put a few cold, common sense facts into a song, and dress them up in a cloak of humor to take the dryness off of them, he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read a pamphlet or an editorial on economic science.[43]

Thus, Hill's songs were, in essence, recruiting songs, songs imploring the worker to join the noble cause of the One Big Union. With his music, Hill was always seeking the mystical "solidarity"; always hyping working class consciousness. His songs possessed a clarity of vision and an air of confidence and destiny. He sang of the inevitability of the worker's Commonwealth, his were the songs of a chosen people:

> Organize! O, toilers, come organize your might;
> Then we'll sing one song of the Worker's Commonwealth,
> Full of beauty, full of love and health.[44]

Among Hill's songs one also encounters the controversy over the Wobblies' image as violent anarchists. It is clear that, in principle, the Wobblies advocated non-violence: the "folded arms" philosophy of "Big Bill" Haywood.[45] The history of the I.W.W. is another chapter in the history of passive resistance. The "direct action" tactics pioneered by the Wobblies--the free speech fights, the colorful strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations, and their

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[43]Philip S. Foner, The Letters of Joe Hill (New York: Oak Publications, 1965), p. 167.

[44]I.W.W. Songs, 5th ed., 1913.

[45]For a discussion of Wobbly political tactics see Kornbluh, Chap. 2, "With Folded Arms: The Tactics of Direct Action."

cultural and symbolic approaches to politics--are in the tradition of Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They were anarchists but they were not violent anarchists. The term used in most of the literature is Anarchosyndicalist. They were anarchists in their advocacy of a stateless society and syndicalists in the sense that this stateless society envisioned would be structured around a network of syndicates or unions.

The folded arms philosophy of direct action did have violent possibilities, but in almost every case, the violence was directed against the Wobblies. The hysteria over radical trade unionism did provoke violence, and Wobblies and other radicals suffered many atrocities at the hands of the state police, private security forces hired by factory owners, and vigilantes. The I.W.W. perceived the very conditions of capitalist production, private property, and the wage system, as an institutionalized act of violence perpetrated against the mine and mill workers on a daily basis.

The I.W.W. viewed the world as a violent class struggle, and the apparatus of government was viewed as a major proponent in that struggle. The State, as founding Father Vincent S. John phrased it, "was a committee to look out for the interests of the employers."[46] The Wobblies, therefore, naturally shunned and ridiculed the electorial approach to politics. Many of their constituents were disenfranchized immigrants, aliens, women, and southern blacks. Instead of organizing workers at the capitalist ballot box, the

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[46]Ibid., p. 35.

Wobblies preferred to go directly to the source: the mines, mills, and factories. This is what they meant by "direct action." An I.W.W. publication defined the term this way:

> Direct action means industrial action directly by, for, and of the workers themselves, without the treacherous aid of labor misleaders or scheming politicians. A strike that is initiated, controlled, and settled by the workers directly effected is direct action. . . . Direct action is combined action, directly on the job to secure better job conditions. Direct action is industrial democracy.[47]

But the philosophy of direct action as such does not necessarily imply the use of violence. I.W.W. leaders preferred to strike passively with "folded arms." The "folded arms" doctrine is here carefully articulated by Wobbly organizer Joseph Ettor, in an address to the Lawrence strikers in January of 1912:

> If the workers of the world want to win, all they have to do is recognize their own solidarity. They have nothing to do but fold their arms and the world will stop. The workers are more powerful with their hands in their pockets than all the property of the capitalists. As long as the workers keep their hands in their pockets, the capitalists cannot put theirs there. With passive resistance, with the workers absolutely refusing to move, lying absolutely silent, they are more powerful than all the weapons and instruments that the other side have for attack.[48]

However, the most controversial element of the Wobblies' philosophy of direct action was the concept of "sabotage." The word and the philosophy are derived from the French syndicalist movement of the late nineteenth century. The word sabotage comes

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Smith, p. 6.

from the French word "sabot," meaning "wooden shoe."[49] It seems that the first peasants recruited to work in the mills at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution wore such shoes. During speed-ups, or after years of 18-20 hour workdays in the squalid conditions of those early factories, when the abuse of the boss or overseer became too brutal, these "sabots" sometimes found their way into the machinery. In English this is the rough equivalent of "a monkey wrench in the works."

But the Wobblies, who were great advocates of sabotage, perceived it as another non-violent weapon in the class struggle. To them, destroying dehumanizing private property was sometimes morally justifiable, and tactically expedient. But instead of the violent destruction of property, the Wobblies preferred to think of sabotage as the "conscientious withdrawal of efficiency."[50] In a pamphlet on sabotage, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn explained it this way:

> Sabotage means either to slacken up and interfere with the quantity, or to botch in your skill and to interfere with the quality of capitalist production so as to give poor service. It is something that is fought out within the walls of the shop. Sabotage is not physical violence; sabotage is an internal industrial process. It is simply another form of coercion.[51]

In Wobbly songs, poster art, and Stickerettes; in the logo of their stationary and the mastheads of their newspapers, one finds the

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[49]Kornbluh, p. 37.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Elizabeth G. Flynn, "Sabotage: The Conscious Withdrawal of the Worker's Industrial Efficiency" (Cleveland: I.W.W. Publishing Bureau, 1915), p. 5.

symbols of sabotage: the wooden shoe, or the "sabo cat," a crouching black cat baring its claws.[52] And it is not surprising to find a few sabotage songs among the works of Joe Hill. In typical satirical humor, Hill captured the images of Wobbly sabotage in "Ta-ra-ra Boom De-ay":

> I had a job once threshing wheat,
> Worked sixteen hours with hands and feet.
> And when the moon was shining bright,
> They kept me working all night.
> One moon-light night I hate to tell,
> I "accidently" slipped and fell.
> My pitch-fork went right in between some cog wheels
> Of that thresh machine:
> Ta-ra-ra boom de-ay!
> It made a noise that way,
> And wheels and bolts and hay
> Went flying ev'ry way.
> That stingy rube said,
> "Well! A thousand gone to hell."
> But I did sleep that night,
> I needed it all right.[53]

And more to the point is a poem by Hill first printed in Solidarity (June 27, 1914), entitled "The Rebel's Toast":

> If Freedom's road seems rough and hard,
> And strewn with rocks and thorns,
> Then put your wooden shoes on, pard,
> And you won't hurt your corns.
> To organize and teach, no doubt,
> Is very good--that's true,
> But still we can't succeed without
> The Good Old Wooden Shoe.[54]

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[52]Kornbluh includes several examples of sabotage symbolism in I.W.W. graphic as well as literary arts, pp. 60-64.

[53]I.W.W. Songs, 9th ed., 1916.

[54]Kornbluh, p. 57.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the famous Wobbly organizer, feminist, and later, a Communist Party leader, was a great admirer of Hill's songs. She took an active part in his defense campaign, and they corresponded while he was in prison awaiting execution. One of his last songs, "The Rebel Girl," was writtem for her from his cell. In a letter to Flynn, on the very eve of his execution, he explained the song's inspiration:

> Dear Friend Gurley:
> I have been saying Goodbye so much now that it is becoming monotonous but I just cannot help to send you a few more lines because you have been more to me than a fellow worker. You have been an inspiration and when I composed The Rebel Girl you was right there and helped me all the time. As you furnished the idea I will now that I am gone give you the credit for that song, and be sure to locate a few more Rebel Girls like yourself, because they are needed and needed badly. . . . With a warm handshake across the continent and a last fond Goodbye to all I remain
>
> Yours as Ever,
> Joe Hill[55]

The song's chorus is a lasting tribute to Wobbly women and to radical women everywhere:

> That's the Rebel Girl, that's the Rebel Girl,
> To the Working Class she's a precious pearl.
> She brings courage, pride and joy
> To the fighting Rebel Boy.
> We've had girls before but we need some more
> In the Industrial Workers of the World.
> Yes it's great to fight for freedom
> With a Rebel Girl.[56]

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[55] Smith, p. 174.

[56] I.W.W. Songs, 9th ed., 1916.

Hill's songs were thus a great inspiration to working men and women alike. Ralph Chaplin described Hill's songs this way:

> [they are] as coarse as homespun and as fine as silk; full of lilting laughter and keen-edged satire; full of fine rage and finer tenderness; simple, forceful and sublime songs; songs of and for the worker, written in the only language that he can understand and set to the music of Joe Hill's own heart.[57]

While his songs made him famous, Hill's life remains a mystery. Little is known of his early life, and of his trial and execution for murder, there is much that remains enigmatic.

A Young Swede Named Hillstrom

About all we know about the great Wobbly troubadour and martyr has been elaborately romanticized, embellished with a shiny coat of bright red symbolism, by the mind guerillas of the One Big Union. Even in the face of death, Hill, the greatest mind guerilla of them all, stubbornly clung to the public image of the dedicated revolutionary and idealistic visionary, framed on a murder charge by a corrupt system of justice in an America dominated and controlled by the Robber Barons of the capitalist industrial establishment. In the statements he made for public consumption during the period he spent in jail awaiting trial and execution, Hill was especially vague about his real-life past and perhaps overly enthusiastic about his

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[57]Ralph Chaplin, "Joe Hill: A Biography," Industrial Pioneer (November, 1923), 23.

martyred future. To a request for biographical data, he craftily replied:

> Biography you say? No. Let's not spoil good writing paper with such nonsense--only the here and now is of concern to me. I am "a citizen of the world" and I was born on a planet called the earth. The exact spot where I first saw the light of day is of such slight importance that it deserves no comment--I haven't much to say about myself. Will only say that I have done what little I could to bring the flag of freedom closer to its goal.[58]

And on the eve of his execution, the Wobbly poet seemed determined as ever to make his death a grand heroic episode in the proletarianization of the planet earth:

> Tomorrow I expect to make a trip to the planet Mars and, if so, will immediately commence to organize the Mars canal workers into the I.W.W. and we will sing the good old songs so loud that the learned star-gazers on earth will get positive proof that the planet Mars is really inhabited.[59]

The legend that sprang from Hill's ashes was only partly of his own doing. Others contributed much. The emerging legend was captured in song and story and circulated widely throughout the Western world. Here is one of the more beautiful--and typical--examples. It is from John Dos Passos' novel, 1919:

> A young Swede named Hillstrom went to sea, got himself calloused hands on sailingships and tramps, learned English

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[58]These comments appeared in a letter from Hill to Oscar W. Larson, September 30, 1915, and first published in Revolt (December, 1915), 12; also in Foner, The Letters of Joe Hill.

[59]Joe Hill to editor Ben Williams, Solidarity (October 9, 1915); Kornbluh, p. 127.

in the fo'c'stle of the steamers that make the run from Stockholn to Hull, dreamed the Swede's dream of the West; when he got to America they gave him a job polishing cuspidors in a Bowery saloon.

He moved west to Chicago and worked in a machineshop.

He moved west and followed the harvest, hung around employment agencies, paid out many a dollar for a job in a construction camp, walked out many a mile when the grub was too bum, or the boss too tough, or too many bugs in the bunkhouse; read Marx and the I.W.W. Preamble and dreamed about forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

He was in California for the S.P strike ("Casey Jones, two locomotives, Casey Jones"), used to play the concertina outside the bunkhouse door, after supper, evenings ("Long-haired preachers come out every night"), had a knack for setting rebel words to tunes ("And the union makes us strong").

Along the coast in cookshacks flophouses jungles wobblies hoboes bindlestiffs began singing Joe Hill's songs. They sang 'em in the county jails of the State of Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, in the bullpens in Montana and Arizona, sang 'em in Walla Walla, San Quentin, and Leavenworth, forming the structure of the new society within the jails of the old.

At Bingham, Utah, Joe Hill organized the workers of the Utah Construction Company in the One Big Union, won a new wagescale, shorter hours, better grub. (The angel Moroni didn't like laborорganizers any better than the Southern Pacific did.)

The angel Moroni moved the hearts of the Mormons to decide it was Joe Hill shot a grocer named Morrison. The Swedish consul and President Wilson tried to get him a new trial, but the angel Moroni moved the hearts of the Supreme Court of the State of Utah to sustain the verdict of guilty. He was in jail a year, went on making up songs. In November 1915 he was stood up against the wall in the jail yard in Salt Lake City.

"Don't mourn for me, organize," was the last word he sent out to the workingstiffs of the I.W.W. Joe Hill stood up against the wall of the jail yard, looked into the muzzles of the guns, and gave the word to fire.

They put him in a black suit, put a stiff collar around his neck and a bow tie, shipped him to Chicago for a bangup funeral, and photographed his handsome stony mask staring into the future.

The first of May they scattered his ashes to the wind.[60]

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[60]John Dos Passos, 1919 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), pp. 456-57.

Dos Passos' sublime prose, unfortunately, captures only the romanticized edges of Joe Hill's story. For a proper perspective, we must dig a little deeper. Recent research has begun to fill in at least some of the details behind the walls of the Hill legend, revealing one of the more interesting and significant mind games of the American Left, a stunning example of the mind guerilla.

He was born Joel Hägglund On October 7, 1879, in Gävle, Sweden. In his childhood, he learned the skills that would enable him to emerge as the great Wobbly minstrel. He grew up in a large and musical family. Joel was known to have played the piano and organ to accompany the singing of his eight brothers and sisters. As a youngster, Joel also learned to play the accordian, the guitar, and his favorite instrument, the violin.[61]

When Joel was only 10 years old, his father died of injuries received while working on the railroad. This abruptly forced young Joel out into the world to seek employment and to begin the long struggle for survival. With his mother's death 10 years later, the family simply disintegrated. Joel, along with his brother Paul, emigrated to America.

They arrived in this country in the winter of 1902. Joel remained in New York City for about a year, working odd jobs and looking for the path to the future. He then moved on to Chicago,

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[61]The most recent discoveries about Hill's early life in Sweden come from Ture Nerman, Arbetarsangaren, Joe Hill, Mordare Eller Martyr? (Stockholm: Federativs Forlag, 1951), cited by Smith, p. 43.

where he may have been fired from a job in a machine shop for attempting to organize the workers there. We have no way of knowing for certain, but it may have been here that he changed his name to Joe Hill in an effort to get past an employer's black list.[62] In any event, he appears to have travelled widely--to Philadelphia, the Dakotas, Spokane, Portland, and San Francisco--searching for employment. In 1905, he sent a Christmas card home to his sisters in Sweden from Cleveland, Ohio.[63] In April, 1906 he sent a letter to his hometown newspaper in Sweden describing his experiences during the famous San Francisco earthquake of that year.[64] He had apparently joined the millions of homeless migrants, hobos, and bindle stiffs who were roaming the country looking for work, or a handout where a job could not be found.

In 1910, Joe Hill joined the San Pedro, California chapter of the I.W.W.[65] The anarchosyndicalist I.W.W was intended as a radical alternative to the mainstream unionism of the American Federation of Labor.[66] Under the conservative leadership of Samuel

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[62]This account of Hill's political activities in America before his arrest is from Nerman. While it may be the most reliable in terms of objectivity, it is not supported by other sources.

[63]Card from Joel to Ester Hägglund, 1905, in a collection of Joe Hill material in Stockholm, Sweden; cited by Smith, p. 49.

[64]Joel Hägglund to Gefle Dagblad, dated April 24, 1906, published May 16, 1906. The earthquake occurred April 18, 1906; cited by Nerman, p. 41; also ibid., pp. 49-50.

[65]Most sources agree on this date. See Smith, p. 52; Kornbluh, p. 127; Foner (1965), p. 9; and Stavis and Harmon, p. 3.

[66]There are many excellent histories of the I.W.W. See Paul

Gompers, the American Labor movement was being carefully steered in the direction of reformism and compromise with management. The primary goal was limited material gains for a growing aristocracy of skilled workers. Gompers expressed little concern for class consciousness and solidarity, or the workers' utopia. The forces behind the I.W.W., on the other hand, were more concerned with fundamental changes that would liberate all the workers, regardless of skill level, by humanizing the work place.[67] To paraphrase a popular slogan from the Lawrence strike, the Wobblies wanted "bread and roses too."[68] They came to represent and attract mostly unskilled, unemployed immigrants, itinerant workers, hoboes, and homeless drifters; the great and desperate underclass of American society at the turn of the century.

Most I.W.W. activities were centered in the Western states. I.W.W. organizers were active among merchant sailors, dock workers, railroadmen, and lumberjacks. The Wobbly rank and file were recruited from a rough and tumble breed. In many ways they consisted of the last of the American frontiersmen. These hopeless and economically frustrated men were sometimes capable of violence. As

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F. Brissenden, The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919); Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4, The Industrial Workers of the World (New York: International Publishers, 1965); Patrick Renshaw, The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967); Robert Colin, Bread and Roses Too: Studies of the Wobblies (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1969); and Melvyn Dubofsky, We Shall Be All (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

[67]Diggins, pp. 45-46.

[68]Kornbluh, p. 164.

Ralph Chaplin has remarked, they preferred to go down slugging rather than to submit to wage slavery.[69] But, as we have seen, their organized political activities were in principle non-violent. And yet, the image of violence would always haunt them.

The I.W.W.'s first national publicity came from its free speech fights in California, Oregan, and Washington, where the Wobblies wrote another chapter in the history of passive resistance. The Wobblies' participation in the strikes in the Northeastern textile centers of Lawrence, Massachusetts and Patterson, New Jersey (in 1912 and 1913) represent the high water mark of their national activity. These colorful, dramatic, and festive strikes were a model for all modern media radicalism to follow.

But the Wobblies' greatest contribution to American radicalism was their advocacy and use of ritualized singing for political purposes. An observer at the Lawrence strike reported that:

> It is the first strike I ever saw which sang. I shall not soon forget the curious lift, the strange sudden fire of the mingled nationalities at the strike meetings when they broke into the universal language of song. And not only at the meetings did they sing, but in the soup houses and in the streets. I saw one group of women strikers who were peeling potatoes at a relief station suddenly break into the swing of the "Internationale." They have a whole book of songs fitted to familiar tunes--"The Eight Hour Song," "The Banner of Labor," "Workers, Shall the Masters Rule Us?" But the favorite of all was the "Internationale."[70]

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[69] An excerpted talk given by Chaplin on Joe Glazer, Songs of The Wobblies (Collector Records CR 1927, 1977).

[70] Kornbluh, p. 158.

Perhaps more than anything else, the I.W.W. came to embody this proud sense of class harmony, purpose, and oneness, so vividly symbolized by shared voices singing the "Internationale" in confident defiance with clasped hands and heads held high:

> Arise ye pris'ners of starvation
> Arise ye wretched of the earth
> For justice thunders condemnation
> A better world's in birth.
> No more tradition's chains shall bind us
> Arise ye slaves no more in thrall
> The earth shall rise on new foundations
> We have been naught, we shall be all.[71]

In other words, the I.W.W. was much more than a mere union or radical political movement. The Wobblies became a symbol; the reification of working class hope. Its dramatic defiance of the capitalist establishment in America, and the heroic activities of nameless Wobblies in the fight for industrial justice, resulted in a romantic image and a body of literature and folklore unprecedented and unsurpassed in the history of American radicalism. To a very large extent, the legend of Joe Hill, the Wobbly bard and hero who died the martyr's death, has been responsible for the continued romanticism of the Wobblies in the folklore of the American Left.

Joe Hill took an active part in the I.W.W. He was the secretary of the San Pedro local for several years,[72] and he appears to have participated in many of the union's battles. He may have

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[71] I.W.W. Songs, 34th ed., pp. 6-7.

[72] Smith, p. 52.

been involved in the free speech campaigns in Spokane, in 1909, and in Fresno in 1911.[73] But this may just be all part of the legend. It has been said that he was captured and beaten by vigilantes in Oceanside, California while on his way to the San Diego free speech fights, sometime in 1912.[74]

Hill's other political activities may have included organizing a sabotage plan in an unnamed factory in 1909 by encouraging the workers to "lubricate" their machines with sand."[75] He may have been involved in the 1912 strike against construction contractors on the Canadian Northern Railroad. We can be fairly certain he at least visited the strikers' camp near Yale, British Columbia, where he wrote the song "Where the Fraser River Flows."[76] Some say he took part in the San Pedro dock workers' strike of 1912.[77] And, although he later denied it, he appears to have been involved in an abortive revolution in Mexico in 1911.[78] But it is difficult to assess the authenticity of such reports, since most were based on hearsay and circumstantial evidence.

But one thing we do know for certain is that, by the time of his arrest in 1913, Hill had become, in his own words, "a true-blue rebel":[79] A dedicated, skilled, and seasoned revolutionary, as well

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[73] Smith, p. 55.

[74] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

[75] Ibid., pp. 50-52.

[76] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[77] Kornbluh, p. 127.

[78] Smith, pp. 53-54.

[79] Ibid., p. 172.

as an experienced mind guerilla. So that, from the point of view of the authorities of the State of Utah, he had also become a threat to social order and justice.

The Angel Moroni

Sometime in the fall of 1913, Joe Hill went to Utah. The Legend has it that he went there to help organize the workers at the United Construction Company in Bingham, near Salt Lake City.[80] Other reports say that he had gone there to visit a relative.[81] Again, we just do not know. The most recent scholarship indicates that he may have worked for awhile in a mine in the mountains outside of Salt Lake City.[82] It was here that he may have met an old friend, Otto Applequist, and their fates became intertwined. By the year's end, he and Applequist were apparently staying at the home of some friends, the Eselius brothers, in a suburb of Salt Lake City.[83]

On Saturday, January 10, 1914, Joe Hill left the Eselius home sometime between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. He did not return home until around 1:00 a.m. the following morning. His activities during this evening have never been adequately explained. All that is known for certain is that Hill visited the home of a Dr. Frank M. McHugh

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[80]Dos Passos, p. 456.

[81]Chaplin, "Joe Hill: A Biography," pp. 23-26.

[82]Without doubt, the most objective, scholarly, and complete work to date on Hill's crime, trial, and execution is Smith's Labor Martyr: Joe Hill. I have thus relied heavily upon this work. However, whenever possible, I will cite the original sources.

[83]Ibid., p. 63.

shortly after 11:30 p.m., suffering from a bullet wound in the chest. He told the doctor that he had been wounded by "a friend" who thought he had "insulted" his wife.[84] He never backed away from this story and he continually refused to provide further details. It was in the mystery of this evening that the legend was to take root.

Earlier that same night, shortly before 10:00 p.m., as John Morrison and his two sons, Merlin and Arling, were closing their grocery store in downtown Salt Lake City, two masked men entered the store. One was tall, the other was short. As they entered the store, one shouted, "We've got you now!" There was an exchange of gunfire. Mr. Morrison and Arling were killed, and one of the attackers was apparently wounded. Merlin Morrison was the only witness who lived.[85]

Since the two men fled immediately, without taking anything from the store, their motive appears to have been revenge--not robbery. It seems that Mr. Morrison had been a policeman for several years before becoming a grocer and had arrested many men during that time period. There is reason to believe that some may have sought revenge. He had been attacked on two previous occasions. It was widely known that he lived in fear of retaliation.[86]

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[84] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

[85] Ibid., p. 71.

[86] Ibid.

Approximately two hours later, Joe Hill turned up at Dr. McHugh's office, which was only about four blocks from the Morrison store. After dressing the wound, the doctor was helping Hill put his shirt back on when a gun and shoulder holster fell from his clothing. He said that he has wrestled the gun from his assailant and kept it as a souvenir. This was almost certainly a fabrication because, during the trial, evidence was produced which seemed to indicate that Hill owned the gun he carried that night.[87] While Hill was being driven back to the Eselius home, the car developed engine trouble. When the driver got out to crank the engine, Hill threw the gun out of the window. The gun was never found and Hill never explained why he decided to get rid of it.[88] When he returned home, Hill awoke Applequist, his shorter companion. They had a brief talk and then Applequist left the house, never to be seen or heard from again.[89]

The next morning Dr. McHugh read about the Morrison murders and decided to report Hill's injuries to the police. Then, in co-operation with the police, McHugh returned to the Eselius home to change Hill's dressing and to administer a shot of morphine for pain. The shot rendered Hill unconscious and the police were able to move in and capture him.[90]

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[87] Ibid., p. 65.

[88] Ibid., p. 66.

[89] Ibid., p. 67.

[90] Ibid., p. 75.

As the police entered his room, Hill made a sudden movement with his hand to reach for his hankerchief. One of the officers, thinking he was reaching for a gun, opened fire, wounding Hill in the right shoulder and right hand.[91] Afterward, the room was searched, but no gun was found. On Tuesday, January 13, 1914, Joe Hill was taken, wounded and bleeding, to the Salt Lake County jail.[92]

He was formerly charged with first degree murder on January 20. It appears that he gave his name as Joseph Hilstrom, for that is the name which appears in the court records and in the press accounts of the trial. He was arraigned on January 27, and entered a plea of "not guilty."[93]

The Trial

The trial began on Wednesday, June 17, 1914, six months after his arrest.[94] Since he had no money to hire a lawyer, he had requested to conduct his own defense. However, shortly after the preliminary hearing, a young attorney, E. D. McDougall, went to visit Hill in jail and offered to defend him free of charge.[95]

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[91]Smith, p. 75, says only that "the shot, barely missing Hill's chest, struck his hand, shattering the knuckles." Kornbluh, p. 128, simply says that "one fired a shot which grazed Hill's shoulder and went through his right hand." According to Foner, The Case of Joe Hill, p. 21, Hill was reported to have said: ". . . a bullet passed right over my chest, grazing my shoulder and penetrating my right hand through my knuckles, crippling me for life." From this I have inferred that it was Hill's right shoulder that was wounded.

[92]Ibid., p. 75.

[93]Ibid., p. 78.

[94]Ibid., p. 84.

[95]Ibid., p. 83.

The trial lasted for 21 days. It became a media event, attracting the attention of both the national and international press. Hill appears to have put on quite a show. On the third day of the trial, in a dramatic outburst, he discharged his counsel and demanded the right to conduct his own defense.[96]

While he insisted he was innocent, he refused to testify in his own behalf, saying he would rather die than reveal the details of his activities on the night of the murders.[97] Some say it was his naive idealism that led him to believe that, in America, he would be presumed innocent until proven guilty, with the burden of proof resting squarely on the shoulders of the prosecution. It was, therefore, not necessary for him to be concerned with the practical problem of his defense. Perhaps his utopian mentality led him to believe that right was on his side and justice would surely prevail. Others say that his public statements concerning his belief that "justice would prevail" was merely the ideological ploy of a guilty man who was committed to the cause of the union and seeking martyrdom to further the cause of the oppressed and exploited masses.[98]

A lawyer provided by the I.W.W., O. N. Hilton, took over Hill's defense on June 19. The press now began to play up Hill's I.W.W. connections and the myth-making process began in earnest.[99]

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[96] Ibid., pp. 85-856.

[97] Ibid., p. 93.

[98] Ibid., p. 81.

[99] Ibid., pp. 89-91.

Although he could not be positively identified, he had no known motive, and the bullet which passed through his body could not be found in the Morrison store, the jury was not convinced of his innocence. The circumstantial evidence was too strong: an unexplained gunshot wound received on the same night as the murders, and in the vicinity of the Morrison store. To those on the right, he was a subversive and a criminal, and it was obvious that he was guilty of the murders. To those on the left, it was just as obvious that he was being framed because of his radical songs and his affiliation with the I.W.W.[100] Out of this controversy the legend began to grow and develop.

On Saturday, June 28, Joe Hill was found guilty of first degree murder. It was probably his unwillingness to cooperate, his defiant attitude, and his courtroom antics that moved the jury to convict him. On July 8, he was sentenced to death. He was given a choice of being hanged or shot to death. He is said to have replied dryly to the judge: "I'll take shooting. I'm used to that."[101]

His attorney immediately filed a motion for a new trial and the case was appealed to the Utah State Supreme Court. His attorneys argued that the State had failed to establish, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Joe Hill had murdered the Morrisons. The court asked for more evidence. Hill was asked to testify,

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[100]Ibid., pp. 98-102.

[101]Ibid., p. 102.

but he refused. The request for a new trial was denied.[102]

Then they applied to the Utah Board of Pardons for commutation of the sentence to life in prison. They argued that the evidence was not strong enough to take a man's life. Requests (and demands) to save Joe Hill flooded into the Board from union locals, private citizens, and various organizations opposed to capital punishment.[103] The board denied the commutation, but offered to free Hill if he would just reveal--in confidence to his lawyers only--the circumstances behind his wound. Again, Hill refused to cooperate, saying:

> I do not want my death sentence commuted to life imprisonment and I am not clamoring for a pardon; I do, however, want a new trial--a fair trial. If I can not have a new trial, I am willing to give my blood as a martyr that others may be afforded fair trials.[104]

The legend was beginning to take control of what was left of Joe Hill's life.

They next appealed directly to Utah's Governor Spry for executive clemency. Letters began to pour into the Governor's office at the rate of 200 per day, but he would not give in to public pressure. Then President Wilson was asked, by the Swedish minister to the United States, to intervene in Hill's behalf. The President telegraphed the Governor and, reluctantly, Spry granted

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[102]Ibid., pp. 102-13.

[103]Ibid., pp. 135-38.

[104]Ibid., p. 141.

a stay of execution so that the case could be reviewed by the Swedish minister.[105]

The Board of Pardons then reconvened to hear the appeal by the Swedish minister. Once again, they denied the motion for a new trial. Again, they demanded "tangible evidence," and, once more, Hill refused to cooperate. The execution was finally set for November 19, 1915.[106]

The movement for Joe Hill's release then took to the streets. In New York City a huge "Joe Hill Protest Meeting" was held on November 8 and an appeal for help was sent to President Wilson. During the next week, 30,000 marched in Minneapolis in protest of Joe Hill's execution. On November 16, Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Labor, wired a resolution to President Wilson, adopted by the thirty-fifth annual convention of that union, appealing for Joe Hill's life. Even Helen Keller sent a telegram to the President, pleading for the life of Joe Hill.[107] On November 17--just two days before the execution--the President again wired Governor Spry, appealing for Hill's life. The Governor, annoyed by Wilson's interference, refused to back down.[108] Nothing would stop them now.

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[105]Ibid., pp. 144-54.

[106]Ibid., pp. 160-61.

[107]Ibid., pp. 164-67.

[108]Ibid., p. 168.

The Execution

All through the evening of November 19--the night before the execution--protest demonstrations were held. There was a mass demonstration that evening in downtown Salt Lake City. Speakers eloquently proclaimed Joe Hill's innocence and the injustice of his trial. After the speeches, Joe Hill's songs were sung by the great masses in unison. Late into the night the crowd was heard chanting, "and Joe Hill will be shot in the morning," loudly answering themselves: "Not if we can help it."[109] Somewhere along the way, someone was reported to have shouted the words that were to give the legend its strength and its endurance: "Joe Hillstrom will never die, do you hear it everybody, Joe Hillstrom will never die."[110]

On the eve of his execution, Joe Hill was interviewed by the local press, who found him quite calm and reserved, showing no signs of nervousness. He was reported to have said: "What do I expect to accomplish by my situation? Well, it won't do the I.W.W. any harm and it won't do the state of Utah any good."[111] He had already assumed the role of the martyr.

He then wrote his famous farewell message to "Big Bill" Haywood, president of the I.W.W.:

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[109]Reported in the Salt Lake Herald-Republican, November 19, 1915; see ibid., p. 171.

[110]Reported in Los Angeles Times, November 19, 1915; ibid.

[111]Salt Lake Herald-Republican, November 19, 1915; ibid., p. 172.

> Goodbye Bill: I die like a true-blue rebel. Don't waste time in mourning--organize! Its a hundred miles from here to Wyoming. Could you arrange to have my body hauled to the state line to be buried? I don't want to be found dead in Utah.[112]

And around 10:00 p.m., he handed a poem through the bars of his cell to a guard. It was his last will:

> My will is easy to decide,
> For there is nothing to divide.
> My kin don't need to fuss and moan--
> "Moss does not cling to a rolling stone."
>
> My body?--Oh!--If I could choose,
> I would to ashes it reduce,
> And let the merry breezes blow
> My dust to where some flowers grow.
>
> Perhaps some fading flower then
> Would come to life and bloom again,
> This is my last and final will.
> Good luck to all of you,
> Joe Hill.[113]

He woke about 5:00 a.m. on the morning of his execution. It was reported that he broke a broom handle to serve as a weapon.

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[112]Telegram: Hill to William D. Haywood, November 18, 1915; first published in Salt Lake Herald-Republican, November 19, 1915. See ibid; also in Foner, Letters to Joe Hill, p. 84.

[113]According to Barry Stavis, The Man Who Never Died (New York: Haven Press, 1954), Hill wrote "My Last Will" during an interview in his cell with a reporter from the Salt Lake City Herald Tribune on the afternoon of November 18, 1915. The reporter asked how Hill would dispose of his effects. Hill replied: "I have nothing to dispose of . . . . But I have a will to make and I'll scribble it. I'll send it to the world in care of Ed Rowan and my I.W.W. friends." According to Kornbluh, p. 146, "My Last Will" was first published in the International Socialist Review in December, 1915 and then in the ninth edition of the I.W.W. Songbook (March, 1916). Bill Haywood included it in a letter sent out to all I.W.W. locals with instructions about scattering Hill's ashes to the winds on the following May 1 (1916).

Then, using his bedding, he tied the door to his cell shut, and put his mattress up against the door. When the guards tried to break through his barricade, he fought them off with the sharp end of the broom handle. By the time the executioners came for him he had bloodied one of the guards and taken a night stick from another. He finally gave up, saying simply: "Well, I'm through, but you can't blame a man for fighting for his life."[114]

Then he was taken to the prison yard and strapped into a chair. "I will show you how to die," he said, "I have a clear conscience."[115] A mask was placed over his eyes and a white paper target was placed over his heart. Then the attending guards stepped back. Hill tossed his head back, attempting to see from under his mask. To some of his friends he thought were there to witness his execution, he shouted, "I'm going now boys. Good-by!" Although no one was there to listen, he shouted again, "good-by boys!" An officer began the sequence of commands: "Ready, aim . . ." Then Hill called out, "Fire--go on and fire!" A smile spread over his face. The officer commanded, "Fire!" And then the shots were heard. There was a thud in the middle of Joe Hill's chest. The white paper target turned red. The smile faded from his face, his body stiffened, then relaxed and hung limp. His spirit had finally been released into martyrdom.[116]

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[114] Salt Lake Herald-Republican, November 20, 1915; Smith, p. 175.

[115] Ibid., p. 177.

[116] Ibid.

At 7:45 a.m., on November 19, 1915, Joseph Hilstrom was pronounced dead.[117] But the Legend of Joe Hill, the poet and singer who was "framed and murdered" by the authorities in the state of Utah, had just come to life.

The Funeral

In the weeks leading up to Hill's execution, the I.W.W. organization network had begun to prepare for Hill's canonization. They were determined to see that his last will was carried out.

First, there was a funeral service held in Salt Lake City on November 21, then another, much bigger one, after the body arrived in Chicago. The service in Chicago was held on November 25, Thanksgiving Day.[118] It was during these services that the myth-making process really got underway. The program covers at the funeral read:

In Memorium Joe Hill
We Never Forget,
Murdered by the Authorities of the State of Utah,
November 19, 1915[119]

Thousands of people turned out to see Joe Hill's remains, and to hear him proclaimed a martyr, and to hear his executioners denounced as murderers. In Chicago, there was almost a festive air. Many wore red streamers around their necks, as if to say, "We'll

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., pp. 181-90.

[119] Ibid., p. 183.

keep the red flag flying here."[120] Many more wore buttons which read: "He died a Martyr." And, as always, his songs ("Casey Jones, got a job in heaven; Casey Jones, was doin mighty fine . . . "[121]), were sung by the mourners.[122]

After the funeral, the procession flowed through the streets of Chicago, like a giant human serpent, the crowd spontaneously singing Hill's songs one after another. At the cemetery, the singing went on long into the night.[123]

The next day, Joe Hill's body was photographed for the final time and then placed on a stone slab and pushed into a blast furnace. His ashes were collected, placed into envelopes, and distributed to I.W.W. locals in every state of the Union--except Utah--and then to many countries throughout the world: from South America to New Zealand; from the Soviet Union to South Africa. On the first of May, 1916, in fulfillment of his last will, his ashes were ceremoniously released into the winds of time.[124]

The Decline of the I.W.W.

By the time of Hill's death the I.W.W. was already in a serious decline from which it would never recover. The years 1912-13 had been

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[120] From a Wobbly song by Jim Connell, "The Red Flag," I.W.W. Songs, 1st ed., 1909.

[121] From Hill's "Casey Jones, the Union Scab," I.W.W. Songs, 4th ed., 1912.

[122] Smith, p. 184.

[123] Ibid., p. 187.

[124] Ibid., p. 188.

the peak years for the I.W.W. as a viable political force in America.[125] Joe Hill's execution and the publicity that surrounded it was, in a sense, the last desperate gasp of militant enthusiasm for the Wobblies and the radical left in America generally. The spirit of patriotism that swept the country during the First World War proved fatal to the pacifist and anarchist views of the Wobblies. Many Wobblies fell victim to mass war hysteria and vigilante violence.[126] Joe Hill's execution came to symbolize capitalist terrorism and was but a prelude of things to come.

The I.W.W. was, in principle, opposed to the war in Europe. It was perceived as a war among capitalist industrialists, fought by the disinherited working classes to protect the interests of property. Moreover, the utopian vision of the One Big Union--the industrially united working class world--simply could not incorporate the images of violent conflict among belligerent national entities. As Wobbly organizer J. P. Thompson put it:

> In the broad sense, there is no such thing as a foreigner. We are all native-born members of this planet and for members of it to be divided into groups or units and taught that each nation is better than others leads to clashes and world war. We ought to have in place of national patriotism, the idea that one people is better than another, a broader concept--that of international solidarity.[127]

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[125] See Brissenden, p. 283.

[126] See Kornbluh, pp. 316-25; also Len De Caux, The Living Spirit of the Wobblies (New York: International Publishers, 1978), Chap. 14, "Repression."

[127] Walker C. Smith, The Everett Massacre: A History of the Class Struggle in the Lumber Industry (Chicago: n.d.), p. 183; cited in Kornbluh, p. 316.

However, back in the real world, the I.W.W.'s national organization, fearing the repression that was inevitable anyway, prudently decided not to formally oppose the war effort or the re-institution of the military draft.[128] Bill Haywood stated their carefully chosen stance on the war:

> It's true that we think there is only one fight in the world, and that is between capital and labor. It's true that we are not interested in nationalities. We will fight for German workers or French workers or Norwegian workers just as hard as we will fight for American workers. But do you think we want to see the Prussian military system prevail? How would we stand to gain anything from that?[129]

Many rank and file Wobblies eventually served in the Armed Forces or in war-related industries. However, the more militant did agitate against the draft, and some refused to register or left the country, fleeing across the border into Mexico.[130]

In April, 1917, after the United States entered the war, the serious repression began in earnest.[131] Throughout the summer, an organized reign of terror, fueled by war hysteria, poured down ruthlessly upon the I.W.W. Perceived as a threat to national security during a time of war, the War Department quickly moved to suppress their activities and to destroy their base of organization.[132]

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[128]Ibid., p. 317.

[129]"What Haywood Says of the I.W.W.," Survey, 38 (August 11, 1917), p. 429.

[130]Ibid., p. 318.

[131]De Caux, p. 129.

[132]Kornbluh, p. 318.

The state governments were quick to go along. Between 1917 and 1920, 21 states and two territories passed criminal syndicalist and criminal anarchist laws, declaring open season on Wobblies and all other radicals and undesirable elements.[133] The army, the state troopers, local police, private security forces, and, the most ruthless of all, armed bands of super-patriotic vigilantes, were simultaneously released upon the I.W.W.

The nation's press went along with the witch hunts, depicting the I.W.W. as lawless, subversive saboteurs. The New York Tribune hinted at a German connection behind the I.W.W.[134] An editorial in the Cleveland News paraphrased the nation's Wobbly hysteria: "While the country is at war, the only room it can afford I.W.W.'s is behind bars."[135] An editorial in the Tulsa, Oklahoma Daily World argued that:

> . . . The first step in the whipping of Germany is to strangle the I.W.W.'s. Kill them, just like you would kill any other kind of a snake. Don't scotch 'em; kill 'em dead. It is no time to waste money on trials and continuances and things like that. All that is necessary is the evidence and a firing squad.[136]

In many parts of the country, this is just about what was happening. Even President Wilson, that reluctant warrior and symbol of America's war conscience, is said to have remarked to his attorney general:

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[133] Ibid., p. 321.

[134] Ibid., p. 317.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

"The I.W.W.'s certainly are worthy of being suppressed."[137]

Perhaps the I.W.W. among other radical groups was singled out because it had become so visible in its militancy. Its public image as violent anarchists, made the I.W.W., symbolically, a perfect target in the war against internal subversion. Throughout the summer of 1917, there were raids on I.W.W. headquarters, halls, and members' homes around the nation. Leaders and organizers were arrested and charged with interfering with the war effort. Truck loads of membership records, Wobbly literature and paraphernalia, minutes of meetings, as well as official and personal correspondence, were hauled away to be later used against them in government trials.[138]

By December, all of the I.W.W.'s major and secondary leaders were incarcerated, including Vincent St. John, Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tressca, Auturo Giovannitti, Joe Ettor, and Ben Williams.[139] Throughout the country, I.W.W. property had been confiscated or destroyed. The union's organizational and communications network was severely damaged, if not completely destroyed.

Of those arrested and tried, 15 got 20-year sentences, 35 were sentenced to 10 years, 33 got five years, and 12 received sentences of a year and a day.[140] They were fined a total of $2,300,000.[141] For all practical purposes, the repression virtually wiped out the I.W.W.

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[137] De Caux, p. 131.

[138] Ibid., p. 129.

[139] Ibid., p. 136.

[140] Kornbluh, p. 320.

[141] Ibid.

After the war, the Harding Administration finally gave in to public pressures and released all political prisoners by the end of 1923.[142] But, by this time, the I.W.W. in particular, and the American Left generally, had been dealt a severe blow. While the I.W.W. as an ongoing political movement was almost completely destroyed in the Red Scare of the First World War, it persists to this day, its headquarters on North Sheffield Street in Chicago, a pitiful shell of the once militant and glorious One Big Union.[143]

And yet the anarchist spirit and the syndicalist vision of the Wobblies have lived on and even prospered in twentieth century America's freshly emerging culture of protest. Through the turmoil of the thirties and on into the sixties, the spirit of the Wobblies thrived. And the songs of Joe Hill and the legend of his martyrdom were to form an essential part of that culture and that vision.

Why Joe Hill?

Why did the mind guerillas of the I.W.W. single out Joe Hill to carry their message into the future? This is a very difficult question upon which we may only speculate. Some mystery will perhaps always remain. There were other public personages and living legends who could have carried the red flag into the thirties. Bill Haywood or Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, for example, were fine Wobbly specimens

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[142] Ibid., p. 325.

[143] This address was established by a phone call to the IWW administrative headquarters in Chicago (312-549-5054) by the author on March 1, 1983. The full address is I.W.W. General

and selflessly dedicated organizers, soapboxers, and lecturers for the cause of the One Big Union. Flynn had a long and distinguished radical career, first as the foremost woman organizer of the I.W.W., and then as an officer in the American Communist Party.[144] She died in 1964, one of the last veterans of the Wobbly era.[145] Haywood's story is more tragic. In 1921, he and eight other Wobbly defendants in criminal syndicalism trials jumped bail and fled to Soviet Russia where he died, disillusioned and broken, in May of 1928.[146] Both Haywood and Flynn were great Wobbly statesmen, very prominent and respected radical politicians. But their lives simply lacked the drama of Hill's. And the circumstances of their deaths did not make martyrs of them.

But there were other Wobbly martyrs. The reactionary terror of the repression during the Great War gave the world two more I.W.W. martyrs. Frank Little, a veteran Wobbly activist, was attacked and beaten by vigilantes after delivering a speech in Butte, Montana, in July, 1917.[147] Little was abducted at gunpoint from his boarding

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Administration, 3435 N. Sheffield Street, #202, Chicago, Illinois, 60657.

[144]Kornbluh, p. 214; see also Flynn's autobiography, I Speak My Own Piece (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1955).

[145]Smith, p. 125.

[146]Kornbluh, p. 324; see also Haywood's memoirs, Bill Haywood's Book (New York: International Publishers, 1929).

[147]Ibid., p. 306; also De Caux, pp. 126-28.

house room in the middle of the night. They tied a rope around his neck, dragged him behind their car to the outskirts of town, where he was lynched. His body was left hanging from a railroad trestle, tagged with a card bearing the vigilante symbol "3-7-77" (the dimensions of a grave) and the initials "D-D-C-S-S-W," which referred to other Wobbly organizers on their hit list.[148]

And on November 11, 1918, Armistice Day, in the lumber town of Centralia, Washington, Wesley Everest, a war veteran in uniform, was among a group of Wobblies attacked by a mob disguised as an American Legion parade.[149] Everest escaped capture at first, and held off his pursuers in a gun battle, but was finally forced to surrender. He was knocked unconscious and dragged to the jail by a strap around his neck. Later that night a lynch mob drug him from his cell. According to legend, he shouted to his fellow prisoners: "Tell the boys I died for my class."[150] He was then driven out of town and, before they hanged him, one of the super-patriots castrated him.[151]

While the labor movement in America still remembers Little and Everest, they are clearly overshadowed by the image of Joe Hill. While Hill's martyrdom is among the headlines of working class history, Little and Everest are merely interesting footnotes. In the popular histories of the Wobblies by Kornbluh, Foner, and De Caux,

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[148] Ibid.

[149] De Caux, p. 137.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid.

for example, entire chapters are devoted to Joe Hill, while only a few lines are sufficient to tell the stories of Little and Everest.[152] And the great body of literature and folklore that has grown up around Hill, surpasses by far any of the tributes to Little or Everest. How are we to explain this?

Hill was not a great political leader and activist, like Haywood or Flynn. Like Little and Everest, Hill's fame came as a casualty of America's violent class struggle in the first decade of the twentieth century. It seems that public death for the cause is the ultimate revolutionary act and, as a result, martyrs are remembered over activists. But, unlike Little and Everest, Hill had not been on union business when he fell into the trap of American class justice.

Although the myth-makers of the Joe Hill Defense Committee made a gallant effort to make Hill's I.W.W. connections an issue, it was but a secondary issue.[153] It was but an irritant to a criminal prosecution. And, moreover, there is reason to believe that Hill may have been guilty of this criminal offense. Perhaps Hill was unjustly sentenced, but at least he was afforded the pretense at due process. Hill was not ritualistically tortured by vigilantes, nor his body brutally mutilated by a lynch mob. When compared to the atrocities committed in the cases of Little and

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[152] I am referring to Kornbluh, Rebel Voices; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, Vol. 4, The Industrial Workers of the World; and De Caux, The Living Spirit of the Wobblies.

[153] See Smith, p. 90.

Everest, Joe Hill was treated with respect and compassion. Strictly speaking, the deaths of Little and Everest are by far more convincing examples of Wobbly martyrdom. So why Joe Hill?

Joe Hill was a symbol of all that the Wobblies stood for: the exuberant revolutionary zeal, the naive faith in the mission of the class struggle, and the quest for the proletarian utopia. Hill also embodied the rough, violent edge of the Wobblie image. And the controversy over his guilt or innocence became the central mystery that fuels the drama of Hill's story.

Above all else, Hill was a showman, with a flair for the dramatic, and through the publicity of his trial, he was given an international stage upon which to perform his last act. His public statements during the course of his trial read like a Hollywood script: "I have lived like an artist, and I shall die like an artist"; "I'll take shooting. I'm used to that"; "I'm going to get a new trial or die trying"; "I will die like a true blue rebel"; I don't want to be found dead in Utah"; "Don't waste time in mourning--organize!"[154] His final stroke on the canvas of his martyrdom, was to give the command to fire at his execution.

Frank Little and Wesley Everest hardly had the chance to learn their lines, and no chance whatsoever to promote the last scenes of their lives. And, in the end, this histrionic component may have made all the difference in the world.

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[154]Ibid., p. 191.

But the final point to be made is that, by the time of his arrest, Hill--unlike Little and Everest--was already established as a poet and songster: the Wobbly's troubadour. Little and Everest were unable to capture the image of the singing union. Hill could and did. Joe Hill became the very embodiment of Wobbly singing.

The story of Joe Hill is, thus, the story of a singer whose voice has been stilled, but whose songs live on, on the lips of his brothers and sisters in the struggle for social justice in America. And it is in this sense that Hill's martyred image most closely captures the spirit and impact of the Wobblies.

The Body of Lore After Hill's Death

After Hill's death, others paying tribute added to the body of lore. First, other Wobblies wrote poems (Ralph Chaplin's "Joe Hill"[155]) and songs (John Nordquist's "November 19"[156]). And then leftist intellectuals took over. In 1925, Alfred Hayes wrote the poem that, perhaps more than any other single work, has given the legend its endurance:

> I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
> Alive as you or me.
> Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."
> "I never died," said he.[157]

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[155] I.W.W. Songs, 9th ed., 1916.

[156] Solidarity (November 27, 1915), 3.

[157] Hille, p. 35.

In 1924, Upton Sinclair published a short play, Singing Jailbirds, based on Hill's life and songs.[158] In 1927, Carl Sandburg included some of Hill's songs in a collection of folk songs, American Songbag.[159]

In the 1930s there was a short mythical biography of Joe Hill in Dos Passos' 1919 (1932)[160] and another long poem, Kenneth Patchen's "Joe Hill Listens to the Praying."[161] In the 1940s, Archie Binn's novel, Timber Beast (1944)[162] revived the legend, but accepted Hill's guilt, and presented a character who would take by force what he needed. When he ran out of money in Salt Lake City the grocer, unfortunately, got in his way. A more objective view of Joe Hill was emerging.

In 1950, Wallace Stegner's novel, The Preacher and the Slave, appeared.[163] It was the first serious, book-length work on the Hill legend. That same year a play by Barrie Stavis, The Man Who Never Died, was released.[164] The Hill character also appeared in several

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[158]Long Beach, California: by the author, 1924.

[159]Carl Sandburg, American Songbag (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1927); "The Tramp," p. 185; "The Preacher and the Slave," p. 222.

[160]Quoted above, pp. 128-29.

[161]Granville Hicks et al., eds., Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology (1935); also in Smith, pp. 196-99.

[162]Archie Binn, Timber Beast (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

[163]Wallace Stegner, The Preacher and the Slave (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

[164]Barrie Stavis, The Man Who Never Died (New York: Haven

other novels during this period: James Stevens' Big Jim Turner,[165] Alexander Saxton's The Great Midland,[166] Margaret Graham's Swing Shift,[167] James Jones' From Here to Eternity,[168] and Eugene Burdick's The Ninth Wave.[169]

In the early sixties, Woody Guthrie, the Joe Hill of the 1930s, published a poem in Hill's honor.[170] In 1966, Phil Ochs, one of Guthrie's disciples, wrote a long narrative ballad, "Joe Hill."[171] In 1964, the Canadian Broadcasting Company produced a film for television about Hill's prison life.[172] And, in 1969,

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Press, 1954).

[165]James Stevens, Big Jim Turner (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1948), pp. 85-89, 92-95, 157-73.

[166]Alexander Saxton, The Great Midland (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948).

[167]Margaret Graham, Swing Shift (New York: Citadel Press, 1951).

[168]James Jones, From Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 640-42.

[169]Eugene Burdick, The Ninth Wave (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), pp. 22-23.

[170]Woody Guthrie, "Joe Hillstrom," in Moses Asch, ed., American Folksong (New York: Oak Publications, 1961), p. 22.

[171]Phil Ochs, "Joe Hill," Broadside, 76 (November, 1966), 5.

[172]The Man Who Never Died (Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1964).

Joan Baez sang the Hayes-Robinson song at Woodstock, insuring a place for the Hill legend in the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s.[173] And most recently, in 1980, there was a play produced on Broadway about Hill's life: Thomas Babe's Salt Lake City Skyline.[174] It can indeed be said that Joe Hill has never died.

Conclusions

With Joe Hill's martyrdom, the working class subculture in America found its first folk hero. Joe Hill is a symbol of the Wobbly mind guerilla. This selflessly dedicated poet and singer, true to the cause of the One Big Union even in the face of death, is an image that revolutionaries of any generation can identify with and emulate. It is in this sense that the Hill legend is one of the great and lasting working class totalizers.

In spite of the controversy surrounding his guilt or innocence, Hill's behavior before, during, and after this highly publicized trial, was dramatic and heroic. His melodramatic public statements and his calculated selflessness, though perhaps overplayed, was effective histrionics before the footlights of the American labor movement. Hill played his role convincingly. He was scorned and feared by the propertied classes, but he became a hero to the toiling masses and their intellectual sympathizers.

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[173] Blackstead, 1970.

[174] Newsweek (February 4, 1980).

Long after the I.W.W. has been forgotten, the seeds of the Wobbly revolutionary spirit that were sewn in the fertile soil of 1915 have grown with the legend of the union's great singing troubadour and martyr, Joe Hill. The Wobbly style--the dramatic flair for romanticizing radicalism for popular consumption--set the tone for twentieth century social protest, and that is the same style embodied in the legend of Joe Hill.

With the death of Joe Hill, a pattern was established and a tradition was born. Woody Guthrie would inherit this tradition in the 1930s and pass it on to Bob Dylan in the 1960s. The canonization process of the working class hero may be tentatively outlined as follows. In the mystery and drama surrounding the death of a public personage, myth and legend naturally follow. The myth is then utilized to further the cause for which the hero stood, in our case the union. The hero need only to have been truly heroic, greatly loved, and genuinely lost. Glorification and embellishment, in the pathos of the aftermath of this great loss, furthers the myth-making process. Of course, media publicity is crucially important. In the case of the singing hero, his songs are quickly absorbed into the folklore of his people. Aphorisms attributed to the hero (like "don't mourn--organize!") take on the force of scripture. Rituals, rites, and pilgrimages occur in his honor. Memorial journalism, souvenirs, trinkets, and other memorabilia circulate widely. Monuments and shrines are erected in his name. All this furthers the canonization process, and a cult emerges looking back to a

golden, heroic age, and forward to a utopian dream world where the golden age will again descend from the heavens.

The canonization process, by focusing dissent into a convenient set of symbols embodied by a super hero, carries the revolutionary spirit beyond its historic setting, projecting the culture of protest into the future. It is in this sense that the working class hero has promoted the cause of the working class, as a totalizing agent of social protest.

CHAPTER V

WOODY GUTHRIE: THE DUST BOWL BALLADEER

I've been doin' some hard travelin',
  I thought you knowed.
I've been doin' some hard travelin',
  Way down the road.
I've been doin' some hard travelin',
  Hard ramblin', hard gamblin',
I've been doin' some hard travelin', Lord.

Woody Guthrie, 1940

Hillbilly Mind Guerilla

In the early 1960s, as Woody Guthrie lay dying--his body ceaselessly jerking and trembling in the pitiful, spasmodic dance of Huntington's chorea--a cult was forming around him.[1] Suddenly, his songs were everywhere. No longer confined to the left-wing bohemian circles of New York's Greenwich Village, Woody's songs were now in the grade schools and on the nation's college campuses, the stock and trade of folk festivals and hootenannies. Some of his songs were even making the pop music charts. For the first time in his

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[1]For biographical information, I have relied heavily upon the most recent and definitive work on Guthrie's life to date: Joe Klein, Woody Guthrie: A Life (New York: Knopf, 1980); other Guthrie biographies include: Ed Robin, Woody Guthrie and Me (New York: Lancaster-Miller Publishers, 1980); Henrietta Yurchenco, A Mighty Hard Road: The Life of Woody Guthrie (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1970); see also Guthrie's autobiography, Bound For Glory (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1943). The following works also include chapters on Guthrie and have been very helpful in preparing this chapter: R. Serge Denisoff, Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1971); John

life, he was making money. To an increasingly fervent following, Woody Guthrie had become a living legend, truly a working class hero.

His romantic, wandering life as a singing hobo had been mythologized. It was widely believed that he was dying from the hard-drinking, hard-traveling, hard-gambling life on the road, and that it was alcoholism or perhaps syphilis that was killing him. Others knew nothing of his illness, having been raised only on the myth. They believed he was still out there somewhere, rambling on down that long, dusty road, searching for that place where the water tastes like wine.

Partly due to the force of the Guthrie legend, folk music--the music of rural America--had become an important part of urban popular music culture. Folk artists, from Ramblin' Jack Elliot to Country Joe McDonald, and folk groups from the Weavers to the Kingston Trio, had begun to perform and record his songs. And young Robert Zimmerman was beginning to model himself and his image on the Guthrie myth.

Guthrie's wild, rough and tumble, unkempt manner; his dusty, baggy, drab okie attire; his weathered, crackling voice; his wry, child-like sense of humor, coupled with his heart-felt dedication to, and sense of oneness with "his people," America's "working

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Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953); and Pete Seeger, The Incomplete Folk Singer (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972). Finally, a brief autobiographical introduction by Guthrie in his American Folksong, edited by Moses Asch (New York: Oak Publications, 1961), has been very helpful.

folks," all merged to transform this wiry little drifter into a genuine folk hero; a symbol of the American working class of the thirties.

Of his relationship to the people, Guthrie wrote:

> The worst thing that can happen to you is to cut yourself loose from the people. And the best thing is to sort of vaccinate yourself right into the big streams and blood of the people. To feel like you know the best and the worst of folks that you see everywhere and never to feel weak, or lost, or even lonesome anywhere.
>
> There is just one thing that can cut you to drifting from the people, and that's any brand or style of greed. There is just one way to save yourself, and that's to get together and work and fight for everybody.[2]

But perhaps, over and above his selfless dedication to the people, it was his sparkling vitality and energy, his unquenchable sense of wonderment, his determined optimism and naive but genuine faith in the future of his people--the mischievous smile and silly giggle that he always seemed to be able to project even in the face of tragedy after tragedy--that won over the hearts of so many. Woody Guthrie was the epitome of the working class mind guerilla. In the liner notes to one of Guthrie's early recordings, John Steinbeck described Woody this way:

> Woody is just Woody. Thousands of people do not know he had any other name. He is just a voice and a guitar. He sings the songs of a people and I suspect that he is, in a way, that people. Harsh voiced and nasal, his guitar hanging

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[2]This quote was taken from the note book kept by the Almanac Singers during their tour in the summer of 1941; see Seeger, p. 59.

> like a tire iron on a rusty rim, there is nothing sweet about Woody, and there is nothing sweet about the songs he sings. But there is something more important for those who will listen. There is the will of a people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit.[3]

What Steinbeck refers to as the American spirit is the same thing Elizabeth Gurley Flynn had called the revolutionary spirit, and Woody Guthrie, like Joe Hill before him, was very much a part of that spirit: the embodiment of worker solidarity. And, although Woody did not die the martyr's death in the same sense as Joe Hill, he did die tragically after suffering a slow, lingering, humiliating illness. Huntington's disease took him in his prime, reducing the great balladeer and visionary into a pitiful, institutionalized invalid.[4] Perhaps it was this public suffering, the slowly fading light that had once shone with such brilliance and purpose, that gained him the sympathy of the American public.

There has never been a more elegant spokesman for the utopian One than Woody Guthrie. While he often used the language of the Wobblies (using the characteristic expression "One Big Union"), his conception of utopia was a little different. When he used the term

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[3]Greenway, p. 288.

[4]Huntington's chorea is a rare hereditary disease marked by chronic and progressive chorea (the ceaseless occurrence of rapid, jerky, involuntary movements), and mental deterioration terminating in dementia. The age of the onset is variable, but usually occurs in the fourth decade of life. Death usually follows within 15 years. See Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary (25th ed.; Philadelphia W. B. Saunders Company, 1974), pp. 311-12.

One Big Union, he was not necessarily referring to the industrial worker. He was referring specifically to the uprooted okie farmers, reduced to the level of migrant farm laborer, after the dust storms and the depression ran them off their farms, and more generally to the rural folk community, or what sociologists refer to as the "gemeinschaft,"[5] but he was not a syndicalist in any strict sense.

He came to be more closely associated with the American communist movement, but he would have never been able to follow the party line. Woody was an eccentric when it came to politics. When asked if he was a communist, he was fond of saying: "Some people say I'm a Communist. That ain't necessarily so, but it is true that I've always been in the red."[6] However, it does appear that Guthrie did eventually join the party. According to Gordon Friesen, who knew Guthrie in New York in the 1940s, Woody was indeed a card-carrying party member. Friesen has claimed that, ". . . when I knew him he was a full-fledged member of the Village branch of the Communist Cultural Section, and proud of it."[7]

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[5]The term "gemeinschaft" was introduced by Ferdinand Tonnies, as an ideal type of society where social bonds are based primarily upon the close personal ties of friendship and kinship. He used the term to distinguish between two basic types of societies: geneinschaft and gesellschaft. Gesellschaft refers to societies where social relationships are primarily formal, contractual, and impersonal; the type of urban industrial society Woody Guthrie abhorred. Guthrie's ideal community is best captured by the term geneinschaft, meaning rural-agricultural, folk or peasant societies. See George A. and Achilles G. Theodorson, eds., A Modern Dictionary of Sociology (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979), pp. 170, 173.

[6]Robbin, p. 133.

[7]Gordon Friesen, Broadside, 134 (January-March, 1977), 24.

Thus Guthrie was a Marxist of a sort but his Marxism was instinctual and not rational; in-bred and not learned. He was class-conscious before he had ever heard the term. He had experienced and lived the class struggle, which he was inclined to view as a fight between the rich and the "pore." Since he had always been "pore," he always knew which side he was on. All this about dialectical materialism and economic determinism was to Woody just bourgeois intellectualism that could only distract from the issues and interfere with one's ability to reach the uneducated poor. Here he was as one with the tradition of the Wobblies.

Ed Robin, the radical journalist who introduced the young hillbilly singer into California's left-wing political circles in the late 1930s, described Woody's politics this way:

> He didn't bother to read what Karl Marx had written, or Lenin. Woody believed that what is important is the struggle of the working people to win back the earth, which is rightfully theirs. He believed that people should love one another and organize into one big union. That's the way he saw politics and world affairs.[8]

Here is an excellent utopian specimen: a child of the Wobblies, the unpolished gem of a rebel outcast, a rugged and whiskery mind guerilla.

In discussing what he called the "utopian mentality," or the radical's famed "consciousness," Karl Mannheim observed that the utopian perceives his world--and the events, experiences, and

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[8]Ibid., p. 41.

episodes that make up that world--as if it were ordered and arranged in such a way as to "take on the character of destiny."[9] This is clearly how Woody Guthrie saw his world and his place in it. He perceived his life and his work as a calling: he was bound for glory, it was his fate to change the world, and his goal was nothing short of the One Big Union. Marjorie Guthrie, his second wife, described Woody's sense of destiny:

> I can only say that he had a tremendous feeling about himself. It's as though he felt he had a mission. He'd say, "We're poor now, but one day our kids will be rich." We made a joke of it and talked about what the kids would do with all the money that would be coming in. And then he would say that his one hope was that the kids would be aware of the need to change the world they lived in and become part of the struggle.[10]

In his productive lifetime--before the disease robbed him of his capacity to communicate--he had written over a thousand songs,[11] and mountains of typed prose: poems, short stories, novels, flights of fantasy and erotica, as well as homespun social commentary and front-porch editorials.[12] Words seemed to gush out of him, like a

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[9]Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1936), p. 216.

[10]Robbin, p. 132.

[11]This figure comes from Greenway, p. 282. However, my own attempts to list the songs of Woody Guthrie have only uncovered 134 Guthrie songs.

[12]Much of Guthrie's scattered prose works have been published in a work edited by Robert Shelton, Born to Win (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1965).

wild mountain stream after the spring thaw. He wrote long, rambling, intoxicated outpourings in an uninhibited stream-of-consciousness style. He was a man possessed by a sense of destiny and purpose, and a burning desire to change the world.

Utopian themes run very deep in Guthrie's songs, and among his scattered prose are some of the finest expressions of the utopian soul:

> Our wants, needs, backgrounds, false weaknesses, fears, dreams, hopes, our desires and passions and cravings, all these things, and a million others, drift across the hills of my mind while I think of all of it. And all these things are one, all mixed and blended like colors into a pattern, and like patterns into a big, big picture of life. All of our tangles and mix-ups are the only reason for livin' and workin' and goin' on. Our loves and kisses and passions and flights of mind, they give us the gas and the juice to keep goin' on. The world I've seen is alive and interesting, not because its perfect and pretty and eternal, but because it needs my fixin', I need fixin', so does the land. And when I let my mind dwell on such truths, I seem to float up like a balloon, way up high somewhere. And the world and the work and the trouble and the people, seem to be goin' as a bunch in such a good direction, that my own little personal lead weights and drawbacks, miscues, mistakes, and flounderin' around seem to fade away; rubbed out like a big finger rubbin' out a wild pastel color.[13]

Woody Guthrie perceived his life as a holy crusade, part of the eternal quest for the communion of the utopian One. His consciousness was that of a holy man, a prophet on a mission from the gods. His mission was to listen to the people's cries of hunger

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[13]See Woody Guthrie's "We Ain't Down Yet," a recording (Cream Records, Inc. CR-1002, 1976), prose narrated by John Pearson; "All of Us," side I, band 4.

and oppression, and to inspire in them the songs of hope, brotherhood, and change.

Guthrie, in the shadow of the Wobblies, saw the song as a weapon in the class struggle, but he saw in the song so much more. The real difference between the music of Woody and the Wobblies was his use of the rural genre of "folk" music, as opposed to the hymns and urban pop tunes used by Joe Hill and the Wobblies.[14] To Guthrie, the folk song was the special property of the people, or the "folk." And he utilized the people's music to capture and express their concerns and hopes. In his mind, the music, himself, and the people were all one. While the Wobblies used songs to "fan the flames of discontent," Woody used songs as a holy sacrament.

From Guthrie's inspiration, a singing left, in the spirit of the Wobblies, would differentiate from the main body of the Progressive movement in America, to organize itself around the principle of "song power." Beginning with the Almanac Singers, then People's Songs, Inc., and the popular folk group, The Weavers, the social protest song tradition became a radical force all its own.[15] The ideology, philosophy, and values behind this movement were those of Woody Guthrie. He wrote with great conviction on the power of song in the struggles of the mind guerilla, stressing the power of song to evoke community and solidarity, of the power to bring back the past

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[14]For a further elaboration of this distinction between the musical culture of the Wobblies and the "urban folk music revival" which Guthrie came to represent, see Denisoff, pp. 41-76.

[15]Ibid., Chaps. 4-5.

and to capture nostalgia, and the power to cure the soul and generate hope. Here are Woody's words:

> Somewhere, way back in my mind, I can hear the boys in the PX singing their old nickel beer songs at night, 'till the lonesome tears from home rolled down out of their eyes. Their songs are not war songs, they're not gunner songs and they're not shootin' songs. Their songs are back-home songs, songs about brown eyes and blue eyes, eyes of all colors. And every man around those old beer tables sings with his head low and his eyes closed, and he sees home while he sings. I remember seein' my old self back home, I could hear the kids in their club next door to us singing and gruntin', huggin' and kissin', laughin' in the light of their youth club juke-box. Oh I love to hear houses sing, I love to hear windows yell. I remember livin' in the hope that when I got out of those old pesky Army camps, I'd hear every door and every window, just for one night, sing all night long, 'til a new day cracked. I ask ya Mr. President, please, let everybody everywhere, for just one night, sing all night long: Love songs, work songs, new hope songs. That would cure every soul in our jails and asylums, and most of the sick in our hospitals. Try it and see. I know, I'm a Prophet singer.[16]

Woody was a prophet singer alright, and the folk were his chosen people. His scripture was the great body of American folklore, but his songs--his original adaptations and reworkings of traditional songs--have become a kind of holy grail for the social protest tradition. This prophet singer was also a folk politician, a kind of hillbilly Marxist, a statesman of the folk. In the following parable, Woody explains the role of the singing hero in the mind games of the social protest tradition in America, through the analogy of the singing cricket. He could be describing the life of Joe Hill or John Lennon, but he is talking about himself:

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[16]Woody Guthrie's "We Ain't Down Yet," "The Prophet Singer," side I, band 1.

> I wanna tell ya about a singing cricket I knew once. You know, singing helps keep you going. It might not be all that keeps you going, but it's a mighty powerful way a tellin' somebody you aim to keep going. . . . Now just off hand you might think that us humans is the only outfits that can sing, but I recollect that old cricket was about the best singer for his size that I ever heard.
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> Crickets always sing under old chunks a rotten wood, old stuffy apartment houses where the stair steps are creaky and liable t'throw ya; anywhere where there's anything bad is a good place for this kinda singin': mold, rot, decay, crooked work, lies, profit-snatchin'. When you hear a cricket singing, you can just look around and find a rotten board or plank that needs to be jacked up and a new one run under it. Crickets don't help bring the house down, he just hangs around to sing that the damn thing's fallin' down. But them other bugs that really brought the house down, they run off somewhere and holler: "That cricket was there all the time, he's the one, he lives in rotten filth, he causes it, he believes in it, get him!"
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> And finally one day somebody squashed the cricket under their shoe. But the cricket's brothers and sisters heard about it and they started singin' about that. Then all the other relatives heard that singin' and now they're singin' about it. They're all just sittin' around old rotten houses singin' about the death of that one cricket. And you know what they call the song they're all singin"? They call it the song of the singing cricket.[17]

From Woody's point of view, singing is a source of hope. It keeps you going. To him, folk song was inherently a source of protest, and a weapon in the class struggle, and it possessed the power to liberate the folk. Folk song is the very embodiment of the folk community and a source of solidarity in the people's struggles, the struggle of the working folks and the common man to recapture the world. Folk songs are a channel through which the people vent their anger, frustration, and discontent. And yet, as former Almanac and Weaver Lee Hays has said, folk songs are

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[17] Ibid., "The Singing Cricket," side II, band 6.

dangerous.[18] The singer runs the risk of repression, reprisal, alienation, and even death at the hands of the enemies of the folk community. But the singer's songs will not die, they will live on, on the lips of the singer's brothers and sisters in the family of mankind. In the folk, Woody saw the Wobblies' One Big Union and, to him, folk songs were union songs.

This is Woody Guthrie: poet, bard, saloon singer, visionary, prophet, martyr, and saint. He was a hillbilly mind guerilla and a folk hero. His story begins in Oklahoma in the 1930s, the dust bowl of America's Great Depression. It was a perfect breeding ground for singing crickets.

Dust Bowl Refugee

Woody Guthrie lived a life filled to the brim with suffering. He lived life's other side, the dark side; a life of failures, tragedies, and disasters. He was born in Okema, Oklahoma, in the summer of 1912. Looking back on it some years later, he set the stage of his birthing with these words:

> It was in the quicksands and muds of the river's rising, the wind that blew and whipped from east to west in a split second, the lightning that splintered the barn loft, the snakey tailed cyclone, prairie cloudbursts, the months of fiery drouth [his spelling] that crippled the leaves, in the

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[18] PBS, "The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time," March 19, 1983; a rebroadcast of a video documentary of the history of the Weavers, centering on their December, 1980 reunion concert at Carnegie Hall, written and produced by Lee Hays.

> timber fires, prairie fires that took more than it could build back, in the fights of men against all this, that I was born, the third child in our family, and heard my mother sing to my brother Roy, and to my sister, Clara.[19]

He was born of suffering, raised in song, and pursued by relentless tragedies. Mysterious fires killed his big sister, Clara, and later, his little daughter, Cathy. Both Woody and his father were seriously burned in similar incidences. Early in his childhood, he watched in horror as his mother slowly withdrew into insanity and had to be committed to the state mental hospital. It was much later in life that he came to realize that his mother had suffered from the same tragic disease that she would pass on to Woody, and he to his children.[20]

Before his fourteenth birthday, his family had completely disintegrated: his mother institutionalized, his father crippled and broke, his sister dead and buried. Woody and his brother Roy were left to fend for themselves.[21] Roy got a job in a grocery store,[22] and Woody, for the first of countless times, hit the road:

> I hit the road down south to Houston, Galveston, the Gulf, and back, doing all kind of odd jobs, hoeing figs, orchards, pickin grapes, hauling wood, helping carpenters and cement men, working with water well drillers. I was thirteen or fourteen. I carried my harmonica and played in barber shops, at shine stands, in front of shows, around

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[19]Woody Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 1.

[20]Klein, Chap. 1, "Life's Other Side."

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., p. 35.

> the pool halls, and rattled the bones, done jig dances, sang and played with Negroes, Indians, whites, farmers, town folks, truck drivers, and with every kind of singer you can think of. I learned all of the tricks of strings and music and all of the songs that I could remember and learn by ear. [Then] I struck back up across Texas to the wheat farm where my dad was.[23]

He hung around the Texas panhandle town of Pampa for a few years, working odd jobs, and singing in a hillbilly band with his father's brother, Jeff. He married a local girl named Mary Jennings, and "lived in the ricketiest of the oil town shacks long enough to have no clothes, no money, no groceries, and two children, both girls, Sue and Teeny."[24]

Woody and Lefty Lou

In the mid-thirties, he left Mary and the kids, and set out to seek his fortune elsewhere. He joined the great migration of homeless dust bowl refugees, the victims of the drought and economic recession in the American southwest, on the long trek out across the deserts and into California, the promised land. He stayed for awhile with relatives, bummed around the migrant camps and Hoovervilles, working the fields and orchards, singing in the bars and passing the hat, until he somehow found his way onto the radio as part of a hillbilly act. He wound up with a half-hour show of his own on progressive station KFVD, with his cousin, Maxine Crissman, to whom he gave the unglorious handle, "Lefty Lou."[25]

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[23]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 3.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Klein, pp. 87-99.

"The Woody and Lefty Lou Show" became quite popular among the newly arrived okies and other migrant farm laborers homesick for the rural culture they had left behind. Every evening, after a back-breaking day in the fields and factories, the old folks welcomed these friendly blending voices singing the old songs from back home. Even back then, Woody came on strong:

> Drop whatever you are doing
> Stop your work and worry too;
> Sit right down and take it easy,
> Here comes Woody and Lefty Lou.[26]

Woody was still very naive politically. He was yet to connect up all the linkages between the Capitalist banking interests back east and the farm failures back home. He was as green as California's fields and orchards when he wrote the first of many self-portraits. It appeared on one of the back pages of Woody and Lefty Lou's Favorite Collection [of] Old Time Hill Country Songs: Being Sung for Ages, Still Going Strong. It was entitled simply "Woody," and reflects the kind of cornball country humor that he fed those dusty okies between songs:

> Well, when I go to write about myself, I can't say much, 'cause I ain't got no material to work on. I've been around the country for years, a Hobo Hillbilly, eating about twice a week whether I was hungry or not. I've worked in a lot of places, but never did have anybody write and tell me that my work was a bright spot in their day till I got on the air-waves in front of a Microbephone. I never did drink anything stronger than water for a chaser, and never spend my money

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[26] Ibid., p. 91.

> foolish unless I'm by myself or with somebody. I am a believer in everybody and everything, extry modern, and extry old fashioned. My contract at KFVD don't give me enough money to get the big head, but it gives me enough that I don't care what other people think about me. I'm just a pore boy tryin' to get along. The dust run me out of Texas, and the Officers run me in at Lincoln Heights. But they was nice to me. They had bars fixed up over the windows so nobody could get in and steal my guitar. I was hijacking on credit till I got on the radio. Now I plan to put in a second hand bank. I am never surprised or disappointed, for I have no regret or future ambitions. I am a lazy man, and can't help it. Ugly and can't fix it. The Universe is my home, and Los Angeles is just a vase in my parlor. I like pore people because they'll come out a winner in the long run. And I like rich people because they need friendship.[27]

Woody called these natural rambling digressions his "cornpone philosophy," and they became a fixed segment in his radio act.[28] Here he first began to develop the famous Guthrie humor, and that easy-talking, friendly style. Here we also see, for the first time, his emerging class consciousness, intermingled with a relaxed, naive utopianism. KFVD was not only Woody's channel into the public, it became his stepping stone into California's left-wing politics.

The Popular Front

In the 1930s, radicalism in America came to be centered in the Communist Party. It was the only time in American history that communist ideology ever made any significant headway into the American heartland.[29] To Woody, the communists seemed to be the

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[27] Robbin, p. 55.

[28] Klein, p. 91.

[29] John P. Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), pp. 108-21.

group that was fighting the hardest for the things he believed in, and he became an ardent supporter.[30] He claimed to have "always read the radical (i.e., communist) papers over my program and took sides with the workers all I knew how."[31] It was the communists who led the drive to organize the migrant farm laborers--Woody's special "people"--into labor unions. Woody was greatly impressed by their zeal and commitment. And he was perhaps most impressed by their idealism and their utopian vision of a society based upon complete equality, a brotherhood of man, where each would contribute according to his abilities, and receive according to his needs.[32]

The Communist Party in America had grown up in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, attracting Militant unionists, and old Wobblies like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The Red Scare after the First World War and the Palmer raids of 1920 had forced them underground. But the Great Depression of the 1930s brought them to the surface again, and with great vigor.[33] Woody Guthrie, like the thousands of victims of Old Man Depression, was attracted to the communists by their carefully thought out and well argued assurances that poverty and injustice in America could be overcome by the simple application of Marxist principles.[34]

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[30]Klein, p. 118.

[31]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 4.

[31]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 4.

[32]Klein, pp. 118-19.

[33]Diggins, pp. 110-11.

[34]Klein, p. 119.

The stock market crash of 1929 seemed to fulfill the Marxian predictions of the inevitable demise of capitalism. As unemployment soared, farm foreclosures and business failures mounted, and banks began to go under, the Marxian interpretation of history seemed to make more and more sense in America.[35] The rise of Hitler and the spread of fascism in the mid-thirties seemed to give the communist movement even greater strength. To the average American, the international lines between good and evil were being sharply drawn, and communism was at the opposite end of the political spectrum to the evil of fascism.[36] From the new American perspective, communism was now on the side of right and justice.

In 1934, at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, the delegates vowed to cease the factual bickering that plagued the movement, and unite in what came to be known as the Popular Front.[37] Soon a spirit of unity swept the entire radical movement in a desperate bid to check the threat of world fascism. And, to this end, the Communists were now expressing a willingness to put aside the class struggle and to cooperate with the liberal bourgeoisie as well as socialists and trade unionists. They were now eager to commune with the entire non-communist left. Communists were even supporting and endorsing F.D.R.'s New Deal as an example of enlightened and progressive legislation.[38]

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[35]Diggins, p. 112.

[36]Ibid., p. 114.

[37]Ibid., p. 128.

[38]Ibid., p. 129.

American communists were also leaders in the massive union organizing drive made possible by Roosevelt's encouragement and support of the labor movement. In 1935, under the leadership of the fiery Labor organizer, John L. Lewis, the militant Congress of Industrial Organizations separated from the parent American Federation of Labor.[39] In the tradition of the I.W.W., Lewis wanted to organize industrially, by uniting whole industries. This was a radical alternative to the craft unionism of the A.F.L.[40] It was felt that a large industry-wide union of construction workers, for example, would be more effective than to organize according to individual craft skills, like carpenters, bricklayers, and painters and decorators. However, such an ambitious scheme required the cooperation of diverse organizations, and the pragmatist Lewis was all too happy to accept the support of the communists who had long advocated industrial unionism, and were very experienced as labor organizers.[41]

In America in the 1930s, a broad progressive movement was reaching out again, with much joy and great hope, to the One Big Union.

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[39] Ibid., p. 124.

[40] John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 733.

[41] George Charney, A Long Journey (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 61-62.

Left-Wing, Right-Wing, Chicken Wing . . .

J. Frank Burke, the owner of station KFVD, was deeply involved in liberal politics in Los Angeles. In 1938, in the spirit of the Popular Front, Burke had hired Ed Robbin, a correspondent for the communist daily newspaper, The People's World, to appear on KFVD three times a week as a radical news commentator. Robbin's show aired in the time slot immediately following Woody's show. Woody would often hang around the studio to listen to the radical news. A friendship soon developed between these two, and it was through this relationship that Woody was introduced into California's left-wing circles.[42]

Ed Robbin became Woody's informal booking agent. He started to feature Woody at various party functions as an entertainer and radio personality, to lighten up these sometimes dry meetings. The first political function that Woody performed at was a rally to celebrate the freedom of an old labor organizer, Tom Mooney, who had served 22 years at San Quentin on a charge that most now agreed was unjust. Mooney was one of the many victims of the Red Scare of the twenties.[43]

Woody took a great interest in the case and wrote a song about it called "Mr. Tom Mooney is Free." Robbin heard him sing it on the air, and decided to ask Woody to sing at the rally for Mooney. When asked, Woody said, "Sure, why not?" But, not wanting to drag the

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[42]Klein, p. 122.

[43]Robbin, pp. 29-34.

naive okie into a situation he did not full understand, Robbin took Woody aside and explained the situation: "I would like you to know, Woody, that this is sponsored by the Communist party, and it's a politically left-wing gathering." According to Robbin, Woody's response was: "Left-wing, right-wing, chicken-wing--it's all the same thing to me. I sing my songs wherever I can sing 'em. So if you'll have me, I'll be glad to go."[44]

Late that night, after all the speakers had given their tributes to Mooney and Mooney himself had been allowed to exercise his rhetorical skills, Robbin nudged Woody, who had fallen asleep, and he got up and sang his Tom Mooney ballad. It brought the house down. The audience had gone wild over the last verse, where Woody had suggested that the thing to do now was to free the rest of California.[45] Woody was a little surprised by such an enthusiastic response. It was obvious that they wanted more. So he sang a few of his dust bowl songs, songs about the people's struggles, of the dust storms and the farm foreclosures that had forced them out onto the road to California, and of the police harrassment and vigilante beatings they had endured along the way. Both Woody and the crowd were overwhelmed. He had touched a nerve. It was the beginning of his career as a radical singer.[46]

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[44]Ibid., p. 32.

[45]Klein, p. 123.

[46]Ibid.

But Woody was always much more than a singer. Through Ed Robbin he also broke into radicalism journalism. In May, 1939 he started writing a column for the People's World, a Will Rogers style daily commentary. It was a continuation of his old cornpone philosophy. He called the column "Woody Sez." It was usually no more than a paragraph, but it ran on the bottom of the front page, and seemed strangly out of place, hiding there under the most serious and weighty of the party's partisan polemics.[47] Here is a typical example:

> The national debit is one thing I cain't figger out. I heard a senater on a radeo a-saying that we owed somebody 15 jillion dollars. I don't know their name but I remember the price. Called it the national debit. If the nation is the government, and the government is the people, that means I owe me and you owe you, and I forget the regular fee, but if I owe myself something, I would be willing to just call it off rather than have senaters argue about it, and I know you would do the same and then we wouldn't have no national debit.[48]

Woody had enthusiastically jumped right in to California's radical politics. In the same way he had absorbed the traditions and culture of the folks on the road and in the migrant camps, he now began to eagerly assimilate the Stalinist radicalism of the Great Depression. He later claimed that he learned all he could ". . . from the speeches and debates, forums, picnics, where famous labor leaders spoke."[49] And that he had heard ". . . William Z.

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[47]Ibid., p. 125.

[48]Ibid., p. 126.

[49]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 4.

Foster, Mother Bloor, Gurley Flynn [and] Blackie Myers" and ". . . played my songs on their platforms."[50] His image as a performer was merging with his image as a radical.

Stalin and Hitler

In the meantime, after he had accumulated some money, Woody sent for Mary and the kids.[51] For Mary, a frustratingly predictable pattern was taking shape. He would welcome them warmly, play with the kids, and seem happily settled and satisfied, for a while, until boredom finally set in and the urge to roam took back over. He would then hit the roads and rails, for a bit of adventure. Never bothering to say where he was going or when he would be back, he would travel around the migrant camps or the skid row bars, to see first-hand what the people were going through. Eventually, Mary would get fed up and pack the kids back to the panhandle, only to be persuaded at some later date to return to a "new" Woody, cured of his restlessness and needing a family again.

Through Ed Robbin, Woody also met the actor Will Geer, a determined left-winger, who, like Woody, had never joined the party. Also like Woody, he preferred performing to politicing, and he was active in agiprop theater back in New York City. He had come to the West Coast to tour the migrant camps. Earlier, he had toured with a ballad singer named Jack Frost, acting out the ballads while Frost sang. He

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Klein, p. 99.

was looking for another ballad singer when Robbin introduced him to Woody Guthrie. They toured the camps together in the summer of 1939 and became life-long friends.[52]

In August, the non-aggression treaty between Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union stunned the Western world and the Popular Front crumbled and fell completely apart. Frank Burke, as well as the KFVD audience, quickly lost all respect for the communists. Woody, stubborn as ever, steadfastly supported the Soviet action as a momentary defensive maneuver designed to maintain the peace.[53] And besides, the important thing was that the communists were still the only people organizing the migrant workers in California, and they could not be held responsible for what was going on between Stalin and Hitler. In September, after the Red Army swept through eastern Poland, "liberating" the peasants there, the position of the American communists became increasingly isolated. Woody experienced Red baiting for the first time in his career.[54] At KFVD, the two "commies," Woody and Ed Robbin, became the object of much scorn and backsliding. But Woody refused to back down. He wrote and performed a new song about the Russian invasion of Poland which sent the station manager, Burke, into a rage. It was a talking blues called "More War News":

> I see where Hitler is a-talking peace
> Since Russia met him face to face--

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[52]Ibid., pp. 126-29.

[53]Ibid., pp. 129-31.

[54]Ibid., p. 134.

He just got his war machine a-rollin',
Coasting along, and taking Poland.
Stalin stepped in, took a big strip of Poland
and give the farm lands back to the farmers.[55]

In November, when the Soviets invaded Finland, and Woody stubbornly defended the communists, tension at the station reached the breaking point, and his early experiment in radio came to an end.[56]

So, as 1940 and World War II approached, Woody hit the road again. First, he delivered Mary and the kids (there were three now with the birth of a baby boy in October, named Will Rogers Guthrie) back to Texas, and after borrowing thirty-five dollars from his brother Roy, he headed on to New York City, alone again, to visit Will Geer.[57]

New York Town

The Woody Guthrie who arrived in New York City in January of 1940 was a seasoned performer. Reeking of the road, his guitar poured out an amazing repertoire of traditional songs, as well as a profusion of original compositions in the traditional style, reflecting the depths of his road experiences. With all those half-hour radio shows under his belt, and all those political rallies, skid-row bar performances, and migrant camp shows behind him, he had perfected an easy, relaxed style. When he stepped in front of a microphone, or when he got in front of an audience anywhere--from a

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[55]Ibid., p. 131.

[56]Ibid., p. 134.

[57]Ibid., p. 136.

large crowded auditorium to a friendly living room or front porch--he easily, effortlessly switched on. His guitar-playing was perhaps only average, and his voice only adequate, but his style, the force of his stage personality, his melodic okie accent, his impecable sense of timing, and his honest, child-like humor, were powerfully captivating.[58] Already a West Coast celebrity of a sort, in New York City he became a folk hero.

. New York City was the radical capital of America. Bohemianism and left-wing activism already had a long history of association with New York's Greenwich Village. And the Village of the 1930s was a major center of American communism, and all the radical cultural apparatus that accompanied it. In the nation's major urban center, the Great Depression had triggered a strange fascination with the plight of the homeless, hungry victims of the worst economic crisis in the country's history.[59]

The nation's leading artists, scholars, and journalists--Thomas Hart Benton in painting, Martha Graham in dance, John Steinbeck in literature, the photo journalism of the Farm Security Administration's Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Ben Shahn, and the folk song collections of John and Allan Lomax--were reaching out, searching for the soul of the American people, attempting to capture,

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[58]For an assessment of Guthrie's performing abilities in 1940, see ibid., pp. 128-29.

[59]Diggins, p. 111.

for all time, the dignity and strength of character of the great American common man, heroically struggling with adversity.[60] The progressive era of the Popular Front and Roosevelt's New Deal saw an unprecedented glorification of the working classes, a mythology of "the people" seeped indelibly into American culture. And a folk music revival was just taking shape in the charged atmosphere of New York's Greenwich Village.[61]

In New York, Woody continued to write his column for the People's World, and started to contribute articles to New York's radical newspaper, The Daily Worker. He was as comfortable and confident in his radical persona as he was with his folk balladeer image. Indeed, the two were so tightly intermeshed that they formed a single transcendent character: the singer-activist.[62] A few years later, in the lucid and fluid prose of his autobiography, Bound for Glory, Guthrie captured the imagery of his minstrel-mind guerilla consciousness, as he meditated upon his life's purpose, while staring blankly out of a window, down 65 stories, to the New York City streets of 1940:

> I begun to pace back and forth, keeping my gaze out the window, way down, watching the diapers and underware blow from fire escapes and clothes lines on the back sides of the buildings. . . . Limp papers whipped and beat upwards, rose into the air and fell head over heels, curving over backwards and sideways, over and over, loose sheets of newspaper with pictures of people and stories of people printed somewhere on them, turning loops in the air. And it was blow little

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[61] Denisoff, pp. 41-60.

[62] Ibid., pp. 134-38.

> paper blow! Twist and turn and stay up as long as you can, and when you come down, come down on a pent-house porch, come down easy so's not to hurt your self. Come down and lay there in the rain and the wind and the soot and smoke and the grit that gets in your eyes in the big city--and lay there in the sun and get faded and rotten. But keep on trying to tell your message, and keep on trying to be a picture of a man, because without that story and without that message printed on you there, you wouldn't be much. Remember, it's just maybe someday, some time, somebody will pick you up and look at your picture and read your message, and carry you in his pocket, and lay you on his shelf, and burn you in his stove. But he'll have your message in his head and he'll talk it and it'll get around. I'm blowing, and just as wild and whirling as you are, and lots of times I've been picked up, throwed down, and picked up; but my eyes has been my camera taking pictures of the world and my songs has been messages that I tried to scatter across the back sides and along the steps of the fire escapes and on the window sills and through the dark halls.[63]

In New York, Woody Guthrie began to refine his craft and his vision. He was starting to really believe that he was bound for glory.

The Great American Balladeer

When he first arrived, he imposed upon Will and Herta Geer, sleeping on their living room couch, but never taking his boots off, expropriating Herta's brand new Martin guitar, as he toured the bars and dives of New York City. He was not an easy house guest, and was soon politely asked to seek other quarters. He stayed with other friends and casual acquaintances. He spent some time at Burl Ives' apartment, but eventually ended up in a cheap hotel near Times Square.[64]

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[63]Guthrie, Bound for Glory, p. 295.

[64]Klein, p. 141.

Through his association with Will Geer, he found his way into New York's left-wing cultural community. He played at parties and various fund-raising events. In February, he sang at a huge benefit for the refugees of the Spanish Civil War, and was well received. But a concert organized by Geer for March 3 proved to be far more significant. It was a benefit for the John Steinbeck Committee for Agricultural Workers, and was being billed as "Grapes of Wrath Evening."[65] It was a performance that would profoundly affect Woody Guthrie's life and career, as well as the development of American popular music. This was the first Patterson-style concert of the urban folk music revival. It was the beginning of a proletarian renaissance in American popular music.[66]

Woody shared the bill with, among others, Aunt Molly Jackson, a ballad singer from the mining districts in Harlan County, Kentucky, and Huddie Ledbetter ("Leadbelly"), the Negro blues singer imported directly from a prison farm in Texas. In the audience a young Harvard drop-out, Peter Seeger, watched with great enthusiasm. And, backstage, Alan Lomax, the young curator of the Library of Congress folklore archives down in Washington. D.C., watched with great excitement as this strange little man from Oklahoma wandered on-stage, scratched his head with his pick, nodded at the audience, and said "Howdy." First mumbling something about how happy he was to be a

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[65]Ibid., p. 142.

[66]Denisoff, p. 80.

part of a "Rapes of Graft" show, he then tilted his head back and started to sing. Lomax could barely contain himself. He knew instantly and instinctively that he had stumbled on to something very special.[67] In his tours with his father, John Lomax, down through the Appalachians and into the southwest, collecting folklore, mountain ballads, and cowboy songs, he had fallen in love with the rugged authenticity of America's traditional music. And, as a young idealist with leftist values, he had seen something in this music that his conservative father had not. Alan Lomax had seen that these were the songs of America's isolated and dispossessed rural poor, songs of the oppressed and exploited. Young Lomax had quickly grasped the revolutionary significance and potential of America's folk song heritage. And, here for the first time, he was witnessing, in its purist form, a great American balladeer, and, astonishingly, one who incorporated a definite, almost intellectual, but native, class-consciousness into his traditional songs.[68]

The Library of Congress

Lomax brought Woody to Washington, D.C. to capture the great balladeer on record for national posterity. The Library of Congress recording sessions took place on March 21, 22, and 27, 1940, at the Department of Interior's studio.[69] Lomax recorded a long, rambling,

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[67] Klein, p. 143.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., p. 153.

casual interview with Woody, trying to get as much color and background information as possible to accompany all the songs Woody could remember "on a pint of pretty cheap whiskey."[70] While both Woody and Lomax were very pleased with the recordings, it would be 25 years before the Library of Congress recordings would be released to the public.[71]

However, Lomax prepared a radio script based on the Library of Congress interviews for his "Columbia School of the Air" program, which was broadcast on CBS in April. For this 30-minute program, Woody was paid the unbelievable sum of $200. The program was a great success, eventually winning an award for the best educational program of 1940.[72]

Through Lomax's influence, Woody was booked on to a few other radio programs and, more importantly, Lomax was able to persuade Victor Records to produce a two-album set, including 12 78-rpm records, of Woody's dust bowl ballads. In one marathon session on May 3, 1940, at Victor's Camden, New Jersey, studios, Woody recorded these great documents of the Great Depression in the American southwest. Although the records were never successful commercially, they were, nevertheless, a recording landmark as the first serious production of social protest material. Clearly, Woody Guthrie's Dust Bowl Ballads is one of the most influential recordings in the twentieth century.[73]

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[70] Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 5.

[71] Klein, p. 155.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., pp. 158-59.

For these historic sessions, Woody was paid $300. With all the money that was coming his way, his conscience began to stir. He bought a new Plymouth and decided to visit Mary and the children. But, before leaving, he got involved in one more of Alan Lomax's projects, a book of protest songs called Hard Hitting Songs for Hard Hit People. Lomax provided the songs, Pete Seeger transcribed the music, and Woody wrote the introduction to each song. Although not released until 1962, it became another classic in the social protest song tradition.[74]

Pete and Woody

In the spring of 1940, after completing work on Hard Hitting Songs, Woody, with Pete Seeger as a traveling companion, headed down through Appalachia to Texas. Along the way they stopped for a brief visit at the Highlander Folk School, outside Knoxville, Tennessee, where Miles and Zilpha Horton were experimenting with the use of music as an organizing device. It was an inspirational visit for these two budding protest singers.[75]

Upon reaching Oklahoma, they first paid a brief visit to Woody's brother Roy in Konawa, where his sister, Mary Jo, and his father, Charlie, were staying. Then they were back on the road to Oklahoma City, where they stayed with Communist Party organizers

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[74]Ibid., p. 160.

[75]Ibid., pp. 160-63; for an account of this trip from Seeger's perspective, see David King Dunaway, How Can I Keep from Singing: Pete Seeger (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), pp. 65-70.

Bob and Ina Wood. The Wood's put them to work by taking them around to the Hooverville encampments of the homeless, named for the president whose policies were felt to have produced them, outside of town, to a rally for striking oil workers, and to a meeting of the Unemployed Workers Alliance. Seeger and Guthrie played all the labor songs they knew and generally soaked up the revolutionary spirit.[76]

Excited by all the camaraderie, Woody decided to try and write a few labor songs of his own. He first playfully transformed an old hymn, "You've Got to Walk That Lonesome Valley" into "You've Got to Go Down and Join the Union," and later, in a more substantial effort, wrote the famous song, "The Union Maid," perhaps inspired by the example of Ina Wood.[77] But more on that later.

In Pampa, Pete Seeger's indelibly middle class sensibilities were shocked at the sight of the broken down shack in which Woody's wife and children were subsisting. After a few uncomfortable days with Woody's family, Seeger begged off and continued his travels alone. Woody lasted only a few more days himself before he packed up and headed back up to New York. Along the way he again visited the Woods, who were preparing to take a group to New York for a Communist Party convention. Woody helped by offering the services of his new Plymouth which, after arriving in the city, he promptly donated to the Oklahoma City Communist Party.[78]

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[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid.

New York Radio Personality

Back in the city, Woody resumed his singing career, with a re-invogorated sense of mission and purpose. Before the summer was over, Seeger had returned and, together, they began to tour the union halls and Communist Party functions. They appeared together on WNYC, New York's public radio station, with the other folk protest acts like Leadbelly and Burl Ives, and traditional singers like Jim Garland and Sara Ogan from Kentucky.[79]

During this period Woody also met a would-be actor friend of Will Geer, Gilbert "Cisco" Houston, and they began to appear together in night clubs and bars around the city. It was the beginning of a long, close-knit, personal and professional relationship. During the war, they shipped out together with the Merchant Marines, and, between ships, recorded hundreds of songs for Moses Asch, which have since been released in a lot of different packages. The relationship with Cisco was probably the closest friendship of Woody's life.[80]

As 1941 approached, Woody was making some inroads into commercial radio, appearing at various times on NBC's "Cavalcade of America" and CBS's "We, the People" and "Pipe Smoking Time." He was making as much as $350 a week from his radio performances, plus all the small change he could pick up in the bars. Woody Guthrie was becoming a successful New York act, and making more money than he'd ever made in his life. He wrote to Lomax, saying, "They are

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[79]Klein, p. 165.

[80]Ibid., p. 166.

giving me money so fast I'm using it to sleep under."[81]

But, the further he moved into commercial radio, the more difficult it became for him to maintain his political integrity. His act was being subtly polished for popular consumption. Certain songs were quietly discouraged. He was pressured to ease up on the political cracks between songs. The networks were trying to package him as a cornball hillbilly singer, in the tradition of Homer and Jethro, or String Bean. And, in spite of these and other concessions, the stations received a good deal of red-baiting mail, condemning Woody as un-American, a "fifth columner," and a commie.[82]

He was caught in that great dilemma, between commercial success and political conscience. The dilemma intensified with the events in Europe. In June, Hitler had invaded and occupied France, and by September the bombing of England was at its terrifying height. The war was deepening, drawing the United States ever closer to the fighting, and war-fever was starting to make it difficult for American radicals.[83]

The pressure to conform must have been intense. For the first time in his life, Woody Guthrie seemed to be backing away from his stubborn radical posturing. He stopped writing his column for the Daily Worker, and he appeared to be settling down into a more respectable, mainstream, almost bourgeois, lifestyle. He sent

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[81]Ibid., p. 167.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Gararaty, p. 760.

for Mary and the family. He was ready for the domestic comforts again.[84]

Seemingly, Woody Guthrie was caving in, and in the worst possible way. He appeared to have sold out, compromised all he believed in, for a shot at the big time. But, while outwardly he was a successful radio personality and a man of means, on the inside he was seething. During his radio performances his quick, caustic wit no longer slapped out at the "poll-il-TISH-uns," and the capitalist thieves. He was just another singing hick who had come up from Texas to entertain the city slickers, with only the blandest of songs, the limpest stories, and in the most self-depreciating style.[85]

Just one example should make the point. Woody's starring role in CBS's "Pipe Smoking Time," which began in November, 1940, called for a bastardized, orchestrated opening number--a kind of theme song--which featured Woody embarrassingly singing an advertising jingle to the tune of "So Long, It's Been Good to Know Ya":

> Howdy friend, well it's sure good to know you
> Howdy friend, well it's been good to know you;
> Load up your pipe and take your life easy,
> With Model Tobacco to light up your way
> We're glad to be with you today.[86]

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[84]Klein, p. 169.

[85]Ibid., p. 171.

[86]Ibid.

By the year's end he had taken all he could stand. Without so much as a blink, he quit the radio shows, packed up the wife and kids in a new Buick he had just made the first payment on, and headed for California. And that was the end of Woody Guthrie's radio career.[87]

California and the BPA

After a long, exhausting ride west, by way of Texas, and after a few weeks of cheap West Coast motels and many nights of drunken soul searching, Woody dragged an angry and hopelessly frustrated wife and three fitful youngsters out to the Los Angeles home of his old friend, Ed Robbin. They moved into an abandoned house next door and tried to settle back into California.[88]

Woody tried to get back on at KFVD, but Frank Burke had not forgotten about the Hitler-Stalin pact. The credit union began to send notices about the Buick, and Woody began to seek out the comfort of the skid row bars. But mostly, he just hung around the house, playing with the kids and fighting with Mary. He continued to correspond with the folks back east.[89] At Alan Lomax's urging, he started to write his autobiography.[90] Pete Seeger wrote to him about the new singing group he had organized, called the Almanac Singers.[91]

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[87] Ibid., p. 173.

[88] Robbin, p. 58.

[89] Klein, p. 177.

[90] Ibid., p. 176.

[91] Ibid., pp. 183-87; for a more elaborate discussion of the birth of the Almanac Singers, see Denisoff, Chap. 4, "The Almanac Singers."

He was already getting the yearning to return to New York; until he got sidetracked by the Bonneville Power Administration.

It seems that an obscure documentary film producer, Gunther Von Fritsen, was planning a film about the BPA's massive dam construction project along the Columbia River, on the border between Oregon and Washington. Fritsen was looking for a folksy, backwoods character to narrate the film, and someone had suggested Woody Guthrie.[92]

In May, 1940, as the war cranked up, and the funds for such projects began to dry up, the prospects for the film grew more doubtful, and in the end the project was dropped altogether. But, through this connection, Woody was able to procure a one-month contract with the BPA, at $266.66 per month, to write and record a series of songs about the Bonneville project.[93] He later claimed he wrote 26 songs during that month. He wrote many of his most well known songs for the BPA: "Roll on Columbia," "Hard Traveling," "Jack Hammer John," and "Pastures of Plenty." It was to be the most productive month of his life.[94]

The Almanac Singers

In the spring of 1941, while Woody Guthrie was busily writing songs about the Columbia River and the Grand Coulee Dam, Pete Seeger's Almanac Singers were preparing for a summer tour. Back in December, 1940, Seeger and a friend named Lee Hays had begun to tour

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[92]Klein, pp. 189-90. [93]Ibid.

[94]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 5.

the city's radical circles singing labor hymns and peace songs, songs for the workers and against the war. Both were dedicated radicals. Both had been drawn, through separate channels, to the idea of using rural musical forms as a weapon in the class struggle. And both saw in the union a grand symbol of worker solidarity and a vision of the future.[95]

Lee Hays had come to New York after leaving Commonwealth Labor College in Arkansas, where he had worked as a teacher, activist, and composer of labor hymns.[96] His repertoire already included a couple of classics: "We Shall Not Be Moved," and "Roll the Union On."[97] And he had written one of the earliest Almanac songs, "The Ballad of Bob Wood," about the Oklahoma communist leader that Seeger and Guthrie had visited back in the summer of 1940.[98]

Pete Seeger had been carefully prepared for his mission as the guiding spirit behind the Almanac Singers. Indeed, although the Woody Guthrie mystique looms much larger, Pete Seeger has been the tireless force behind the urban folk music revival, and the unyielding marshal of the social protest singing tradition in America since the early 1940s. And he is still going strong.[99] Young Seeger's conversion to the people's music occurred on a trip with his father, musicologist Charles Seeger, to the 1935 Asheville (North Carolina) Folk

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[95]Denisoff, p. 80.

[96]Ibid., p. 81.

[97]Klein, p. 184.

[98]Denisoff, p. 81.

[99]For a detailed and moving account of Seeger's career see Dunaway, How Can I Keep From Singing.

Festival.[100] But Charles Seeger was also a Marxist and had had a strong hand in developing the song-as-weapon-in-the-class-struggle thesis that the communists of the 1930s had inherited from the Wobblies. He had been a member of the Communist Party's Workers' Music League. The Almanac Singers was young Seeger's attempt to capture the spirit of the Workers' Music League's "worker choruses."[101] They were a loose group of dedicated young people, using their musical talents to further the propaganda battles of the American Left.

Millard Lampel, a young left-wing intellectual and writer, was Hays' roommate in New York and, together with Seeger, these three formed the original Almanac Singers.[102] But the group never had a very fixed membership. Almanacs came and Almanacs went. But this did not matter because the message and the mission were always more important than the group's personnel. Seeger, Hays, and Lampell were the founding members, but formed only the inner core within a loose and shapeless chorus of mind guerillas. Other Almanacs included Bess Lomax, Alan's younger sister; Pete Hawes, a friend of Seeger; Allen Slone, a friend of Lampell; Arthur Stern, who replaced Lee Hays as bass singer in the fall of 1941; and Agnes "Sis" Cunningham who, along with husband Gordon Friesen, later founded Broadside, the topical song journal of the sixties.[103]

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[100] Denisoff, p. 42.

[101] Ibid., p. 80.

[102] Dunaway, p. 77.

[103] Denisoff, p. 82.

In the spring of 1941, Woody Guthrie, fresh and full of himself after an exhilarating month with the BPA, joined the Almanac Singers in New York, toured with them that summer, and moved into Almanac House, their Greenwich Village commune, that fall. There, between club dates and radio spots with the Almanacs, he continued to work on his autobiography.[104] Throughout the fall, the Almanacs performed in union halls and I.W.O. lodges, at the Russian War Relief benefit, and at a Meat Cutters union banquet.[105] They started giving regular Sunday afternoon concerts from their basement, which they called "Hootenannies," a term they had picked up that summer in Seattle.[106]

The significance of the Almanac Singers to the social protest song tradition in America was underscored that fall by a visit to Almanac House from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The former Wobbly organizer was now a prominent Communist Party leader. Joe Hill's "Rebel Girl" was there that night to officially and ceremoniously pass on to the Almanacs the Wobbly torch in the form of a briefcase containing Hill's private papers.[107]

In December, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the American entry into the war, the Almanacs' fortunes began to suffer. Bookings dropped off drastically in the winter of 1942.

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[104]Gordon Friesen, "Woody Works on His Book," Broadside, 9-10 (July, 1962).

[105]Klein, p. 213

[106]Denisoff, p. 86.

[107]Klein, p. 206.

They tried to transcend their passivist past and subversive image by writing and performing anti-fascist songs like "Round and Round Hitler's Grave," "All You Fascists Bound to Lose," and "The Sinking of the Ruben James."[108] But their patriotism was not convincing.

The Almanacs limped on throughout 1942, crusading against world fascism. Woody, like the others, was all caught up in the propaganda struggle against Hitler. During this period his guitar carried the inscription: "This Machine Kills Fascists."[109] Times were changing, and Woody wrote a song about it called "Brand New Situation."[110] And indeed it was. The war turned everything upside down. Throughout 1942, the Almanacs slowly drifted apart. Pete Seeger was drafted. Lee Hays got involved in war relief work. Millard Lampell went into radio as a script writer. Allen Slone became a staff writer for Parade magazine, and Arthur Stern went back to teaching art history. And, in an attempt to avoid the draft, Woody joined the Merchant Marines.[111]

But the new situation had also required some ideological adjustments. As Woody and the others began to mobilize their radicalism behind the war effort, they had begun to visualize the war in Marxist terms, or, more accurately, in Stalinist terms, as part of the larger struggle against capitalist imperialism. In the beginning they had been opposed to sending working folks across

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[108] Denisoff, pp. 95-99.

[109] Klein, p. 265.

[110] Ibid., p. 217.

[111] Denisoff, pp. 101-02.

the oceans to fight and die to protect the property of the rich. But after Pearl Harbor, they were forced into the position of trying to view Hitler and fascism as an example of international capitalism gone haywire, sick with greed.[112]

But the "Brand New Situation" had much wider implications for Woody. In the winter of 1942 he had fallen in love with a young fan, a dance instructor from New Jersey, named Marjorie Greenblatt.[113] The BPA and then Almanac Summer had been too much for Mary. She had gone back to Texas for the last time. Woody would later say off-handedly: "She was right from her side and I was right from mine."[114] But after a long courtship, while both he and Marjorie settled accounts with previous marriages, and after the birth of a daughter, Cathy Ann, they were finally married in November, 1945.[116]

Woody survived the war, serving convoy duty, ferrying soldiers across the Atlantic. He was torpedoed once, and then hit a mine after unloading soldiers during the D-Day invasion. The two ships were extensively damaged, but Woody was not.[117] Then cruelly, at the war's end, on May 7, 1945, the day the Germans surrendered, the draft finally caught up with Woody Guthrie. He served in the

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[112]Ibid., p. 98.

[113]Klein, p. 224.

[114]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 6.

[115]Klein, p. 253.

[116]Ibid., p. 302.

[117]Guthrie, American Folksong, pp. 7-8.

Army until the following December, when he was released on a hardship discharge.[118]

During the war he continued to record material for Moses Asch.[119] In 1943, his autobiography, Bound For Glory, was published.[120] His association with Pete Seeger continued after the war, and he became involved in Seeger's postwar efforts to revive the Almanac spirit in People's Songs, Inc., and Sing Out! magazine.[121] But, slowly and embarrassingly, his public and private behavior became increasingly bizarre and unpredictable as the disease descended upon him. And although it was not his fault, his young daughter who was so dear to him was tragically killed in a mysterious fire.[122] He became increasingly inward and withdrawn. He began to lose friends and his relationship with Marjorie started to deteriorate.

After his second marriage fell apart, he resumed his wanderings for the last time. According to John Greenway, who visited Marjorie Guthrie in 1952, Woody had gone down to the corner store for a newspaper and never came back.[123] He bummed his way out to California, stayed for awhile with Will and Herta Geer, then ran

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[118]Klein, p. 304.

[119]Ibid., p. 276.

[120]Ibid., p. 255.

[121]Guthrie, American Folksong, pp. 7-8.

[122]Klein, pp. 332-34.

[123]Greenway, p. 280

off with the wife of one of Geer's friends, Anya Marshall.[124] They were together long enough to give birth to another child; her first, his eighth. By 1956, after a third divorce, he entered Brooklyn State Hospital, unable to care for himself any more.[125] He died there in October, 1967, after living death for a decade.[126]

The Dust Bowl Balladeer

Woody Guthrie claimed to have written over a thousand songs.[127] He tended to overwrite and under-edit, so that much of his work has been justifiably forgotten. And yet, among his prolific outpourings are some of the greatest achievements in American folklore: "This Land is Your Land," "So Long It's Been Good to Know You," "Pastures of Plenty," and "Those Oklahoma Hills." Of this estimated one thousand songs, most fall into the traditional folk song categories: love songs, work songs, hobo songs, and outlaw ballads; great documentary descriptions of tragedies and disasters, non-protest war songs, patriotic national anthems, and nursery rhymes. John Greenway, in Folksongs of Protest, estimates that only about 140 of these thousand songs are songs of political significance.[128]

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[124] Robbin, pp. 116-17.

[125] Klein, p. 406.

[126] Ibid., p. 443.

[127] Greenway, p. 282.

[128] Ibid.

But Guthrie's view of politics was much broader than Greenway's. He was inclined to argue that folk songs by definition were political.[129] They were the songs of a people--THE people--anthems of the chosen. To Guthrie, folk songs were the cultural expressions of a political entity, and singing, in his mind, was an indelible part of the process by which that political entity was created and sustained over time. Moreover, for Guthrie, the process by which songs entered into the public domain (the folk process) was, in itself, a political or revolutionary process. Songs which became public possessions were community products, and therefore great symbols of the utopian One; great testaments to the socialist ideal. Folk songs were not private possessions, they were not the property of individual "Tin Pan Alley" song entrepreneurs, they were not the product of the popular music industry. Folk songs were not factory made, but homemade. And since folk songs were authorless, instead of copyrighted, they did not draw royalties for the benefit of the few. In Guthrie's mind, since folk songs were public and not private, they inevitably and always stood outside of, and in direct opposition to, the capitalist system.[130] The very same process that turned a song into a hit turned the farmer into a migrant laborer, and Woody Guthrie wanted no part of it.

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[129]Klein, pp. 168-69.

[130]This is a summarized assessment that comes from much reading of many sources. Some of Woody's views on politics and the popular music can be found in an article, "Woody," consisting of a collection of his writings, drawings, and songs published in tribute just after

Of course, it is ironic that Guthrie's family would ultimately make millions of dollars from the royalties of his songs, and become economically stable "rich folks," living as capitalists, benefiting privately from a public commodity, buying and selling the Woody Guthrie mystique. But there was a strong, stubborn side of the real Woody Guthrie that always resisted, sometimes in the most irresponsible ways, profiting from his songs.[131] This was the utopian side of his character.

Especially in the beginning, Woody refused to (or perhaps did not know to) copyright any of his songs, and therefore forfeited the royalties. The royalties for his "Oklahoma Hills," for example, went to his cousin, Jack Guthrie, with whom he used to sing the song on KFVD.[132] Woody seemed content to see many of his songs slip out of his hands and into the public domain. In the early 1940s, George Wilhelm, a West Coast radio announcer, disturbed about the profits of Guthrie's "Philadelphia Lawyer," which was popular at the time, not reaching Woody, took it upon himself to initiate a suit in behalf of Guthrie for copyright infringement. But the action was eventually dropped when Woody showed no interest in the suit.[133]

But later, a more profit minded Woody Guthrie, after being coached by Allen Lomax, would balk at the Almanac Singers' insistence

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his death, in Sing Out! 17, No. 6 (December/January 1967/68), 5.

[131]See Greenway, p. 275.

[132]Klein, p. 297.

[133]Greenway, p. 283.

upon giving their songs a collective authorship. Guthrie claimed copyrights and royalties on several Almanac songs ("The Union Maid," "The Sinking of the Ruben James," and "The Ladies Auxiliary"). He made this claim to authorship because he had furnished the major idea or the majority of the lyrics, while the other Almanacs (which he sometimes referred to as his "deputy song writers")[134] had only made secondary contributions.[135] Perhaps there was an entrepreneural side to Wood Guthrie's character also.

This contradiction runs very deep in Woody Guthrie: the anti-capitalist "folk" songwriter forced into the music industry marketplace to make a living. But this contradiction may be resolved in light of Guthrie's utopian character. He was not so much interested in money as in fame. His utopian spirit wanted to be remembered, it wanted immortality. Woody Guthrie wanted to become a part of the folk process, along with his songs. He wanted to enter the public domain.[136]

But the irony deepens when one considers that Woody Guthrie wrote few, if any, original melodies. The melodies of the Almanac songs mentioned above, for example, were written to familiar folk or country tunes. "The Union Maid" was written to the tune of

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[134]This comment is from a "Woody Sez" column in the New York Daily Worker, June 24, 1940; it was reprinted in Broadside, 21 (February, 1963).

[135]Klein, pp. 208-09.

[136]Robbin, p. 132.

"Redwing."[137] "Ruben James" was written to the Carter Family's "Wildwood Flower,"[138] and "The Ladies Auxiliary" was written to the tune of "The Butcher Boy" (he liked that tune so well that he also used it for one of his children's songs, "Clean-O"[139]). Most of his other famous songs were plagiarized in this fashion: the melody for "This Land is Your Land" came from "Little Darlin' Pal of Mine,"[140] "Tom Joad" from "John Hardy,"[141] "Jesus Christ" from "Jesse James,"[142] "Jack Hammer John" from "Brown's Ferry Blues,"[143] "The Philadelphia Lawyer" from "The Jealous Lover,"[144] "Pastures of Plenty" from "Pretty Polly"[145] and both "Roll on Columbia" and "Rambling Blues" from "Irene Goodnight."[146]

But Guthrie saw nothing unusual about this kind of plagiarism, and felt it was simply the normal folk process, and a further

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[137]Greenway, pp. 299-300.

[138]Klein, p. 209.

[139]Reprints From Sing Out! Vol. VII (New York: Oak Publications, 1964), p. 19.

[140]Klein, p. 141.

[141]Seeger, The Incomplete Folksinger, p. 54.

[142]Greenway, p. 301.

[143]Klein, p. 195.

[144]Seeger, The Incomplete Folksinger, p. 52.

[145]Ibid., p. 54.

[146]Harold Leventhal and Marjorie Guthrie, The Woody Guthrie Songbook (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1976), pp. 196, 188.

indication of his connections to the people.[147] As we have seen, this was the standard procedure used by the Wobblies and other early labor songsters.[148] Songs have circulated in oral cultures since the beginning of time in this fashion.[149]

The whole notion of melody ownership was something foreign to the folk gemeinschaft, and Guthrie felt that borrowing a melody was a natural way to compose a song. And yet, in the degree to which he claimed authorship to songs, and especially songs written to the melodies of other songs, Woody Guthrie was violating the folk process, and had, in a sense, joined forces with the "Tin Pan Alley" capitalists.[150] As we proceed with this discussion of the politics of Woody Guthrie's songs, we must keep this contradiction in mind.

Guthrie's Philosophy of Song

But clearly the contention that all of Guthrie's songs are inherently political is far too broad a conception to be of use here. In more sober moments, Guthrie offered some more specific criteria for what constitutes a political protest song. In one of his New York Daily Worker columns in 1940, he gave the following

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[147]Pete Seeger introducing "Quiet Early Morning" (in reference to the previous song, Guthrie's version of "Lonesome Valley"), on Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie, Together in Concert (Warner Brothers Records, Inc., 1975), side IV, band 4.

[148]See above, pp. 113-14.

[149]See Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore (New York: W. W. Noeton and Co., Inc., 1978), p. 165.

[150]"Tin Pan Alley" is a derogatory term used to refer to New

advice on how to write political songs. I think it is worth quoting in full, since it contains Woody Guthrie's political philosophy of song:

> Poor day today. Didn't write but 3 union songs. Oh well, that'll keep the deputy song writers busy another 6 months. Pete's even taking a wack at song making. He plowed out a couple yesterday. You know you (the reader) are as good a songwriter as there is, but you might not believe it. If you don't believe it, that's why you're not. All you have to do is sit down and write up what's wrong and how to fix it. That's all there is to it. Lord knows, there is plenty of matter to work on. All we need is more song writers. You, for instance. Naw, come on, it don't even have to rhyme. Don't even have to be spelt right. All you got to do is cut loose and let her roll out on paper, and when you get something that's haywire and how to fix it, you got a song. Best part is that you don't even have to be able to write. You don't even have to be able to hum, whistle, or sing. You just got to speak it. That's all. Just whale away and yell it right out. Loud as you can. So somebody else can hear what's haywire and how to fix it. Then you got a song. Every word is a music note of some kind, so everything you yell is a song. Geetars and banjos ain't what makes the world go 'round. It's talkin' songs and yellin' songs--and the best song you don't even have to yell it--you just double up your fists, roll up your sleeves, and thump it out on any convenient silk hat.[151]

Woody Guthrie's philosophy of song begins with the premise that we, the people--each of us as individuals and all of us as a community--have a right and a responsibility to sing out when we encounter injustice. And he meant this literally as well as metaphorically. We each have a duty to expose injustice and

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York City's (and thus America's) popular music industry. See Tony Palmer, All You Need is Love: The Story of Popular Music (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), Chap. 6, "Always Chasing Rainbows: Tin Pan Alley."

[151] Broadside, 21 (February, 1963).

dehumanization whenever and wherever we encounter it. From here he argues that anyone can "sing" in the face of oppression. To do so is as natural as talking. No special skills are necessary. Each of us possesses this capacity. We know instinctively when something is "wrong," when something has gone "haywire," and we have a responsibility, a duty, to speak out, to stand up to the "silk hat" oppressors.

The oppressors that Guthrie usually associates with the "silk hat" imagery show up in his songs as fat-cat capitalists, bankers, industrialists, and politicians. Those who, in his mind, have removed themselves from the community of the people, shed their "folksiness" for a more materially comfortable life style. The few who live in splendour and isolation from the many who barely cling to existence. Those evil individuals who are so filled with greed that they are no longer able to reach out with compassion to their brothers and sisters in the world community. Those few who wish only to dictate to, exploit, extort, bribe, or brainwash the "folksiness" (i.e., the revolutionary spirit) out of the people.

And finally, the solution to this violation of the folk utopia, for Woody Guthrie, seemed to have involved simply standing up to the politicians, landlords, and factory owners of the world, but with the power of a united and determined "people" behind you. This is the old "Solidarity Forever" argument of the Wobblies again. In fact, the same argument could have been made by Joe Hill or John Lennon. But where Hill would have colored his argument in the

direction of the industrial worker, and Lennon toward the bohemian counter-culture, Guthrie painted his songs in the soft hues of the folk, or the rural gemeinschaft of the 1930s.

While the spirit of this philosophy may indeed permeate all of Guthrie's songs, when you get down to the specifics, searching the lyrics for evidence of "what's wrong" and "how to fix it," very few of them measure up to Guthrie's own criteria for a political song. Greenway's estimate that less than 1 percent of Guthrie's songs were overtly political seems to make sense.[152] There are very few Woody Guthrie songs that expose social problems and offer political solutions. Perhaps a few of his union songs like "Union Maid," live up to Guthrie's dual propertied political song. Most of his songs possess one or the other quality, but rarely both together.

Some dwell mostly upon what is wrong, and are grand descriptive ballads of disasters and tragedies, tributes to the suffering of the people, but with very little in terms of solutions to the problems they portray. I will refer to these as documentary songs and our examples will be taken from the Dust Bowl Ballads and The Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti, and a few especially descriptive ballads like "The 1913 Massacre" and "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Song of the Deportees)." On the other hand, there are Guthrie songs which seem to indulge themselves in solution, the problem being self-evident or unknown. To Guthrie, the typical answer to

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[152]Greenway, p. 282.

almost any problem, and the only real hope for the people, was still the union. Guthrie's union songs, like "You've Got to Go Down and Join the Union," "Good Old Union Feeling," "The Union Maid," and "Union's My Religion," are classic examples of labor hymns, and are Guthrie's contribution to the old Wobbly organizing song tradition.

In addition to these, some of Guthrie's more well known songs do not seem to fit well into either of the above categories. They are neither documentary nor organizational, in the strict sense. They are not likely to concern themselves with problems or solutions. They may stem from an exaggerated emphasis upon imaginary solutions. They appear in the form of great patriotic nationalistic anthems like "This Land is Your Land" and many of the Bonneville Power Administration songs. Some of his non-protest war songs like "The Sinking of the Ruben James" also seem to fit into this category.

We must now turn our attention to a discussion of Guthrie's political songs. We will be examining not only the three categories outlined above, but also his children's songs, for evidence of their political significance.

Documentary Songs

Woody Guthrie's Dust Bowl Ballads, recorded in 1940 by Victor Records, are among the finest documents in song of the Great Depression in the American southwest, great photographic descriptions of the drought, the dust storms, the farm failures, and the migrations of the homeless out of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, out to California

in search of a new life.[153] For Woody Guthrie, these songs not only document the plight of his chosen people, the dispossessed okies; but what gives them such authenticity and conviction is that they are songs that emerged out of his own personal experiences trying to survive the devastation of the dust bowl. Here, in 1940, are among the very best collections of thematically coherent protest songs ever assembled and recorded in America. The Dust Bowl Ballads are probably Woody Guthrie's greatest artistic and political accomplishments. What John Steinbeck would accomplish in the novel form, and Dorothy Lange in photography, Woody Guthrie would do in song.

The ravaging dust storms that blew away the top soil and reduced once rich farmlands to desert, were among the most dramatic episodes in the Great Depression. In "The Great Dust Storm," Guthrie describes what he referred to as ". . . the worst of dust storms that ever filled the sky." The storm occurred on April 14, 1935, and laid waste an enormous area, from Oklahoma to the Dakotas, and from New Mexico to Kansas:

> This storm took place at sundown and lasted through the night,
> We looked out next morning and we saw a terrible sight;
> We saw outside our windows where wheat fields once had grown,
> Was now a rippling ocean of dust the wind had blown.[154]

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[153]These are still available: Dust Bowl Ballads Sung by Woody Guthrie (Folkways Records FH 5212, 1964).

[154]Ibid., side II, band 1.

In describing the destruction, Guthrie effectively centers the narrative upon himself and his family, crowded into the parlor, with the children crying, as the wind and the dust "whistled" through the cracks in the windows and the walls of their "oil boom shack." They all thought it was the end of the world; they thought the Day of Judgement was at hand. When it was all over, the devastated family was loaded into their "jalopie" and they "rattled down the highway to never come back again."[155]

It is interesting to note that Guthrie and those he portrayed in these songs were more likely to perceive their plight in religious (as opposed to political) imagery, and the great dust storms were very typically viewed in eschatological terms. In "Dusty Old Dust," the people were sitting around talking about the end of the world when:

> . . . the telephone rang and it jumped off the wall,
> That was the Preacher a-making his call.
> He said: "Kind friends this may be the end.
> You've got your last chance at salvation of sin."[156]

But the dust was so bad inside the church that the Preacher could not read from his Bible. So he folded his "specs," took up the collection, saying:

> So long, it's been good to know you,
> So long, it's been good to know you,
> So long, it's been good to know you,

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[155]Ibid.

[156]Ibid., side II, band 2.

This dusty old dust is getting my home,
And I've got to be drifting along.[157]

Typically, Guthrie's solution is escapist, to drift on down the road, to put your troubles behind you.

But, at least Guthrie did not lose his sense of humor through all this. In fact, as you can see, he used it very effectively in the service of protest. Humor is as important a component in Guthrie's songs as it was in the songs of Joe Hill. Some of his deadly serious comments on the side effects of the dust are softened by genuine, yet impossibly funny, witticisms. In "Dust Pneumonia Blues"[158] (which he pronounced "NEW-monie"), Guthrie describes one of the more serious consequences of the dust storms, a respiratory disease, pneumononiosis, caused from dust in the lungs.[159] In the song he takes the role of a pneumoconiosis patient. His doctor tells him: "You got that dust pneumonee and you ain't got long, not long." But Guthrie describes all this with a humor that cuts deep into the nature of such a tragedy. About midway through the song, he sings:

Now there ought to be some yodelin' in this song,
Now there ought to be some yodelin' in this song,
But I can't yodel, for the rattlin' in my lungs.[160]

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[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., side II, band 4.

[159] Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary, p. 1220.

[160] Dust Bowl Ballads, side II, band 4.

He also weaves in a love story. His girl loves him because "she's got the dust pneumonee, too."[161] In fact, they are both so accustomed to the dust that one day, when his "good gal" fainted in the rain, he had to throw "a bucket of dirt in her face, just to bring her back again."[162] But before it was over, he was starting to realize that, "If you wanta get (or keep) a mama, you have to sing a California song."[163]

To young Guthrie and the other "dust bowl refugees," California became the Promised Land, where they could escape the devastation, and make a new beginning. But, as it turned out, California was not so promising. There was no Moses to lead the migrant children, and besides, in California, money was God. In "Do Re Mi," Woody warns the new Israelites of what lies ahead in California, but with a disarming wit:

> Lots of folks back east, they say;
> Are leavin' home most ev'ry day,
> Beatin' the hot old dusty way,
> To the California line.
> Cross the desert sands they roll,
> Gettin' out of that old dust bowl.
> (They) think they're goin' to a sugar bowl
> But here's what they find:
>
> For the police at the port of entry say,
> "You're number fourteen thousand for today."
>
> Oh, if you ain't got the Do Re Mi, boys,

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[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.

If you ain't got the Do Re Mi,
You better get back to beautiful Texas,
Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.
California's a Garden of Eden,
A paradise to live in or see.
But believe it or not,
You won't find it so hot,
If you ain't got the Do Re Mi.[164]

"Talking Dust" is another very humorous narrative of the flight to California. It is in the form of a "talking blues," a traditional blues format, which lends itself quite nicely to humor, with periodic pauses and an unusual metric pattern. It is an almost improvised rambling chatter, woven loosely into a repeating bass line on the guitar.[165] The singer first talks of the idyllic "little farm" he lived in with his family back in 1927, and of how the dust storms ruined it, and of the trip to California.[166] His description of the situation the family found in California is filled with a sarcasm that is just beginning to have a political edge:

We got out to the west coast broke
So dadgum hungry, I thought I'd croak.
So I bummed up a spud or two,
And my wife fixed up a 'tater stew.
We poured the kids full of it.
Mighty thin stew though,
You could read a magazine right through it.

I always have figured,
That if it'd been just a little bit thinner
Some of these here pol-i-ticians could've seen through it![167]

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[164]Ibid., side I, band 3.

[165]See Brunvand, p. 159.

[166]Dust Bowl Ballads, side I, band 1.

[167]Ibid.

Along the road to California, and in the "Hoovervilles" or migrant camps outside of the western cities, one of the most dreaded fears were the "vigilantes," armed patriots and hired thugs who preyed upon the migrants, out of a fear for their property and jobs in the onslaught of the homeless and hungry. Reflecting the perplexity of the homeless people around him, living as aliens in their own country, Woody Guthrie could not understand the vigilante phenomena. In "Vigilante Man," he asks:

> Oh, tell me why does a vigilante man,
> Tell me, why does a vigilante man,
> Carry that sawed-off shotgun in his hand?
> Would he shoot his brother and sister down?[168]

His utopian ideology was beginning to bear fruit on the vine that Steinbeck would call the "grapes of wrath."[169]

Woody was so taken by Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath that, after seeing the movie version in New York City in 1940, he wrote a long narrative ballad, condensing Steinbeck's 500-page novel down into 17 verses, in a song he was very proud of, called "Tom Joad."[170] Through Steinbeck's Preacher Casey, Woody reflected the growing sense of class-consciousness he imagined and hoped would ultimately spread throughout his people:

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[168] Ibid., side II, band 6.

[169] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1939).

[170] Dust Bowl Ballads, side I, band 4.

"Well, I preached for the Lord a mighty long time,
Preached about the rich and the poor.
Us working folks (has got to) get together
'Cause we ain't got a chance anymore, boys,
We ain't got a chance anymore."[171]

But probably the best reflection of Guthrie's growing class consciousness, and the most consciously political of the Dust Bowl Ballads, was "I Ain't Got No Home In this World Any More."[172] In a much abbreviated ideological summation of the politics of the dust bowl, Guthrie wrote:

My brothers and my sisters are stranded on this road,
It's a hot and dusty road that a million feet have trod.
The Rich man took my home and drove me from my door,
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.[173]

The whole concept of the Dust Bowl Ballads reflects Woody Guthrie's utopian consciousness. They are grand testaments to the strength and perseverence of his "brothers and sisters," the homeless and hungry, struggling to survive out on the road. But, by and large, these songs are the product of a pre-ideological Guthrie. With only a few exceptions, they are devoid of any conscious, positive radicalism. But there is a naive class consciousness, a growing awareness of the struggle of the poor against the rich, and the innocent hope that the poor will unite in their oppression and overcome the stranglehold of the rich. This was to form the solid foundation of Woody Guthrie's political philosophy.

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[171] Ibid.

[172] Ibid., side II, band 5.

[173] Ibid.

Much later in his career, in 1946, at the urging of record producer Moses Asch, Guthrie attempted another similar project.[174] But this time the subject matter lay outside the field of Guthrie's experience. He was asked to document the controversial trial and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolemeo Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists convicted of murder in conjunction with a payroll robbery in Boston some 20 years earlier. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927 after a long and well-publicized trial. Their case became a much celebrated cause in the American Left. Not since Joe Hill had a public execution attracted such political controversy. While never as respected artistically, nor as convincing politically, as the Dust Bowl Ballads, Woody Guthrie's Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti (Folkways FH 5485) are nevertheless great monuments to two of the American Left's most notorious martyrs.[175]

In a typical example, "You Souls of Boston," Guthrie recounts the story of Sacco and Vanzetti, while proclaiming their innocence. He argued that, at the time of the alleged crime, Vanzetti, a fish peddler, was with ". . . his fish cart 32 miles away."[176] And Sacco had relatives who would testify that he was some 40 miles away at the time of the robbery. Moreover, after seeing Sacco's pregnant wife

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[174]Klein, pp. 313-14.

[175]Woody Guthrie, The Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti (Folkways Records FH 5485, 1947); also issued in the form of a song book by Oak Publications, n.d.

[176]Ibid.; see also Reprints From Sing Out! Vol. VI, pp. 44-45.

break down in tears, a member of the "Morelli Gang" confessed to the crime.[177] But, because Sacco and Vanzetti were "union men," they were found guilty and executed.[178]

The other nine songs on the album simply re-tell the same story, but without the personal insights or the humor of the Dust Bowl Ballads. All Guthrie would pull together in the Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti were a few weak, unenthusiastic, and unconvincing songs to remember them by:

> Two good men a long time gone,
> Two good men a long time gone,
> Sacco and Vanzetti are gone,
> Left me here to sing this song.[179]

One final example of the documentary style, and one of Guthrie's most lyrical and poignant narrative ballads, is "The 1913 Massacre."[180] It is another retrospective account of an event in labor history, a vigilante-style incident that occurred during the Christmas season of 1913 in the copper mining districts of Michigan. The narrative is especially effective because Guthrie skillfully draws the listener into the story, creating a powerful empathy with the story's victims, the Michigan copper miners and their families:

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Reprints From Sing Out! Vol. III, p. 22.

I'll take you in a door and up a high stairs,
Where laughing and singing can be heard everywhere,
I'll let you shake hands with the people you meet,
And watch the kids dancing 'round the big Christmas tree.[181]

After you are comfortably seated and content in the warm closeness closeness of the miners and their families, listening quietly as a "little girl" sits down by the Christmas tree to play the piano, your quietude is suddenly interrupted as some of the "copper boss thugs," looking for a little fun, open the door at the foot of the stairs and yell "fire!" In the rush to evacuate the crowded hall, 73 children are crushed to death as the thugs hold the door and laugh at their "murderous joke."[182] Woody then resolves the ballad in a quiet, but powerful, protest against such a horrible and inhumane prank:

The piano played a slow funeral tune
And the town was lit up by a cold Christmas moon;
The parents they cried and the miners they moaned,
"See what your greed for money has done?"[183]

To understand this last line, we must dip back into Guthrie's utopian consciousness. In his mind, all the complexities of world and domestic politics were conveniently reduced to a mythic contest between love and greed; between an altruistic, compassionate family of man, and the blind, amoral, materialistic greed of the wealthy few:

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[181]Ibid.

[182]Ibid.

[183]Ibid.

> All I ever done was to simply show here and there
> that the people in the fight all around the world
> are lined up on one of two sides. Love. Greed.
> There are no middle grounds--no halfway limbs . . .[184]

Woody Guthrie, the utopian, worked out his politics in black and white, good and evil symbolism. To him, greed was embodied in the evil institutions of free enterprise capitalism, and love was the only possible weapon to fight such an insidious evil. In his mind, also, love was synonymous with "the union." The union, as a symbol of the people united in the struggle against capitalist greed, was the very embodiment of altruistic love, or community, locked in a fight to the death against the plague of blind egoism and materialistic greed. Invariably, greed, in any "brand or style," was the "what's wrong" component in Guthrie's protest song equation, and love, in the form of the union, was "how to fix it."[185]

There are many more examples of documentary songs scattered among Guthrie's songs: "The Union Burying Ground," "The Ludlow Massacre," "The Dying Miner," and "The Song of the Deportees," to mention only the most well-known examples. These are among Guthrie's best artistic accomplishments. He was a masterful balladeer and the narrative documentary song was his most powerful medium. While these songs are rarely overtly political, a subtle social commentary usually accompanies the narrative.

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[184]Klein, p. 270.

[185]Ibid.

Guthrie's union songs are far less subtle. Some are even clumsily propagandistic. But their purpose was more ideological than narrative, and they are thus more didactic than aesthetic.

Union Hymns

In one of his more arrogant moments, Woody Guthrie claimed that, among the other great protest writers of his day--Aunt Molly Jackson, Sara Ogan, Jim Garland, and Pete Seeger--his work would be remembered as "the most radical, the most militant, and the most topical, of them all."[186] But it is surprising to find that, for such a boastful radical songwriter, Woody Guthrie actually wrote very few overtly political songs. His most radical songs amount to only a handful of union songs, and these fall into two distinct categories: the traditional union organizing songs (like "Union Maid" and "You've Got To Go Down and Join the Union"), and Guthrie's own unique union utopian songs (like "Good Old Union Feeling" and "I'm On My Way").

Within the protest genre, organizing songs are the most obviously revolutionary, the most blatantly radical. These songs are usually designed with actual movement politics in mind. Their most obvious musical-lyrical characteristic is the presence of a repetitive refrain line or chorus. Organizing songs are designed for group singing. While the narrative-documentary format demands the great descriptive powers of the balladeer, audience participation

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[186] Sing Out! Vol. 17, No. 6, p. 5.

is kept at a minimum. The major purpose of the organizing song is not descriptive, but organizational, meaning they are specifically intended to generate audience participation. Organizing songs thus lend themselves to practical political uses on the picket lines and at mass demonstrations. They are great rallying songs, imbued with positive political power, the power to totalize protest into decisive revolutionary action.[187]

The great organizing songs in the protest tradition include Ralph Chaplin's "Solidarity Forever,"[188] Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On,"[189] the Negro protest spiritual, "We Shall Overcome,"[190] and John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance."[191] Many of these songs are still heard today, in the 1980s, at mass demonstrations and peace rallies. Only Guthrie's "Union Maid" approaches the calibre of the above songs, but it is rarely heard today.

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[187]The concept of the "organizing" song is quite similar to what Denisoff called a "magnetic" song, which he distinguished from the more descriptive "rhetorical" song; see his Sing a Song of Social Significance (Bowling Green, Ky.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1971), Chap. 1.

[188]I.W.W. Songs (34th ed.; Chicago: I.W.W., 1973), p. 4; originally published in the 9th ed., 1916.

[189]Originally written in Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1931, copyright 1947, by Stormking Music, Inc.; see Pete Seeger, American Favorite Ballads (New York: Oak Publications, 1961), p. 94.

[190]For a discussion of the historical background of "We Shall Overcome," see Dunaway, pp. 222-23; the text has been reproduced in many songbooks, see Maynard Soloman, ed., The Joan Baez Songbook (New York: Ryerson Music Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 144-45.

[191]Although written by Lennon, this song is credited to John Lennon and Paul McCartney. It was recorded at the 1969 Montreal

It may be that Guthrie wrote many more organizing songs than have survived to the present. It is in the nature of organizing songs that many are written spontaneously for very specific politico-historical events, and then quickly forgotten. Songs like "Mr. Tom Mooney is Free,"[192] written by Guthrie on the occasion of Mooney's release from prison, and "Why Are You Standing in the Rain?"[193] written for the 1940 American Youth Congress Convention in Washington, D.C., for example, are so topical as to be only of academic interest. Probably only the most general and abstract of Guthrie's organizational songs have survived.

Another explanation for Guthrie's low output of organizing songs is that very quickly after Woody immersed himself in leftist politics in the early 1940s, America entered World War Two. This, as we have seen, created great turmoil in the American Left. And, for Guthrie, war fever may have transformed many would-be organizing songs into grand patriotic nationalist anthems. Songs like "This Land is Your Land" have a very definite militant edge and, like organizing songs, have a choral musical-lyrical structure. But, for reasons we will explore later, these songs underwent a political white-washing as they entered into the popular field, losing much of their revolutionary impact.

"Bed-in," copyright Maclen Music, Inc., BMI; first released by Apple Records in 1969 as a single, then on the John Lennon album, Shaved Fish, by Capital Records (SW 3421), 1975.

[192] Klein, pp. 122-23.

[193] Ibid., p. 143.

Organizing songs are a large part of the Wobbly legacy.[194] The Wobblies were not serious balladeers, but they pioneered the activist, picket line song, and radical congregational singing techniques. Early in his travels, Woody Guthrie was exposed to Wobbly politics and culture. Much of his early political enlightenment occurred in the hobo jungles, sitting around camp fires, listening to old Wobblies talk of the class struggle and revolution. And, somewhere along the way, he obtained a copy of the "Little Red Songbook," which he carried inside his shirt, as if it were a sacred but subversive, holy text. His own passion for putting together songs and songbooks, as well as his political philosophy and his philosophy of song were, in some very significant ways, inspired by this historic Wobbly songster.[195]

Guthrie's earliest (and probably best) attempts to write explicitly radical, movement songs were quite naturally written in the Wobbly style. This was the only pattern to go by. Thus, the favorite Wobbly technique of transforming popular hymns into union songs was, as we have seen, the technique that produced Guthrie's first organizing song: "You've Got To Go Down and Join the Union."[196] It was written at the home of Communist Party organizers Bob and Ina Wood, while traveling with Pete Seeger in

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[194]See above, pp. 120-21.

[195]Klein, pp. 82-84.

[196]See above, p. 196.

the spring of 1940, and it was what Lee Hays would call a "zipper song."[197] Words could be "zipped" in and out of the song, to adapt to new situations.

When performing this song Woody would simply exchange "You've got to" for "My brother's got to," or "My sister's got to," or whatever came to mind at the time. But, at some point the song involved a very memorable final stanza, which utilized the metaphor of the "road" to symbolize life's hardships and struggles. It also incorporated a reference to the hope-generating role of singing in the romanticized struggle, while alluding to the struggle's ultimate goal (which Wobbly poster art often pictured as a beautiful sunset at the end of the road): the utopian One

> Though the road gets rough and rocky
> And the hills get steep and high;
> We will sing as we go marching
> And we'll win that One Big Union by and by.[198]

"The Union Maid," Guthrie's most famous organizing song, also has Wobbly roots and a Wobbly flavor. It is directly in the tradition of Joe Hill's "Rebel Girl." It was also written while he was with Bob and Ina Wood in the spring of 1940, and was at least partly

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[197] Denisoff, Great Day Coming, p. 6; Pete Seeger credits Lee Hays with having originated the term "zipper song" on Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie, Precious Friend (Warner Brothers Records 2BSK 3644, 1982), side IV, band 4. However, Denisoff does not mention Hays in this connection.

[198] Woody Guthrie Songbook, p. 246.

inspired by the example of Ina Wood. However, in The Woody Guthrie Songbook, Guthrie is quoted as saying:

> This song was made up in honor of Mrs. Merriweather. She's a woman that was stripped naked and beat up, and then hung to the rafters of the house 'till she was unconscious.[199]

The heroine in the song was never afraid of the "goons and ginks and the company finks," or the deputies who made the raids on the homes of union organizers.[200] She was always "wise to the tricks of the company spies," and could not be misled by the "company stools."[201] She was a dedicated union woman who always got her way when she "struck for higher pay."[202] And when confronted by the company guards, she always stood her ground, singing defiantly:

> Oh, you can't scare me,
> I'm stickin' to the union,
> I'm stickin' to the union,
> I'm stickin to the union;
> Oh, you can't scare me,
> I'm stickin' to the union,
> I'm stickin' to the union,
> 'till the day I die.[203]

Guthrie originally wrote only two verses and the chorus, and then a very interesting and convoluted folk protest process took

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[199] Ibid., p. 236.

[200] Ibid., p. 233.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid., pp. 233-34.

[203] Ibid., pp. 234-35.

over the song. When it became part of the Almanac Singers' repertoire, they felt it needed a third verse, so Milard Lampell added this verse:

> Now you gals who want to be free
> Take this little tip from me;
> Get you a man who's a union man
> And join the Ladies Auxiliary;
> Married life ain't hard
> When you've got a union card,
> And a union man has a happy life
> When he's got a union wife.[204]

The song remained in this form until the early 1970s, when Lampell's last verse began to grate on some sensitive feminist nerves. In the 34th edition of the I.W.W.'s "Little Red Songbook" in 1973. Lampell's verse was dropped and a new, feminized verse was added by Nancy Katz:

> A woman's struggle is hard
> Even with a union card,
> She's got to stand on her own two feet,
> And not be a servant of the male elite.
> It's time to take a stand,
> Keep working hand in hand,
> There's a job that's got to be done
> And a fight that's got to be won.[205]

Here we have a Woody Guthrie song, inspired by the original Wobblies, adapted by the Almanac Singers, and then re-worked by the feminist descendants of the Wobblies.

Because of the elasticity of the symbol "union" this song has been able to adapt and develop with changing times. Unfortunately,

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[204] Ibid., pp. 233-34.

[205] I.W.W. Songs, 34th ed., p. 46.

however, it has not been able to stretch quite as well in the post-World War II era. The I.W.W.'s 1973 feminist verse is not very well known. After the war, the union as a symbol lost a great deal of its credibility with the radical left in America. Especially after the 1955 merger of the AFL and the CIO, American Labor movement has been perceived as increasingly elitist and conservative.[206] Union leaders have become indistinguishable from management executives; both seem to dress, act, and think like politicians and bankers. At a symbolic level, the union leader is no longer a convincing radical.

After America's entry into World War II, Guthrie's union songs turned increasingly utopian in character. And in the post-war years, union songs and symbolism disappeared altogether from Guthrie's work, and from the social protest song tradition generally. In 1941, Guthrie wrote his last union organizing song, at the request of the CIO's Ladies Auxiliary. They had approached Guthrie and the other Almanac Singers and asked if they would write a theme song for the Ladies Auxiliary. When Guthrie reminded them of "The Union Maid," saying it had been written for just that purpose, the ladies said it was not "dignified enough."[207] So, partly in jest, and partly in contempt, Guthrie wrote them a theme song:

Oh the Ladies Auxiliary,
It's a good Auxiliary,
'Bout the best Auxiliary
That you ever did see.

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[206] Garraty, p. 824.

[207] Reprints From Sing Out! Vol. VII, p. 19.

If you want an Auxiliary,
See the Ladies Auxiliary,
It's that Ladies Auxiliary.[208]

After America's entry into the war, and Guthrie had joined the Merchant Marines, he continued to write union songs. He began to see the war effort as part of a world-wide union struggle, the struggle of the working folks against fascism.[209] In 1947, Guthrie put together another songbook, American Folksong, edited by Moses Asch, and published by Oak Publications.[210] The collection included two very good union songs written during the war.

But these songs reveal a changing conception of "the union." In "Good Old Union Feeling," the union was represented as an emotional affect, or perhaps a mystical-spiritual condition:

It's that good old union feeling in my soul! In my soul!
It's that good old union feeling in my soul!
Since I've seen my union vision, I'm traveling a union road,
It's that good old union feeling in my soul.[211]

In "I'm On My Way," he is traveling the same imaginary road, and not looking back. Confidently marching off to a "better place," to a "union town," to a utopia where "We'll win our war and peace," and presumably live happily ever after.[212]

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[208]Ibid.

[209]See above, pp. 205-206.

[210]It was not published until 1961.

[211]Guthrie, American Folksong, p. 33.

[212]Ibid., p. 31.

These later organizing songs were beginning to lose their radical character. While they possessed many of the characteristics of organizing songs, they were now becoming utopian in spirit in that they had lost their class-based activist referent and had become increasingly mystical and escapist.

Nationalistic Anthems

As we have seen, Woody Guthrie's politics always had a utopian edge. He had always romanticized the working class struggle, using what Klein called "comic-book dialectics."[213] It was always the evil rich bankers and politicians against the pore workin' folks. Radical politics to Guthrie was a religion. It was a way of life, a mission, and a cause. It was the missing ingredient that made his life complete. It gave his life meaning and purpose. He once even wrote an unmemorable song called "Union's My Religion," explaining his unorthodox beliefs:

> When I seen my union vision
> Then I made my quick decision;
> Yes, that union's my religion;
> That I know,
> And that I know.[214]

His "union religion" was the religion of the people, involving the glorification of the working class which, for Guthrie, was best represented in the symbolism and imagery of the rural gemeinschaft of the American heartland. But he idealized all American workers,

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[213]Klein, p. 271.

[214]Ibid.

all who toiled by the sweat of their brow and the muscles in their arms.

Guthrie went so far as to proletarianize Christ as "a carpenter true and brave":

> When Jesus come to town,
> All the workin' folks around
> Believed what he did say.
> The bankers and the preachers,
> They nailed him on a cross,
> And they laid Jesus Christ in his grave.[215]

But Guthrie's politics here are more Steinbeckian than Marxian, reflecting--not a revolutionary dialectic--but a sentimental exaltation of the working class. This was but Guthrie's interpretation of the Depression era's Popular Front Americanized radicalism.

Perhaps, as Denisoff has suggested, Guthrie's politics was opportunist in nature, motivated by the desire to reach an audience that was demanding a working class song culture.[216] However, I think that this criticism is too harsh. While, like other performers, Guthrie had the problem of finding and keeping an audience, his politics were never as shallow as Denisoff seems to imply. Actually, in his songs, Guthrie was juggling a strange and eccentric blending of American folk-country musical cultural, New Deal-Popular Front radicalism, and World War II patriotism; idealizing

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[215] Woody Guthrie Songbook, p. 155.

[216] Denisoff, p. 137.

the vanishing American peasantry and the emerging working class in a decidedly nationalistic manner.

The songs Guthrie wrote for the Bonneville Power Administration in the spring of 1941 were among the first of his songs to reflect this utopian working class romanticism. Because of their apparent nationalist pride and patriotism, these are among his most misunderstood songs. And yet, in Guthrie's imagination, these were meant to be great and lasting tributes to an experiment in American socialism. In the liner notes to Woody Guthrie (Asch 347), he explains the political significance of the B.P.A. songs:

> . . . I made up 26 songs about the Columbia and about the dam and about the men, and these songs were recorded by the Department of Interior, Bonneville Power Administration, Portland, Oregon. The records were played at all sorts and sizes of meetings where the people bought bonds to bring the power lines over the fields and hills to their own little places.
>
> But there were reactionary congressmen in back of the people that owned those little private dams and power houses out there, that didn't want to see the Grand Coulee built, because it would make electricity dirt cheap and cut down on their profits. (They fought hard to keep the TVA out of the State of Tennessee, too.) They can always think up a million nice good excellent reasons why it is better for you to go ragged and hungry and down and out and even in the dark, as long as it makes them a profit. But lots of people made speeches on both sides. Movie stars flew up in big airplanes and told the folks how nice it was not to have no electricity . . . . But we made speeches on our side, and we played the records over the loud speakers there in those little towns, and the people shelled out the money and bought the bonds and brought the electricity over the hill to milk the cows, shoe the old mare, light up the saloon, the chili joint window, the ladies' dresses and hats in windows, the schools and churches along the way, to run the factories turning out manganese, chrome, bauxite,

> aluminum, steel, and flying fortresses by the hundreds to bomb the Japs out of this war with. That's how things get done. Just people doing it. People can get more done that way than anybody else I ever seen, and I'm a man that's seen a lot of them.[217]

What excited Guthrie so about the Bonneville Power Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and other New Deal public works projects was that the Government (meaning "the people") was building these massive dams and highways. This was a revolutionary slap at the private enterprise system. In Guthrie's mind, and in the minds of many others on both sides of the issue, this was a very important step toward socialism.[218] It was as if all his political dreams had come true! He made the Grand Coulee Cam out to be the eighth wonder of the world:

> Well, the world has seven wonders
> That the travelers always tell;
> Some gardens and some towers,
> I guess you know them well.
> But now the greatest wonder
> Is in Uncle Sam's fair land;
> It's that King Columbia River,
> And the Big Grand Coulee Dam.[219]

And he lavished praise and glory on the hard working men who tamed the Columbia River, bringing electric light to the people, in grand epic working class anthems like "Jack Hammer John," "Hard Travelin," and "Roll On Columbia":

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[217] Greenway, pp. 291-92.

[218] Klein, p. 195.

[219] Greenway, p. 292.

These mighty men labored by day and by night,
Seldom you seen such a beautiful sight,
Matching their strength against the river's wild flight,
It's roll on Columbia, roll on.[220]

To Guthrie, these dam construction projects would create "green pastures of plenty out of dry desert land."[221] And the strong implication was that the land and its resources belonged to the working people. The people's freedom demands that the Government (as opposed to private companies) control the nation's natural resources:

It's always we ramble,
That river and I,
All along your green valleys
I'll work 'till I die;
And my land I'll defend
With my life if it be,
'Cause my pastures of plenty
Must always be free.[222]

Thus, when it came, Guthrie had no trouble justifying America's entry into World War II, as the defense of the land and the people's freedom.

His sensitivity to the reactionary, anti-communist sentiments of those who warned of the totalitarian possibilities of these Government-owned utility monopolies, and his overriding concern for

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[220] Reprints From Sing Out! Vol. III, p. 11.

[221] From "Pastures of Plenty," by Woody Guthrie, copyright 1960, Ludlow Music, Inc.; see Woody Guthrie Songbook, pp. 181-82.

[222] Ibid.

upgrading the standard of living of the American common people on their lands, is revealed in this satirical ending to "Talking Columbia":

> Yes, Uncle Sam needs wool, and Uncle Sam needs wheat,
> Uncle Sam needs houses and stuff to eat,
> Uncle Sam needs water and power dams
> Uncle Sam needs people, and the people need land.
>
> Of course, I never did like dictators much, myself,
> But, I think the whole country ought to be run by
> e-lec-tri-ci-ty![223]

In Guthrie's mind, the B.P.A. was a great humanitarian experiment, and a great expression of working class consciousness and solidarity. It was supplying jobs and electricity to the people, and demonstrating the courage, determination, and ingenuity of the hard working men and women who were the backbone of this nation.

In April, 1966 Woody Guthrie, with little more than a year of life left in him, was awarded the Department of Interior's Conservation Service Award for his BPA songs. In conjunction with the award, one of the Bonneville Power Administration's sub-stations was named after him.[224] But the letter from the Secretary of the Interior clearly demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the meaning and intent of Guthrie's B.P.A. songs and the nature of his song-writing career generally:

> Yours was not a passing comment on the beauties of nature, but a living, breathing, singing force in our struggle to

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[223]Ibid., p. 217.

[224]Ibid., p. 48.

> use our land and save it too. The greatness of this land is that people such as you, worked on it and that you told about that work--told about the power of the Bonneville Dam and the men who harnessed it . . . . You have summarized the struggle and the deeply held convictions of all those who love our land and fight to protect it.[225]

In the eyes of the Secretary, this Stalinist mind guerilla was a conservationist.

But clearly something in Guthrie's work invited these patriotic interpretations. He had glorified and proletarianized Roosevelt and the New Deal in a decidedly nationalistic manner. In "The Grand Coulee Dam," for example, Guthrie wrote: "Uncle Sam took up the challenge in the year of 'thirty-three, for the farmer and the factory and all of you and me."[226] And, as the war in Europe drew closer, this proletarian nationalism became even more pronounced. In "My Uniform's My Dirty Overalls," he enlisted the American worker in the struggle against fascism.[227] In "The Sinking of the Ruben James," he paid tribute to the "hard fighting men" who died for "the stars and stripes of this land of the free."[228] And he ridiculed the great enemy of the workers in "Talking Hitler's Head Off Blues."[229] In Guthrie's version of World War II, Roosevelt and Stalin were the great heroes, and the American workers the great warriors.

Guthrie's view of Roosevelt, the New Deal, and World War II were a much romanticized utopian socialist view. What passed for

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[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid., p. 111.

[227] Ibid., p. 75.

[228] Ibid., p. 204.

[229] Klein, p. 235.

nationalism was his native folk consciousness filtering through the working class ideology he had been exposed to in California and New York. In Guthrie's mind, Roosevelt stood symbolically for the fight against capitalism at home and fascism abroad. His death in 1945, came as a great shock to Guthrie's utopian sensibilities, inspiring one of his great nationalist anthems, "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt." It took the form of a letter, consoling the widow:

> Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,
> Don't hang your head to cry;
> His mortal clay is laid away,
> But his good work fills the sky . . .[230]

The song continued as a great tribute to F.D.R. as the crippled leader who had "learned [Guthrie's] soul to walk."[231] Woody's Christ-like Roosevelt ran "the money changin' racket boys" out of office, and then helped to build the union movement, and find jobs for the unemployed.[232] Woody claimed that on his merchant ship, the captain had hated F.D.R., but he was loved by "all ship's hands."[233] To Woody, Roosevelt had fought the war "the union way," and the fascist "hate gang all got beat."[234] He went on to say that Roosevelt did not like the capitalist leaders, Churchill, De Gaulle, and Chiang Kai-shek, but that, at Yalta, he had shaken the hand of

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[230] Woody Guthrie Songbook, p. 70.

[231] Ibid., p. 71.

[232] Ibid. [233] Ibid. [234] Ibid.

Joseph Stalin, saying, "There's a man I like."[235] And on and on, through 15 verses, Guthrie spelled out all of F.D.R.'s grand accomplishments, always from a "union" perspective, and always punctuating his WWII mythology with the poignant refrain: "This world was lucky to see him born."[236]

In Woody Guthrie's war songs, World War II was a workers' war. Uncle Sam was fighting on the side of Uncle Joe. American populism and Russian socialism were partners in a struggle to preserve the world for the people. Love was locked in a struggle against Greed. His war songs were thus utopian in nature, mythologizing World War II as a romantic workers' struggle.

But the place where this contradiction between Guthrie's love of the land and the people, and his radicalism, is perhaps nowhere more striking than in the example of his most famous song, "This Land Is Your Land." Originally written in 1940, just after Guthrie arrived in New York City, and entitled "God Blessed America For Me,"[237] it was always intended as a working class national anthem, a pore boy's "America the Beautiful." This song has gone through a very interesting folk process as it left Guthrie's pen and entered into the public domain.

In a cheap hotel room near Times Square, he wrote out six verses all in one sitting, to the Carter Family's "Little Darlin'

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[235] Ibid.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Klein, pp. 140-41.

Pal of Mine."[238] The first verse evolved into the familiar chorus about this being "our" land (your's and mine) "from California to the New York Island," "redwood forests," "gulf stream waters" and all.[239] Two of the more politically explicit verses were eventually dropped, leaving three standard verses in the popular version. But all six were originally capped with the noble, but unimaginative, line: "God Blessed America for me."[240] In 1944, Guthrie replaced that line with the refrain we are all familiar with today: "This Land was made for you and me."[241]

The standard verses effectively disguise Guthrie's original political tone, under a heavy coat of nationalist sentimentality:

> As I went walking that ribbon of highway,
> I saw above me the endless skyway,
> I saw below me that golden valley,
> This land was made for you and me.[242]

The political verses paint a much different, proletarianized picture:

> In the Squares of the city, in the shadow
> of the steeple,
> By the relief office, I saw my people,
> As they stood there hungry, I started to
> whistle,
> This land was made for you and me.[243]

Or even more to the point:

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[238] Ibid., p. 141.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid., p. 276.

[242] Ibid., p. 141.

[243] Ibid.

A great high wall there tried to stop me,
Great big sign said, "Private Property,"
But on the other side, it didn't say nothing;
That side was made for you and me.[244]

The song's original intent was to reclaim America for the working class. It was a great tribute to public, socialistic ownership, and a declaration of contempt for private ownership and free enterprise capitalism. But, in the popular version, all of this socialist tint was carefully white-washed away, and only the sentimental nationalism was left for popular consumption.

It is easy to see how the nationalist sentiment that simmered below the surface of Guthrie's Popular Front radicalism came to the surface as his songs entered into America's popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately, the process of popularization has led to a serious misunderstanding of the origin and intent of Guthrie's career as a singer and song-writer.

Children's Songs

There is one final area in the song literature of Woody Guthrie which could have been easily overlooked, because it does not seem to conveniently fit into the present analysis, and that is the unlikely area of children's songs. But, in actuality, Woody Guthrie wrote more children's songs than any other type of song. Many of these he wrote in collaboration with his daughter Cathy, who was later tragically killed in a fire.

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[244] Ibid.

At first they seem artless, repetitive, and trite, filled with non-rhyming, nonsensical rubbery and playful word games:

> Wash-y, wash-y, wash-y,
> Wash-y, wash-y, wash-y,
> Jingle, jangle, ding-a-ling,
> Pincky, pancky, ponk.[245]

Never preachy or condescending, like many songs written for children, Guthrie's children's songs are authentic reflections of a child's consciousness and spirit. Here are songs for waking up and going to sleep; songs about bottle, breast, and nipple; songs about splashing in the bath tub and brushing your teeth; songs about momma and daddy, sister and brother; songs about birds and fish and trees, wind, rain, and mud; songs about soda-pop, ice cream, candy, and gum; songs to sing and dance and run to; songs for riding in the car; spelling and counting songs; songs to pick up your toys to; and songs about planting seeds:

> Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky tidal, oh;
> Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky tital, oh;
> Tooky, tooky, tooky, tooky tidal, oh;
> We'll all dance around and see my
> little seed grow.[246]

In a surprisingly successful attempt to plant these seeds, Moses Asch, a record producer with a great appreciation for these seemingly insignificant songs, carefully recorded many of them in

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[245]Woody Guthrie, Songs To Grow On: For Mother and Child (Folkway Records FC 7015, 1956), side I, band 8.

[246]Jack Elliot, Woody Guthrie's Songs to Grow On (Folkway

a series called Songs To Grow On. The albums sold quite well, better in fact than many of Guthrie's more serious records. They became an important staple in progressive day care centers throughout the nation. They are still available today.[247]

In our discussion of the politics of Woody Guthrie's songs, these songs could easily be ignored. Few, if any, are political in content. But, their political significance should not be lightly dismissed. In some sense, Guthrie's children's songs have had a political impact equal to, or greater than his more serious political songs.

Woody Guthrie's children's songs are very much a part of the larger mind game. Through such songs, a musical spell is cast when the child is still young and malleable. Music in childhood is a very effective "consciousness" developer. By establishing very early a love for "folk" music, children are being introduced to a song culture that, as the child advances further into it, becomes increasingly political in form and content.

And, in Guthrie's children's songs there is an inherent utopianism that seems to fit nicely into the larger analysis. In many ways, the utopian mentality is a child's mentality. In the child's view of the world, one sees the utopian world view. When operating at the child's level, Guthrie's utopianism shines through:

Records FC 7501, 1961), side II, band 6.

[247]Klein, pp. 312-13.

You stick out your little hand
To every woman, kid, and man,
And you wave it up and down,
Howdja do, howdja do?
And you wave it up and down,
Howdja do.[248]

In this innocent faith in the goodness of mankind, we see the utopian's desire for the harmony of the One Big Union. And, in Woody Guthrie's songs for children, we see the beginning of this struggle to cultivate within the minds of the very young this faith in the oneness of humankind:

We all work together with a wiggle
and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle
and a grin,
With a wiggle and a giggle and a
google and a gogle
A jigger and a jagger and a giggle
and a grin.[249]

Moreover, Woody intended these songs for parents as well as kids, for adults and children alike. His hope was that, through singing, adults would learn to overcome their intrinsic stuffiness, to reach out and connect with their children's openness. In his mind, the world would be a better place if adults were conditioned to be more like children. In the liner notes to Songs to Grow On, he gave the following instructions on how to properly use these songs:

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[248]Woody Guthrie, Songs to Grow On: Nursery Days (Folkways Records FC 7005, 1951), side II, band 4.

[249]Elliot, side II, band 9.

> Now I don't want to see you use my songs to divide nor split your family all apart. I mean, don't just buy these records and take them home so your kids can play around with them while you go off and do something else. I want to see you join right in, do what your kids do. Let your kids teach you how to play and how to act these songs out. Get your whole family into the fun. Get papa. Get mama. Get brother. Get sister. Get aunty. Get uncle. Get grandma. Grampa. The friends. The neighbors. Everybody. But mostly get your own self into it.
>
> Please, please, please, don't read nor sing my songs like no lesson book, like no text for today. But, let them be a little key to sort of unlock and let down all of your old bars.
>
> Watch the kids. Do like they do. Act like they act. Yell like they yell. Dance the way you see them dance. Sing like they sing. Work and rest the way the kids do.
>
> You'll be healthier. You'll feel wealthier. You'll talk wiser. You'll go higher, do better and live longer here amongst us, if you'll just only jump in here and swim around in these songs and do like the kids do.
>
> I don't want the kids to be grownup. I want to see the grown folks be kids.[250]

In Guthrie's mind, adults were kids who had gone sour with age, and singing with your kids was one way to recapture your lost youth. And it was the youthful spirit that would change the world.

But this child-like warmth, this happiness and zest for life, which comes through so convincingly in Woody's children's songs, actually permeates all of his work. And somehow this is the key to understanding Woody Guthrie, as a performer, a thinker, and a public personage. Above all, and through all, Woody Guthrie was an idealist and an optimist. He felt very strongly about this. He felt it was his duty, and the purpose of his art, to lift the spirits of the listener. Woody Guthrie never sang the blues:

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[250]Guthrie, Songs To Grow On: For Mother and Child, liner notes.

> I hate a song that makes you think you're not any good! I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good for nobody. No good for nothing. Because you are either too old or too young or too fat or too thin or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or songs that poke fun at you on account of your bad luck or your hard traveling.
>
> I'm out to fight those kinds of songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood.
>
> I'm out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world, and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter how hard it's run you down and rolled over you, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work.[251]

So if I had to pick one quality that runs through all of Guthrie's works--from the sincerity and purity of the Dust Bowl Ballads, to the grand and glorious Bonneville Power Administration songs, to his simple songs for kids--it would be this basic optimism, an unflinching optimism so paradoxical in a man who suffered so much and was rewarded so little. Through it all Woody Guthrie never lost this naive faith in the future or the hope for the One Big Union:

> There's a better world a-comin',
> I'll tell you why, why, why;
> There's a better world a-comin',
> I'll tell you why.
> When we'll all be union
> And we'll all be free;
> There's a better world a-comin',
> Don't you see.[252]

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[251] Seeger, The Incompleat Folksinger, p. 41.

[252] Woody Guthrie Songbook, pp. 56-58.

Woody Guthrie may have romanticized and mythologized the working class struggle, his radicalism may have turned sentimental and nationalistic over the years, he may have stubbornly clung to ideals long after their time had passed, and he may have had a definite tendency to get carried away with his words which seemed to spill out unedited and without much thought attached to them; but above all, his passion for living was his ideology and his blind faith in the utopian union was his religion. His character had many flaws, he was sometimes irresponsible, arrogant, and selfish, but he had a vision and a talent for putting that vision into songs that others would sing long after his fingers could no longer strum on his guitar. Through Woody Guthrie, the social protest song tradition, and the banner of the working class hero, were passed on to the generation of the 1960s.

Afterlife

In the late 1930s, when Woody Guthrie was performing songs of deep social and political significance, grand documents of the Great Depression in the American Southwest--"The Great Dust Storm," "Dust Bowl Refugee," and "I Ain't Got No Home in this World Anymore"--popular music in America was dominated by such escapist twaddle as "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams," "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," and "On the Good Ship Lollypop." In all fairness, there were more serious popular songs recorded during the Depression, like "Brother Can You Spare a Dime," but all in all there was remarkably little

social protest generated by the pop music industry of the 1930s. The American public seemed bent on forgetting all their troubles and believing--against all odds--that Old Man Depression would never get them.[253]

But the point is that during the 1930s Woody Guthrie (and social protest music generally) went by largely unnoticed by the public at large. And it was not until the late 1950s, after Guthrie was well beyond his performing years and beginning a period of serious mental and physical deterioration, that his songs and the Guthrie phenomena began to capture large sectors of the popular imagination.

Perhaps more than any other single individual, it was Pete Seeger--first with the Almanac Singers, then with The Weavers, and finally as a solo act on the 1950s campus circuit--who was largely responsible for the production and maintenance of the Woody Guthrie Cult. Seeger tirelessly and persistently performed Guthries songs, and seemed determined to preserve the memory of the man he considered his friend and mentor.[254] What the organizational network of the I.W.W. did for Joe Hill, Seeger and company (from People's Song, Inc. to Sing Out!) have done for Woody Guthrie.

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[253]Charles Hamm, "American Song During the Great Depression," liner notes to Brother Can You Spare a Dime: American Song During the Great Depression (Washington, D.C.: The Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc., NW 270, 1977).

[254]See Seeger, The Incompleat Folksinger, pp. 41-61.

The Folk Boom

The commercial surge of folk music from 1957 to 1965, and the Woody Guthrie Cult, were mutually reinforcing socio-cultural phenomena. Guthrie, with Seeger and the Almanacs, had been instrumental in laying the groundwork for the so called "folk boom," by bringing the music (and protests) of rural America into the major metropolitan centers during the forties and fifties. Guthrie and Seeger became the founding fathers of what came to known as the urban folk music revival.[255]

One of The Weavers' first commercial successes in the early 1950s was Guthrie's "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You," a revision of "The Great Dust Storm," prepared for popular consumption. But, while the original version was about a family driven off their farm by a devastating dust storm, the popular version was a story of lovers marrying and leaving town.[256]

The 1950s saw the first generation of Guthrie admirers and disciples come into being. Besides Seeger, Millard Lampell, Cisco Houston, and the Almanac Singers, there were younger followers like

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[255]An excellent discussion of the Folk Boom may be found in Mike Jahn, The Story of Rock: From Elvis Presley to the Rolling Stones (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, 1973), Chap. 7, "Hang Down Your Head, Bill Haley"; for a more specific discussion of Guthrie's role in the Folk Boom, see Palmer, All You Need is Love, Chap. 11, "Go Down Moses! Songs of War and Protest"; see also Klein, pp. 421-35.

[256]The Weavers (Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, Fred Hellerman, and Eric Darling), eds., The Weavers' Song Book (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), pp. 85-87.

(Ramblin') Jack Elliot, who traveled for awhile with Guthrie, then began to sing Guthrie's songs, imitating Guthrie's twangy voice and guitar style, and adapting Guthrie's dress and mannerisms in an uncanny characterization of the Master.[257] Such devotion by a Guthrie pupil would not be matched until young Robert Zimmerman took up the cross in the early 1960s.

Guthrie's first real break into the popular mainstream came in 1958, when the Kingston Trio (a clean-cut, collegiate hybrid singing group, a mixture of the Weavers, Harry Belafonte, and Elvis Presley recorded an old North Carolina murder ballad, "Tom Dooley," setting off the commercial boom in folk music. The Trio's first album was a commercial success in a way no one in the earlier folk revival could have ever imagined. Besides "Tom Dooley," the album contained Guthrie's "Hard Ain't it Hard."[258]

From 1958 to 1963, the Kingston Trio recorded many Guthrie standards ("Pastures of Plenty,"[259] "This Land is Your Land,"[260] "Hard Travelin',"[261] "Ruben James,"[262] and

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[257]See Klein, pp. 363-65.

[258]The Kingston Trio (Nick Reynolds, Dave Guard, and Bob Shane), The Kingston Trio (Capital Records T996, 1957).

[259]The Kingston Trio, Goin' Places (Capital T 1564, n.d.), side I, band 2.

[260]Ibid., side II, band 2.

[261]The Kingston Trio, Make Way (Capital T 1474, n.d.), side I, band 6.

[262]The Kingston Trio, Close-Up (Capital ST 2011, 1963), side II, band 6.

"Deportees"[263]) in a strange, but successful, blending of traditional (folk) and popular (rock) musical styles. They were a great success on the campuses of the late fifties and early sixties. As folk music moved into the mass market, it became a standard practice for the Kingston Trio-style folk groups (The Brothers Four, The Limelighters, The Tarriers, The Chad Mitchell Trio, and Peter, Paul, and Mary) to include Guthrie songs in their repertoires. In the early 1960s, everybody in the folk community was recording Guthrie material (Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, Odetta, and July Collins). This trend continued into the folk-rock period of the late sixties and early seventies (Country Joe and the Fish, The Byrds, Jesse Collin Young, and Ry Cooder).

By the mid-1960s, Guthrie, who had never been financially stable in his entire life, was receiving $50,000 per year in royalties. His old materials recorded in the 1940s for Asch, Stinson, and Victor Records were now being reissued. In 1964, a three-record set of his Library of Congress interviews with Alan Lomax was released by Electra. In 1965, Born to Win, a collection of his poetry and short prose, was published. And shortly after his death, his unfinished novel, The Seeds of Man, was prepared for publication along with an edited version of his columns for the Daily Worker and People's World, and given the same name as those columns, Woody Sez.[264]

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[263]The Kingston Trio, Time to Think (Capital ST 2011, 1963), side II, band 1.

[264]Klein, p. 433.

This Land is Your Land

Thus, by the mid-1960s, Woody Guthrie had become a national institution. "This Land is Your Land" had become as popular as the national anthem. In the late sixties, the song was used as an advertising jingle by United Airlines and the Ford Motor Company. In 1972, it was used as the theme song for Senator George McGovern's unsuccessful presidential campaign. In 1975, millions of school children from all across the country sang it simultaneously through a video hook-up to open the first annual Music in Our Schools Day. Truly an American clasic, "This Land" has been recorded by the Wayfarers, Glen Yarborough, The Kingston Trio, The Limelighters, The Brothers Four, The New Christy Minstrels, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Trini Lopez, Harry Belafonte, Jay and the Americans, Glen Campbell, Bing Crosby, The Staples Singers, Tex Ritter, Connie Francis, Country Joe McDonald, Paul Anka, Jim Croce, The Mike Curb Congregation, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. But few were aware that they were singing a song intended as a Marxist alternative to "God Bless America."[265]

Perhaps the crowning glory for the Guthrie cult was the 1976 motion picture based on Guthrie's autobiography, Bound for Glory, produced by Robert F. Blumofe and Harold Leventhal, and directed by Hal Ashby, for United Artists. Although David Carradine's Kung Fu image made for a rather unconvincing Woody Guthrie, the movie was

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[265]Klein, pp. 433-34; "This Land" has been heard most recently (in the spring of 1983) on national television advertisements for the National Wild Life Federation, sung by Loretta Lynn, the country singer.

a great documentary to Guthrie and the era of the Great Depression in the southwest. But, predictably, the movie did little to convey the fact that the hero had been a card-carrying communist and a dedicated member of America's radical community.[266]

The Guthrie Phenomenon (or Why Woody Guthrie?)

So, how is one to account for the Guthrie phenomenon? How did Woody Guthrie become so famous, without performing to great masses in outdoor stadiums and without million-seller records? Why did Woody Guthrie cast such a great shadow in America's popular culture, in spite of his rather obvious radical political tone, and in spite of the fact that there were other radical singer/songwriters who were perhaps more deserving of the Working Class Hero crown of the protest generation of the 1930s?

There were the other original Almanac Singers: Lee Hays, of Commonwealth College and later of The Weavers; and Millard Lampell: a gifted song writer ("The Strange Death of John Doe," "The Ballad of Harry Bridges," and "Talking Union") and a working class intellectual dedicated to the creation of a proleterian culture for the masses. And there were the many performers who formed the loose periphery of the group: Gordon Friesen and Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, who later started the topical song magazine Broadside; Arthur Stern, Josh White, Cisco Houston, Brownie McGhee, Sonny Terry, Bess Lomax, and Earl Robinson (who wrote the music to Alfred Hayes' poem "Joe Hill").

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[266]See Broadside, 136 (July-September, 1977), 7-8.

All of these people are virtually unknown by the public at large, while the name of Woody Guthrie, who joined the Almanacs late and remained for only a relatively short period of time, has found a place in the folklore of America.

The only other popular personage to emerge from this period is Pete Seeger, the organizer of the Almanac Singers, People's Songs, Inc., The Weavers, and Sing Out! magazine. Seeger has consistently been the major guiding force behind the folk music revival and the social protest singing tradition in America since the 1940s. Clearly a superior musician and musicologist to Guthrie, and a much more consistent performer, with a much more respected image, an impeccable political history, and an uncanny ability to transform seemingly apathetic audiences into singing congregations, Pete Seeger is indeed the undisputed leader and Great Grandfather of America's social protest singing tradition.

Seeger's ideological purity, unflinching political commitment, and total and complete active involvement in the various causes of the American Left for almost a half century--from union struggles to integration to anti-Vietnam peace movements to environmentalism--contrasts very sharply with Woody Guthrie's unorthodox, eccentric, often half-hearted radicalism, his unpredictable public behavior (as a drunkard and womanizer)[267] and impossibly stubborn egotism.

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[267]Klein was the first author to gain access to Marjorie Guthrie's personal file of Woody's unpublished writings (including many quite explicitly erotic letters), and has uncovered some very interesting accounts of Guthrie's sexual escapades. Sadly, Guthrie's

Moreover, Seeger's rock-stable married life of almost 40 years is also quite a startling contrast to Guthrie's three failed marriages and nine abandoned children. Thus, when compared to Woody, Seeger's life carries the imagery of the responsible, upstanding, idealistic, strongly principled, committed radical and mind guerilla. In comparison, Woody Guthrie comes across as somewhat of a misfit.

But, in spite of this, Guthrie's romantic image as a hard-drinking, hard-traveling, hobo-adventurer and womanizer carries the symbolism of the unrestrained, sensuous, Chaplinesque free spirit; while Seeger's image of the principled and determined idealist, clinging steadfastly to his principles, heroically standing up to McCarthy's House Committee on un-American Activities, when lesser men caved in, carries the symbolism of political integrity and Puritan righteousness and responsibility.[268] The 1960's youth culture which canonized Guthrie lusted after freedom and sexuality, and developed a distinct aversion to political idealism and altruistic social responsibility. Thus, it was perhaps only natural that they would embrace the romantic figure of Woody Guthrie, and rebel against the fatherly image of Pete Seeger.

But, moreover, Guthrie's life was also a potent symbol of alienation, pain, and suffering, whereas Seeger's life, in comparison,

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sexuality evidently grew increasingly out of control as the disease progressed. Before it was over, he had even been prosecuted and convicted on a charge of writing obscene letters to a young woman in California, and served 180 days in jail. See Klein, pp. 350-55.

[268]See Dunaway, especially Chap. 7, "If I Had a Hammer."

was materially comfortable and strangely bourgeois. Seeger has also clearly suffered a great deal as an ostracized, black-listed outcast, who, for many years, went largely unnoticed and unrewarded in proportion to his contribution to the folk song revival in America. But Seeger has persevered, and in the end has become quite famous and wealthy. Woody Guthrie did not experience the black-listing of the McCarthy era, he was hospitalized with Huntington's disease, and therefore too sick to perform or to be much of a threat to the F.B.I. or the House Committee on un-American Activities. But Guthrie did not persevere. In his lifetime, he was never economically nor commercially successful. Always the outcast, from the beginning he lived a life of alienation and poverty that Pete Seeger could only romanticize and envy.

Pete Seeger suffered, but not like Woody. Seeger's suffering was symbolic, based on principles and ideals that he had chosen to stand for, and that others (some evidently in high places) feared. Woody had experienced this kind of pain also (he had been red-baited and placed under surveillance by the F.B.I. in the 1940s),[269] but his suffering was physical as well as political and economic.

Of course, the other obvious difference between Seeger and Guthrie is that Seeger is still alive; Woody is not. Guthrie's long suffering illness, along with the publicity generated by Seeger and others, has turned him into a martyr. So perhaps the Guthrie

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[269]See Denisoff, p. 138.

phenomenon may be explained by his more colorful, romanticized proletarian image, or perhaps, like Hill and Lennon, it is a function of the circumstances surrounding his death.

When the Curfew Blows

Many, but certainly not all, of the differences between Guthrie and Seeger may have been the result of Huntington's chorea, the disease passed on to Guthrie by his mother, and not from sleeping with whores and living on the road. Beginning almost unnoticed in his early adult years, Huntington's disease slowly began to consume Guthrie's mind and body. Shortly after he came into his own, career-wise, Guthrie, in effect, went slowly insane, turning increasingly into an erratic, unpredictable, often bizarre, and even sex-crazed imbecile. All of which, as it sadly turned out, are symptoms of the early stages of Huntington's disease.[270]

But there is another, less tragic, side to all of this, for the disease also appears to have affected Guthrie's creative powers. Under its influence, Guthrie became more child-like, uninhibited, and freely associating, until he was filled with fantasies and visions, and overflowing with poetic ramblings which expressed his innermost psychic feelings. In other words, what Huntington's disease did for Woody Guthrie, LSD (and other drugs) would do for Bob Dylan and John Lennon; break down the barriers of

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[270]See Klein, pp. 439-42.

rationality so that the creative energies could flow freely.[271]

Unfortunately, the deterioration brought on by the disease progressively interfered with Guthrie's physical and mental co-ordination. This is the most tragically frustrating part of it all. For, while the fantastic outpouring of thoughts, visions, and hallucinations continued to flow with increasing intensity, Guthrie progressively lost his ability to control the visions and ultimately to even communicate the thoughts.

So perhaps it was the pain, the humiliation, and the suffering that Woody Guthrie had to endure that, more than anything else, so captured the sympathy of the public. This would be a convincing argument, except for the fact that the public at large knew very little of Guthrie's years as a victim of Huntington's disease. Primarily, they knew only the Woody Guthrie who overcame the hardships of the Depression and defiantly rambled around the country, riding the rails as a hobo and singing for nickels and dimes. This Woody Guthrie, the young Woody Guthrie, the Woody Guthrie of Bound for Glory, came to represent freedom and hope, and the victory of youth over adversity and authority. Perhaps this is why the later image of the hospitalized, trembling choreic was so tragically poignant.

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[271]Will Geer told Ed Robbin of a conversation with Guthrie where he compared the effects of Huntington's disease to a marijuana high, saying: "I sometimes get the same feeling as with the drug when the sickness comes on me. I think several things at the same time . . ." See Robbin, p. 113.

Sometime in the fall of 1967, Harold Leventhal, Guthrie's manager, played a recording of Guthrie's son, Arlo, for Woody to hear. It was a long (18 minutes), comical, Guthriesque talking blues called "Alice's Restaurant Massacree," about how a conviction for littering had saved Arlo from being drafted. It would become one of the classic statements of protest against the military draft during the Vietnam era. And it would bring Arlo, at age 19, more notoriety and commercial success than Woody had achieved during his entire career.[272] A major motion picture was eventually made from Arlo's song with the unforgettable chorus:

> You can get anything you want at Alice's restaurant,
> You can get anything you want . . . at Alice's restaurant.
> Walk right in, it's around the back,
> Just a half a mile from the railroad tracks,
> You can get anything you want at Alice's restaurant.[273]

But Woody never saw that film, and in all likelihood did not comprehend the significance of the recording played for him that fall day, though Leventhal claimed he caught a smile of recognition and approval on the trembling lips of the dying Guthrie. Woody Guthrie died before he could see his son rise to prominence in the very pop music culture that Guthrie's most famous disciple, Bob Dylan, would, almost singlehandedly, construct from the ashes of the Woody Guthrie cultural tradition.

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[272]Klein, pp. 432-33.

[273]Arlo Guthrie, "Alice's Restaurant Massacree," Alice's Restaurant (Reprise Records RS 6267, 1967), side I.

Woody Guthrie finally gave in to death on October 3, 1967. All three networks announced the news of Guthrie's death. Radio stations across the country played musical tributes to Guthrie ("So Long, It's Been Good to Know You," "This Land is Your Land," "Those Oklahoma Hills"). But there were no mass demonstrations. There was not even a funeral service. Marjorie and the children did not believe in ceremonies. Ironically, Woody Guthrie had outlived his fame, to be overshadowed by his pupils and children.[274]

Marjorie Guthrie had the body cremated. Then she and the children (Arlo, Joady, and Nora) took the canister of ashes to one of Woody's favorite spots on the jetty at Coney Island. But they had trouble opening the canister and could not release the ashes--Joe Hill style--to the winds. So, in a gesture unconsciously symbolic of the parental disdain of the new cult of youth, Arlo Guthrie just tossed the vial containing the ashes of his legendary father out into the ocean, as if it were an empty beer can. And then Woody's children, who had never known anything but a grotesque caricature of the great Dust Bowl Balladeer, went off to find a hot dog stand.[275]

Conclusions

Woody Guthrie, the Dust Bowl Balladeer, was a great spokesman for the working class in America. He was one of the founding fathers

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[274]Klein, pp. 444-45.

[275]Ibid.

of America's folk music revival. He wrote songs that document the people's struggles during America's greatest economic disaster, and the world's second global conflict. His songs romanticized and mythologized that period of great international crisis. His public image was that of a hobo and a rambler, a free spirit unfettered by life's burdens and woes, and a great working class minstrel, singing his way across the country, absorbing and expressing the hopes and the fears and the dreams of the American people. He was a prophet singer whose words became the guiding light for several generations of radical culture in America. He was the Will Rogers of America's folk music community.

Guthrie's Popular Front Marxism was tempered by his native folksiness. He boiled his radicalism down into hillbilly couplets and folk phraseology, partly because it was his natural tendency to do so, but also in a conscious attempt to reach out to the common people that this philosophy was supposed to represent. His home-spun "cornpone" philosophizing tended to alienate the intellectuals and the hard-core activists, but seemed to fit well in the spirit of the Popular Front, by Americanizing and popularizing left-wing radicalism.

Woody Guthrie was a troubadour who carried a political message. The totality he was associated with--the folk music revival in America--was a hybrid mixture of radical politics and the traditional folksong culture of America. But, in Guthrie's mind, this was a very natural blending, a fusion of working class politics

with what he saw as working class song culture. If this seems odd today, it is because "folk" music, especially in its urban guise, has never been very popular among the working class in America. Its base of support has been in the major urban centers and college campuses. The workers have preferred "country-western" music. But, of course, the two musical forms share the same sources in America's traditional music: folk being a politicized and intellectualized descendant, while country is a commercialized version of the traditional forms. This differentiation was much less pronounced in Guthrie's day. He was essentially a country musician--as much influenced by the popular country music of the Carter Family and Jimmy Rogers as the oral folk traditions of the American peasantry--who blended a radical consciousness into his music. The result was a new musical genre and cultural movement: the urban folk music revival, or what we know today simply as "folk" music.

Thus, Woody Guthrie was not just a musician for the sake of the music. He was a thoroughgoing mind guerilla. He saw his music as a political tool, a weapon in the class struggle. His purpose as a singer and song writer was not to preserve the old songs for posterity (he did very little of this); his mission was to sing out in protest against the injustices of the world, and to rally the people behind revolutionary change. He sincerely felt that singing was a viable political tactic. To him, a singing people was a powerful revolutionary strategy and force. Moreover, his vision of the future was couched in a musical metaphor. He saw a singing

people and a singing world, where one people would live together in harmony.

Perhaps this was a naive hope--the hope that the right song, sung loud enough, could make a difference, could change the world. But it was a hope he shared with the Wobblies before him, and an entire generation of folk protest singers after him. Clearly, this was the utopian side of Guthrie and the social protest movement generally. But it is not as naive and silly as it sounds. Musical cultures do have an important role to play in the transmission of revolutionary ideals and symbols, and especially in the age of electronics, ideas and ideologies transmitted by song have clearly overtaken the more traditional, literate, and academic means.

The politicization of mass movements and cultures in the future may indeed learn a great deal from the example of Woody Guthrie. Modern totalitarian states, from the Nazis to the Soviets, have utilized such cultural forms very effectively for political and propagandistic purposes. And, in the West, a mass counter-culture of unprecedented size and impact came into being in the 1960s and 1970s, on the grinding rhythms of rock and roll music. Yes, the musical approach to radicalism is utopian, in the sense that a society and a world community is not built upon songs alone, but singing is far more practical as a totalizing device and as a source of symbolic politics than many other propaganda strategies that could be undertaken.

However, in our case, the totalizing effect runs much deeper than the music, to encompass the image and the public perception of the man behind the songs. As a source of vicarious political identity, and as a vehicle to symbolically embody the values of a revolutionary movement, Woody Guthrie's public image is every bit as important as the songs he may have written or sung. Obviously, the man cannot be easily divorced from his songs. But, through the songs, Guthrie's image was able to transcend the immediate situation out of which the songs were written, and, in the long run, even transcend his own death.

The songs of Woody Guthrie went on after Guthrie, the man, fell into the death grip of Huntington's disease. And the human drama behind these songs became as crucial a factor, and as important a totalizing force, as the songs themselves. The drama and romance behind Woody Guthrie's Bound For Glory life--the images of the hobo troubadour, heroically facing up to the Great Depression, persevering against all odds, while always maintaining his sense of humor and his political ideals, until tragically cut down in the prime of his life by a mysterious disease--turned this little man with a guitar and a homespun philosophy into a great folk hero in the American protest tradition.

Through his songs a man's life story was told, and the symbolism that adhered to that life-image became one of the important sources behind the rise of the folk protest totality

in America. And, with the aid of Guthrie's greatest disciple, Bob Dylan, the folk protest totality would become the source out of which the 1960's counter-culture would arise.

CHAPTER VI

BOB DYLAN: MR. TAMBOURINE MAN

Hey! Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me,
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to.
Hey! Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me,
In the jingle jangle morning I'll come followin' you.

Bob Dylan, 1964

Sometime in the bitter cold of late January, 1961, an inspiring young folk singer going by the name of Bob Dylan, hitchhiked across country from out in Minnesota to New York City, to visit his idol, Woody Guthrie, who lay dying in Greystone Park Hospital, nearby in Morristown, New Jersey.[1] It was to be a most historic meeting. What Dylan would later describe as the "book of

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[1]There are few good sources on Dylan's life, most are seriously biased one way or another. There is a running account in the back issues of Sing Out! and Broadside, and later, Rolling Stone, magazines. Sing Out! and Broadside consistently favor the early (folk protest) Dylan and hate the later (rock) Dylan. In Rolling Stone, it is the other way around. There is also a reader by Craig McGregor, Bob Dylan: A Retrospective (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1972), which is a good source for other press articles on Dylan, but it needs to be updated. There are several biographies of Dylan: Daniel Kramer's Bob Dylan (New York: Citadel Press, Inc., 1967) is really a photographic essay on Dylan's early career, some nice photos of Dylan and Baez, an account of Newport '65 and the Forest Hills concert; Toby Thompson's Positively Mainstreet (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1971) is an interesting, but shallow, hip and journalistic exploration of Dylan's early life, focusing mostly on interviews with Echo Hilstrom ("The Girl From the North Country"); to date, Anthony Scaduto's Bob Dylan (New York: New American Library, 1971) is the most comprehensive biography, but it lacks a great deal; A. J. Weberman, the fanatical Dylanologist and "Minister of Defense, Dylan Liberation Front," has been threatening for years to publish a book on Dylan, but it would surely have to be

Man"[2] was symbolically passed along to the young singer as he sat at the feet of the dying Master. Dylan would fill its pages with such visions, dreams, flights of fancy, nightmares, and hallucinations that it would literally explode, revolutionizing completely the popular culture of America and the West.

Beginning as a Guthriesque folk-style performer, he would go on to take the folk protest genre to new and unimagined aesthetic heights, before dramatically and ceremoniously scandalizing the folk music community by publicly turning his back on the old topical-protest tradition, to embrace the dreaded world of popular rock 'n' roll. But this was only the first of many public shifts and image transformations. He would try his hand at nearly every form of American popular music--from folk to rock to country western to gospel--and likewise cross the full spectrum of politics--from the utopian socialism and pacifism of Guthrie and Company, to the radical anarchism and nihilistic existentialism of the rock counter-culture, to the right-wing conservatism of Christian fundamentalism.

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read with a grain of salt; and I understand that Robert Shelton of the New York Times is preparing the definitive Dylan biography, but it is as yet unpublished; a few of the more recent works include Rolling Stone's Knockin' on Dylan's Door (New York: Pocket Books, 1974); Steven Pickering's Bob Dylan Approximately: A Midrash (1975); and Sam Shepard's Rolling Thunder Logbook (New York: Viking, 1977).

[2]From "11 Outlined Epitaphs," a poem by Dylan and the liner notes to The Times They Are a-Changin' (Columbia CS 8905, 1964).

Bob Dylan's life story and the body of his artistic works are thus frustratingly complex, contradictory, and confusing.[3] And, because he is still alive and well and changing daily, it will be an extremely difficult task to summarize and analyze the politics of his songs and poetry. Moreover, the prolific nature of his works is staggering. In the more than 20 years of his career, he has produced to date 25 legitimate record albums, while countless bootlegged albums have been produced by pirates from out-takes, informal recording sessions, and concerts.[4] In addition, he has written a novel (Tarantula[5]), several films (Don't Look Back,[6] Renaldo and Clara[7]), a film score (Pat Garrett and Billy the

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[3]I have relied on the following works to help in interpreting Dylan's songs, poems, and public images: Alan Rinzler, Bob Dylan: The Illustrated Record (New York: Harmony Books, 1978), an extremely helpful record by record summation of Dylan's works; John Herdman, Voice Without Restraint (New York: Delilah Books, 1982), perhaps an even more substantial treatment of the background of Dylan's lyrics; and Michael Gray, Song and Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), an in-depth analysis of Dylan's works as art. However, none of the above address themselves explicitly and exclusively to the politics of Dylan's works. Often these assessments are my own.

[4]For a list of Dylan bootlegs, see Hot Wax Quarterly, Book VIII (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Blue Flake Productions, 1980), pp. 57-69.

[5]Bob Dylan, Tarantula (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

[6]This is the film of Dylan's 1965 English tour, by D. A. Pennebaker, also published in book form (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968).

[7]This is a film of Dylan's "Rolling Thunder Revues," his tours of 1976-77; for the print version, see Shepard, Rolling Thunder Logbook.

Kid[8]), and an endless flow of poetry.[9] Bob Dylan is truly a creative giant and a major popular cultural figure in the world today. And, perhaps more than any other popular artist in America, Bob Dylan came to embody the very essence of the 1960s counter-culture.

To date, the ever-changing Bob Dylan has given his fans at least six distinct public images: Dylan I, The Guthriesque Balladeer (1960-63); Dylan II, the Protest Poet (1963-65); Dylan III, the Punk Rocker (1965-67); Dylan IV, the Moderate Man (1967-70); Dylan V, the Romantic (1970-78); and Dylan VI, the Born-Again Prophet (1979-to the present). Although political themes do appear throughout all of his works, strictly speaking only the first three phases have been explicitly political. Thus, in this chapter, I have confined myself to a study of Dylan's first three masks only, in an attempt to follow this pop culture prophet through the transition from the old-style protest of the Guthrie-Seeger era into the era of the new youth-oriented protests of the 1960s counter-culture.

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[8]A Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer production, written by Rudolph Wurlitzer, produced by Gordon Carroll, and directed by Sam Peckinpah. Dylan's musical score was released by Columbia, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid: Original Sound Track Recording, by Bob Dylan (PC 32460, 1973). The film starred Kris Kristofferson, James Coburn, Jason Robards. Dylan also appeared in a small role as Alias, a friend and sidekick of Billy.

[9]Dylan's poetry, before 1973, has been published along with his song lyrics in Bob Dylan, Writings and Drawings (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).

Dylan I: The Guthriesque Balladeer (1960-63)

Young Bobby Zimmerman, who was born in 1941, became musically aware during the mid-1950s. He was exposed to a wide variety of musical forms, from hillbilly to rock and roll. When he was in the eighth grade, his first musical idol was country singer Hank Williams. But he was even more strongly influenced by black musical forms: the country blues of Blind Lemmon Jefferson and Jessee Fuller; the urban blues of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, B. B. King, and Jimmy Reed; the gospel-spiritual tradition and its popular derivative, the rhythm and blues of Bo Diddly, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Little Richard. In fact, young Zimmerman was so taken by Little Richard (his second idol) that, while still in junior high school, he had adopted his wild piano style. And in his teen years, Zimmerman got caught up in the first great wave of rock and roll: Bill Haley and the Comets, Elvis Presley, and Buddy Holly.[10] Young Zimmerman absorbed musical styles like a sponge absorbs water.

But it was the radical urban folk revival tradition of Pete Seeger, the Almanac Singers, the Weavers, and the cult of Woody Guthrie--so popular on American college campuses during the late 1950s as an urbane alternative to the lewd and unintellectual black-based rock musical forms of the top-10--that ironically would serve

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[10]Scaduto, pp. 5-7.

as Dylan's springboard into the heart of America's popular culture.[11] (The irony of this would not be fully appreciated until 1965 when Dylan would return to what he would then claim were his real roots, during the rock music revival brought about by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the British invasion).[12] With his discovery of Woody Guthrie, it all came into focus for young Zimmerman. The music, the style, the dress, the mannerisms, and the politics of Woody Guthrie all crystallized into a complete image for a young man in search of an identity.[13]

From the time of his first trips down from his home town of Hibbing, in Minnesota's north country, to the big urban centers of Minneapolis and St. Paul, he had been gradually absorbing the culture of the folk revival, the accompanying social consciousness, and bohemian life style. And it was during his brief stay at the University of Minnesota, during the academic year of 1959-60, that he changed his name to Bob Dylan[14] (to shed his middle class, Jewish background), began performing in the folk clubs near campus, and developing his Guthrie repertoire and image, complete with a mythical past as an orphan, circus hand, hobo and rambler, and early encounters with Woody Guthrie himself.[15] In a typical

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[11] Ibid., pp. 26-40

[12] See above, pp. 320-29.

[13] Scaduto, pp. 40-51.

[14] Ibid., p. 27.

[15] Ibid., pp. 67-69.

jive reminiscence, he told a friend (who has it on tape):

> I was with a carnival when I was about thirteen, and I used to travel with the carnival. All kinds of shows and things. We went all around the Midwest. Gallup and . . . Lasco, Texas, down there. Was a roustabout. And sang around a lot. I didn't sing very much, but I learned a lot of songs in that carnival. A lot of songs people are singing today, I learned those songs in the carnival. That's why I know all these songs I know today.[16]

And in an early interview with radio personality Studs Terkel, in Chicago, Dylan said:

> I saw Woody once, a long, long time ago, in Burbank, California. I was just a little boy. I don't even remember seeing him. I heard him play. Must have been about ten. My uncle took me there. It stuck in my mind that he was Woody, and everybody else around me was just everybody else.[17]

Thus, by 1960, young Bobby Zimmerman, a Jewish college student from a small town up near the Canadian border in Minnesota, had concocted for himself a completely new, fictitious persona, in the image of Woody Guthrie. He had begun to dress like a 1930s okie, in baggy trousers and work shirts (like Henry Fonda in the Grapes of Wrath), and he was particularly proud of his wiry hair, which, when left to grow, came to resemble the raggedy curls of Woody Guthrie.[18] He frantically searched the campus for a copy of Guthrie's autobiography, Bound For Glory, which he greedily devoured in a single

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[16]Ibid., p. 69.

[17]Ibid., p. 41.

[18]Joe Klein, Woody Guthrie: A Life (New York: Knopf, 1980), p. 424.

afternoon and then excitedly pursued his friends, reading them passages as if he were quoting from a holy text.[19] He then hungrily consumed all the old Guthrie recordings he could get his hands on, playing them over and over, driving his friends crazy with his Guthrie zeal.[20] He became obsessed with Woody Guthrie and the dream of making a name for himself as a folk singer in the image of his fallen hero.

As his obsession grew, a powerful yearning to actually meet and talk with Guthrie filled young Dylan. From reading in the back issues of Sing Out! magazine, he found out that Woody was in Greystone Hospital in New Jersey and called the hospital, but was told that Woody was too sick to come to the phone, but that the hospital did accept visitors. It was then he decided to go visit Woody Guthrie.[21]

Talking New York

Upon his arrival in New York City, Bob Dylan, like Woody Guthrie 20 years earlier, found his way down to Greenwich Village and the folk clubs, bars, and coffee houses. He performed some at the Cafe Wha?, but mostly just hung out, crashing for a few nights at the homes of strangers he had met in the bars, and bumming his meals. After a few days, he thumbed his way out to Greystone to

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[19]Scaduto, p. 39.

[20]Ibid., p. 40.

[21]Ibid., pp. 43-47.

visit Guthrie.[22] He immediately sent a postcard back to some of his friends in Minnesota, full of the joy of the pilgrim in the holy land: "I know Woody. I know Woody . . . I know him and met him and saw him and sang to him. I know Woody . . . Goddamn!"[23]

He began to visit the hospital regularly, hitchhiking out from the city, sometimes as many as four times a week. In another postcard in early February, he wrote: "Woody likes me--he tells me to sing for him--he's the greatest holiest godliest one in the world."[24] And Woody seemed to have taken to him, he started to ask for him: "Is the boy coming today? When is the boy coming back?"[25] A special bond seemed to form between them.

Soon Dylan became a regular at the Gleason's, a family in East Orange, New Jersey, and old Guthrie fans from the thirties, who were keeping Woody in their home on weekends. There the eager young Dylan came into contact with New York City's folk aristocracy, big name artists like Pete Seeger, Cisco Houston, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, who congregated at the Gleason's ritualistically to pay homage to their dying mentor.[26]

After winning Guthrie's confidence, Dylan started to penetrate into the Village folk scene.[27] He started out participating in the regular Monday night "hoots" at Gerde's Folk City, but by April he

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[22]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[23]Ibid., p. 53.

[24]Ibid., p. 56.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[27]Ibid., pp. 64-66.

was beginning his first major professional engagement there as the second act behind bluesman John Lee Hooker.[28] In full appreciation of the symbolic implications, he wore one of Guthrie's old suits at his debut.[29] Throughout the summer of 1961, he performed in all the various folk clubs: The Commons, the Gaslight, the Wha?, the Limelight, and the Lion's Head.[30]

In September, he was very favorably reviewed by New York Times music critic Robert Shelton,[31] and, as a result, he came to the attention of record producer John Hammond, who quickly signed him with Columbia Records.[32] In November, after less than a year in New York, he gave his first formal concert, to an unimpressive 53 people in Carnegie Recital Hall.[33] While not an overwhelming success he had, against all odds, emerged out of obscurity to become one of the better known folk acts under contract with a major record company. Woody Guthrie had never recorded under such a prestigious label. Within less than a year, the student was about to surpass the teacher.

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[28] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., pp. 59, 65, 71.

[31] Ibid., p. 97; the article by Shelton, "Bob Dylan: A Distinctive Folk-Song Stylist, New York Times, September 29, 1961, was reprinted in McGregor, pp. 17-18.

[32] Ibid., p. 98.

[33] Ibid., p. 100.

By now Dylan was also writing his own material. The songs literally began to pour from his pen, in a totally unprecedented flood of original material. In a WBAI-FM interview in September, 1961 Pete Seeger pays tribute to Dylan's unbelievable song writing capacities, saying: ". . . Of all the people I've heard in America, he seems to be the most prolific. . . . Bob, do you make up a song before breakfast every day or before supper?" And Dylan, with uncharacteristic humility, replies: "Nah. I don't make up a song like that. In fact, sometimes I could go about two weeks without makin' up songs." "I don't believe you!" Seeger interrupts. Dylan continues:

> Oh yea. But then sometimes--well, these are the songs I sing--I might go about two weeks in makin' 'em up. I write a lot of stuff, matter a fact I wrote five songs last night [laughter]. But I gave all the papers away . . . . It was in a place called the Bitter End. . . . Some were just about what was happenin' on the stage. . . . I would never sing them any place. They were just for myself and some other people. . . .
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> But I don't sit around . . . with newspapers like a lot of people do . . . and pick something out to write a song about. It's usually right there in my head before I start. That's the way I write, I mean, it might be a bad approach. But I don't even consider it . . . writing songs . . . I just figure that I made it up, or got it someplace. The song was there before me . . . I just sorta came down and . . . took it down with a pencil. But it was all there before I came around. That's the way I feel about it.[34]

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[34]This interview was taped but never broadcast by WBAI; see ibid., pp. 119-20. Scaduto quotes only a small portion of this interview, which was reproduced in full on an early bootlegged album, Great White Wonder (TMOQ 72001, n.d., probably around 1968). This citation is from Hot Wacks, p. 61.

Here Dylan was advocating a non-rational, inspirational approach to song writing that must have seemed quite foreign to his peers in the topical song writing community. Even at this very early stage, Dylan seemed to stand out--far out--in the topical folk music crowd. His songs from this period include: "Hard Times in New York Town,"[35] an attempt, similar to Guthrie's "New York Town" (1940),[36] to capture the mood of the big city upon his arrival; "Talking John Birch Society Paranoid Blues,"[37] a heavy satire on the red-baiting, anti-communist hysteria that was still quite prevalent in America; "Baby, I'm in the Mood For You,"[38] a tribute to hot teenage lust; "Walking Down the Line,"[39] a Guthriesque hobo song; and "Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Disaster Blues,"[40] which demonstrates Dylan's intuitive grasp of Guthrie's talking blues style. It is an exceptionally funny spoof, based upon a newspaper story, of a tour boat picnic, hastily organized to take advantage of New York tourists. It seems that more tickets were sold than the boat could accommodate. Dylan puts himself (and his fictitious wife and kids) in among the 6,000 people fighting to get on

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[35] Writings and Drawings, pp. 6-7.

[36] Woody Guthrie Songbook, pp. 169-73.

[37] Writings and Drawings, pp. 17-18.

[38] Ibid., p. 22.

[39] Ibid., p. 28.

[40] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

board as the boat begins to sink. After losing track of his wife and kids, he is trampled upon, beat up, and left for dead. This, in the end, causes him to lose his "picnic spirit." And, in a final verse, he cuts loose with a humorous, socially conscious moral, reminiscent of Guthrie's best topical comedy in "Talking Dust" or "Talking Columbia." Dylan ruthlessly attacks the unscrupulous businessmen who make their living by exploiting unsuspecting consumers:

> Now, it don't seem to me quite so funny
> What some people are gonna do f'r money.
> There's a brand new gimmick every day
> Just t' take somebody's money away.
> I think we oughta take some o' these people
> And put 'em on a boat,
> And send 'em up to Bear Mountain
> For a picnic.[41]

The words came from Bob Dylan, but the style was still basically Woody Guthrie's.

Song to Woody

At the end of November, 1961, Dylan went into Columbia's New York studios to record his first album.[42] Dylan performed alone, with just a harmonica in a wire holder around his neck, and his acoustic guitar. The record was released at the end of February, 1962, and only cost Columbia $402. It was not a great commercial

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Bob Dylan, produced by John Hammond (Columbia CL 1779/ CS 8579, February, 1962).

success, only selling 5,000 copies in the first year, but it did establish his credentials as a great folk virtuoso and song stylist.[43]

Even after more than 20 years of incredible developments in popular music, this album is still powerful and exciting. Clearly, the folk music community had never witnessed such superb renditions of traditional, folk-style material. One is struck immediately with the tremendous energy of the performances, the hard driving blues guitar style, backed by powerful harmonica riffs. And the voice of this 21-year-old unknown is equally striking and powerful. It is the raspy, guttural, strained-to-the-limit vocal style of an aged black bluesman. The overall performance is loose, open, sometimes frenzied, but with an impeccable sense of timing, emphasis, and articulation. Truly miles above his contemporaries in the folk field. And a striking contrast to his other folk albums where, to remain in the folk fold, he is forced to tone it down and reel it in some.[44]

This is a collection of the best of the folk repertoire Dylan had been performing in the folk clubs over the past several years: Dylan's own special treatments of folk standards, "Man of Constant Sorrow,"[45] "Pretty Peggy-O,"[46] and Dave Van Ronk's version

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[43]Scaduto, pp. 104-05.

[44]This is largely my own personal assessment; see also Rinzler, pp. 11-13.

[45]Bob Dylan, side I, band 4. [46]Ibid., side I, band 6.

of "House of the Rising Sun."[47] But the meat of the album are Dylanized renditions of some classic gospel and blues numbers from old-time country blues greats: Jesse Fuller's "You're No Good,"[48] Bukka White's "Fixin' To Die,"[49] and Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave is Kept Clean."[50]

While black blues forms may be the strongest musical forms presented here, in my mind the album may be best understood as the fruition of Dylan's obsession with Woody Guthrie. The preoccupation with the romance of death and dying in "In My Time of Dyin'," "Fixin' to Die," and "See That My Grave is Kept Clean"--and more subtly in "Man of Constant Sorrow" ("I'm a-bound to ride that mornin' railroad, perhaps I'll die on that train"[51]), "Gospel Plow" ("All them prophets are dead and gone . . ."[52]), "Pretty Peggy-O" ("Our Captain, he is dead . . ."[53]), "Highway 51" ("Won't you bury my body out on Highway 51"[54])--may reflect Dylan's subconscious empathy with his dying hero. Also, in songs like "Highway 51" and "Freight Train Blues"[55] there is a much more consciously Guthriesque fixation on the highway and railroad themes, and the hard-traveling hobo mystique that had come

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[47] Ibid., side II, band 4.

[48] Ibid., side I, band 1.

[49] Ibid., side I, band 5.

[50] Ibid., side II, band 7.

[51] Ibid., side I, band 4.

[52] Ibid., side II, band 2.

[53] Ibid., side I, band 6.

[54] Ibid., side II, band 1.

[55] Ibid., side II, band 5.

to be so closely identified with Woody Guthrie. Dylan's attempts to manufacture a fictitious hobo background, and his various hitch-hiking trips back and forth from Minnesota to New York, were also part of this attempt to step into Guthrie's ramblin' shoes. In the very beginning, hobo and Wobbly songs were also part of Dylan's imaginary role-playing and stage character.[56] He went after the Guthrie image with everything he had.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the only two original songs on Dylan's first album. Both come directly from the rich Guthrie treasury. In "Talking New York," Dylan utilized Guthrie's talking blues style with great finesse, in an autobiographical account of his arrival in New York in 1960.[57] More polished and satirical than "Hard Times in New York Town," which Dylan never recorded, it is very similar in its picture of New York as cold and uninviting. It is very clearly related to another of Guthrie's New York songs from the 1940s, "Talking Subway." Dylan even lifted a line ("I swung onto my old guitar . . .") directly from Guthrie's song.[58]

According to Dylan's song, he was not received as well as Guthrie had been when he rambled into New York back in 1940, offering us a keen insight into the direction in which the folk song revival had evolved since Guthrie's day:

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[56]Scaduto, p. 45.

[57]Bob Dylan, side I, band 2.

[58]See Woody Guthrie, American Folksong (New York: Oak Publications, 1947), p. 20.

I walked down there and ended up
In one of them coffee-houses on the block.
Got on the stage and begin to play,
Man there said, "Come back some other day,
You sound like a hillbilly;
We want folksingers here."[59]

After the initial setback, he got a job playing harmonica, and although they said they loved his sound, it was only worth a dollar a day. But after "weeks and weeks of hangin' around," he finally got a big time job (a reference to his Gerde's engagement). He was making good money and even joined the musicians' union.[60]

But still this was all somehow dissatisfying. Dylan was bitter about his unappreciative reception. So he dropped a few more lines from the Guthrie scripture, to express his frustration:

Now, a very great man once said
That some people rob you with a fountain pen.
It didn't take too long to find out
Just what he was talkin' about.
A lot of people don't have much food on their table,
But they got a lot of forks 'n' knives,
Man they gotta cut somethin'.[61]

He felt he was being sliced up by critics and exploited by entrepreneurs.

We are left with the distinct impression that Dylan did not take too well to the New York cultural climate during the first few months of his stay there. He seemed to feel rejected, a paranoid

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[59] Bob Dylan, side I, band 2.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

kid, expecting so much more, and feeling very let down. So, in frustration, he hit the road again:

> So early one mornin' when the sun was warm,
> I rambled out of New York town.
> Pulled my cap down over my eyes
> And headed out for the western skies.
> So long New York.
> Howdy, East Orange.[62]

He said goodbye to the big city, and headed out to the Gleason's to commune with the Master.

Then, late one night, after one of these holy visits, legend has it that Dylan sat down to write his famous tribute to the Master: "Song to Woody."[63] Dylan himself wrote the legend. In Sing Out!, he relates the tale:

> It was written in the 1960th winter . . . in New York City in the drug store on 8th street. It was on one of them freezing days that I came back from Sid and Bob Gleason's in East Orange, New Jersey. . . . Woody was there and it was a February Sunday night. . . . And I just thought about Woody, I wondered about him, thought harder and wondered harder. . . . I wrote this song in five minutes . . . it's all I got to say. . . . If you know anything at all about Woody then you'll know what I'm a tryin to say. . . . If you don't know anything about Woody, then find out.[64]

Again, it is vintage Guthrie, written to the tune of "The 1913 Massacre."[65] Dylan says he is a thousand miles from home,

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., side II, band 6.

[64] Sing Out!, 12, No. 4 (October-November, 1962), 7.

[65] Woody Guthrie Songbook, pp. 174-76.

trying to experience Guthrie's world of the road: "I'm a-seein' your world of people and things, your paupers and peasants and princes and kings."[66] But Guthrie's world is a world that seems to be dying, like Guthrie is dying, when, in fact, it has hardly been born.[67] Dylan senses a new world coming. After paying tribute to his great hero and ". . . all the good people" who traveled with him, people like Cisco Houston, Sonny Terry, and Huddle Leadbetter, Dylan rambles on down the road--his road--saying, with a tone of sacrilege: "The very last thing that I'd want to do is to say I've been hittin' some hard travelin' too."[68]

This song is thus much more than a sentimental idolization of Woody Guthrie. While acknowledging his debt to this great balladeer, Dylan is taking his leave from the Guthrie mystique. He does not intend to be a mere Guthrie imitator--another Jack Elliot. Dylan intends to follow his own road from now on.[69] But disentangling himself from the grip of the Guthrie mystique would prove more difficult than a song.

Dylan II: Protest Poet (1963-64)

After the release of Bob Dylan early in 1962, the star syndrome began to descend upon young Dylan, eventually bursting the

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[66] Bob Dylan, side II, band 6. [67] Ibid. [68] Ibid.

[69] This interpretation was first suggested to me by Professor Dick Penner of the Department of English at The University of Tennessee, after reading an early draft of this chapter. Scaduto does not make this argument. But it is crucial to an understanding

Guthrie mold to reveal a sensitive, yet compelling, socially concerned artist. He would take the social protest genre to new, unimagined aesthetic heights, and in the process become the new spokesman for the rising tide of youth rebellion in America and the West.[70] Dylan moved into the forefront of the topical-protest song movement at precisely the moment that the 1960s youth-student movement was separating itself from the older generation of American radicalism. The new emerging social concerns were moving beyond the traditional socialist concerns for the working poor and the faith in the revolutionary potential of the working class. The salient issues now centered around two major concerns. First, there was the problem of black civil rights, and anti-segregation movement, and the accompanying problem of white racist reactionary terrorism in the South. And secondly, there was the problem of the Cold War and the arms race, and the ever present danger of nuclear holocaust. And furthermore, the working class no longer seemed capable of revolution, having grown soft and conservative. The revolutionary potential now seemed to be centered in the concerned youth of the sixties, as revealed in the dramatic rise of student radicalism and campus revolts, and new radical organizations like the SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society.[71]

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of the Dylan-Guthrie relationship. Later works--Rinzler, p. 13; Gray, p. 21--do, however, develop this seemingly obvious interpretation.

[70]Scaduto, pp. 111-17; Rinzler, pp. 15-28.

[71]John P. Diggins, The American Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 155-72.

Carl Oglesby, one time president and radical theoretician of the SDS, gave this assessment of the place of Dylan's music in the rise of the New Left:

> Dylan's early songs appeared so promptly as to seem absolutely contemporary with the civil rights movement. There was no time lag. He wasn't a songwriter who came into an established political mood, he seemed to be a part of it and his songs seemed informative to the Movement as the Movement seemed informative to the song writer. This cross-fertilization was absolutely critical in Dylan's relationship to the Movement and the Movement's relationship to Dylan. He gave character to the sensibilities of the Movement.[72]

As the Cold War reached its terrifying crescendo in the Cuban Missile Crisis of the Fall of 1962, as the black civil rights movement was thrust into America's consciousness with the first sit-ins and mass demonstrations in the South, and as the first American combat troops were quietly moving into South Vietnam,[73] Bob Dylan unleashed a string of the most powerful and influential protest songs in the history of American social protest music. He would shatter forever the mold of Guthrie's sentimental idealism, with unprecedented anger and vengeance, bitter youthful righteousness, and dark dystopic visions of Armageddon.

Broadside Ballads

Dylan's protest phase also ran concurrent with, and was thus partly facilitated by, the creation of a new forum for topical-

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[72]Scaduto, pp. 137-38.

[73]Gerald Howard, ed., The Sixties (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982), pp. 505-07.

protest songs. It came in the form of a monthly mimeographed radical song sheet published in the Greenwich Village apartment of old left activists and former Almanac Singers, Gordon Fresian and Agnes Cunningham. They called their publication Broadside, and here Dylan published his first protest songs.[74] The first issue of Broadside appeared in February, 1962, and featured Dylan's "Talking John Birch Society Paranoid Blues."

Dylan quickly distinguished himself from the other young Broadside balladeers, who came to be collectively known as "Woody's children."[75] These included Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, Peter La Farge, Mark Spoelstra, and Eric Anderson. Dylan's songs easily dominated the early issues. Now that he had found a market for political protest songs, he quickly and obsessively churned them out. Some of the more memorable songs included "I Will Not Go Down Under the Ground,"[76] expressing his refusal to give in to nuclear terror; "The Ballad of Emmet Till,"[77] the shocking true story of a young black boy from Chicago brutally murdered by the white terror machine in Mississippi in 1955; and "John Brown,"[78] about a young man who is

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[74]For background and information on the founding and development of Broadside, see Jim Capaldi, "Broadside: The Struggle Continues," Folk Scene, 4, No. 12 (February, 1977), 16-23; see also R. Serge Denisoff, Great Day Coming (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 170-84; also Josh Dunson, Freedom in the Air: Song Movements of the Sixties (New York: International Publishers, 1965), pp. 72-77.

[75]Dunson, pp. 78-98.

[76]Broadside, No. 3 (April, 1962).

[77]Ibid., No. 16 (November, 1962).

[78]Ibid., No. 22 (March, 1963).

sent off to war to the delight of his proud mother, who later returns shattered and crippled to present his medals to his horrified mom.

Freewheelin'

From 1962 to 1964, Broadside published 23 of Bob Dylan's songs and poems. This was far more than the journal published of any of the other protest writers, with the notable exception of Phil Ochs. Some of Dylan's better (and least controversial) Broadside ballads found their way onto his two major Columbia recordings of this period: The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan (May, 1963)[79] and The Times They Are A-Changin' (January, 1964).[80] These songs became the classic statements of protest of the 1960s. Featured on these two discs were such standards as "Blowin' in the Wind,"[81] which became a civil rights anthem second only to "We Shall Overcome"; "Master's of War,"[82] Dylan's vicious attack on American militarism; "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,"[83] a dark and mysterious eschatological fantasy, inspired by the nuclear brinkmanship of the Cuban missile crisis; "Talking World War III Blues,"[84] a light-hearted farce, likewise inspired by Cold War politics, in the form of a dream about

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[79]Columbia CL 1986 (mono), KCS 8786 (stereo).

[80]Columbia CL 2105 (mono), KCS 8905 (stereo).

[81]Freewheelin', side I, band 1.

[82]Ibid., side I, band 3

[83]Ibid., side I, band 6.

[84]Ibid., side II, band 4.

being left alive after a nuclear holocaust; "Oxford Town,"[85] about James Meredith's attempt to break the color barrier at the University of Mississippi in 1962; "The Times They Are A-Changin'"[86] and "When the Ship Comes In," prophesies of the coming youth revolution; "With God On Our Side,"[87] exposing the hypocrisy of those who use religion to justify violence and war; "The Ballad of Hollis Brown"[88] and "North Country Blues,"[89] portraits of poor people beat down by the system; "Only a Pawn in Their Game,"[90] a comment on the murder of black activist Medgar Evers, taking pity on the murderer as a victim of the same racist system that killed Evers; and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Caroll,"[91] a hauntingly poignant ballad about the senseless murder of a Negro maid by an aristocratic socialite named William Zantzinger,[92] who attacked the waitress with his cane because she was too slow bringing him his drink.

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[85] Ibid., side II, band 3,

[86] The Times They Are A-Changin', side I, band 1.

[87] Ibid., side I, band 3.

[88] Ibid., side I, band 2.

[89] Ibid., side I, band 4.

[90] Ibid., side II, band 1.

[91] Ibid., side II, band 4.

[92] The original spelling from newspaper reports was "Zantsinger" with a "t." For reasons unknown to this author, Dylan dropped the "t" in his ballad. See Broadside, No. 43 (April 15, 1964).

Thus, in 1963 and 1964, Bob Dylan led the surge of folk protest material into America's popular culture, breaking all the rules of the folk idiom in the process. Never before had songs with such stark political intensity reached into the realm of popular culture in America. But the times were right, America was hungry for a vehicle of protest, and young Dylan was just as hungry to rise to the challenge. This was the beginning of the politicization of American popular culture, and this was to be Dylan's major contribution to the generation of the 1960s.[93]

Some of the activists were shocked by the poetic vagueness and overt mysticism of "Hard Rain":

> I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin'.
> Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world,
> Heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin'.
> Heard ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin',
> Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin',
> Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter,
> Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley,
> And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard,
> It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.[94]

But others were stunned by the brilliance of his understated protests, as in "Hattie Caroll":

> Hattie Caroll was a maid in the kitchen.
> She was fifty-one years old and gave birth to ten children,
> Who carried the dishes and took out the garbage
> And never once sat at the head of the table

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[93]Denisoff, pp. 176-84.

[94]Freewheelin', side I, band 6.

And didn't even talk to the people at the table,
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table
And emptied the ash trays at a whole other level,
Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane
That sailed through the air and came down through the room,
And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger.

Ah, but you who philosophize disgrace
And criticize all fears,
Take the rag away from your face
Now ain't the time for your tears.[95]

Blowin' in the Wind

But Bob Dylan had not yet completely disentangled himself from Woody Guthrie's influence. Many of his protest songs still exude Guthrie's idealism. This is most obvious in the Broadside ballads (as opposed to those he recorded for Columbia). In "Let Me Die In My Footsteps," for example, we find more of Guthrie's lines (from "Pastures of Plenty" again) and a large dose of Guthrie's sentimental nationalism:

Go out in your country where the land meets the sun,
See the craters and the canyons where the waterfalls run,
Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho;
Let every state in this union seep down in your souls . . .[96]

And in "Emmett Till" Dylan even flirts with Guthrie's utopian unionism:

This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-
robed Ku Klux Klan.

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[95] The Times They Are A-Changin', side II, band 4.

[96] Broadside, No. 3 (April, 1962).

> But if all us folks that thinks alike, if we could give all we could give,
> We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live.[97]

But the place where Guthrie's politics penetrated deepest into Dylan's protest phase is revealed in Dylan's most famous protest song, "Blowin' in the Wind." This song is every bit as Guthriesque in theme and spirit as "Talking New York" and "Song to Woody." The theme of this song appears to have been taken (probably subconsciously) from a passage in Bound for Glory, where Guthrie compares his mind guerilla cause to the newspapers blowing in the winds of the New York City streets and alleys.[98] It is one of those passages that stands out aesthetically, rhetorically, and politically; a passage that obviously struck a chord deep within young Bob Dylan as he read and re-read this holy book.[99]

When the song first appeared in the pages of Sing Out! in the fall of 1962, Dylan explained its meaning this way:

> There ain't too much I can say about this song except that the answer is blowing in the wind. It ain't in no book or movie or T.V. show or discussion group. Man, it's in the wind--and it's blowing in the wind. Too many of these hip people are telling me where the answer is but oh I won't believe that. I still say it's in the wind and just like a restless piece of paper it's got to come down

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[97] Ibid., No. 16 (November, 1962).

[98] Bound for Glory, p. 295, quoted above, pp. 190-91.

[99] This is my own supposition, based upon my reading of the Guthrie passage, which immediately brought to mind Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." None of the Dylan literature to which I have been exposed makes this connection.

> sometime. . . . But the only trouble is that no one picks up the answer when it comes down so not too many people get to see and know it . . . and then it flies away again . . .[100]

Dylan, in his own inarticulate fashion, is merely paraphrasing Guthrie here. But, while this song may thematicially belong to Guthrie, the poetic flair is all Dylan's:

> How many roads must a man walk down
> Before you call him a man?
> Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail
> Before she sleeps in the sand?
> Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannon balls fly
> Before they're forever banned?
> The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
> The answer is blowin' in the wind.[101]

What You Gonna Do?

The place where Bob Dylan's politics departs from Woody Guthrie is in the realm of political religiosity.[102] Whereas, in songs like "Jesus Christ," "Good Old Union Feeling," and "Union's My Religion," Guthrie proletarianized his childhood Christian fundamentalism; Dylan, in songs like "With God on Our Side," "When the Ship Comes In," "I'd Hate to be You on That Dreadful Day," and "Quit Your Low Down Ways," Christianizes his radicalism. And while Guthrie, in the tradition of the Wobblies, turned religious songs into labor hymns, Dylan is unique in that he produced a strange hybrid that you might call gospel protest:

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[100] Sing Out!, 12, No. 4 (October-November, 1962), 4.

[101] Ibid.

[102] See Gray, pp. 48-49.

Tell me what you gonna do
When the shadow comes under your door.
Tell me what you gonna do
When the shadow comes under your door.
Tell me what you gonna do
When the shadow comes under your door.
Oh Lord, oh Lord,
What shall you do?[103]

As in pre-union protest songs, many of Dylan's protest songs offer up the revenge of Judgement to those who transgress against their worldly brothers:

Well your clock is gonna stop
At Saint Peter's gate.
Your gonna ask him what time it is,
He's gonna say, "It's too late."
Hey, hey!
I'd sure hate to be you
On that dreadful day.[104]

Even where the political message is not exclusively housed in a religious vehicle, virtually all of Dylan's protest songs are richly steeped in Biblical symbolism and Christian metaphors. In "Blowin' in the Wind" it appears to be Noah's dove who is seeking the sand.[105] In "Master's of War," the warlords are compared to "Judas of old," and are so despicable that "even Jesus" would not forgive them for what they do.[106] In "Talking World War III

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[103]Writings and Drawings, p. 62.

[104]Ibid., p. 57.

[105]Ibid., p. 33.

[106]Ibid., p. 36.

Blues," Dylan tries to play "Adam and Eve" with an unwilling young girl.[107] And when the ship of revolution finally comes in, Dylan overcomes his oppressors as Moses and David overcame theirs:

> Then they'll raise their hands,
> Sayin' we'll meet all your demands,
> But we'll shout from the bow, "You
> days are numbered!"
> And Like Pharaoh's tribe,
> They'll be drownded in the tides
> And like Goliath, they'll be conquered.[108]

While Guthrie's utopianism had been a function of his romanticized native class consciousness, Dylan's utopianism (as well as his dystopianism) was basically a function of his Judeo-Christian ethics. And herein lies the major difference between Guthrie and his famous disciple: whereas Woody's radicalism took the form of utopian socialism, Dylan's radicalism was actually a form of non-political Christian-based moralism.

But also early in this protest phase, another side of Dylan's political character is revealed, taking him in directions Guthrie would never have imagined going. As would soon be confirmed in Dylan's punk rock phase, Guthrie's idealism and Christian moralism are but undercurrents in the mainstream of Dylan's angry-young-man persona. In "Bob Dylan's Blues," for example, through a sardonic wit, Dylan's anarchism surfaces:

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[107] Ibid., p. 43.

[108] Ibid., p. 94.

> Well, lookit here buddy
> You wanna be like me,
> Pull out your six-shooter
> And rob every bank you see;
> Tell the judge I said it was alright
> Yea![109]

Dylan playfully, but with very definite violent overtones, rips open a new generation gap.

But some of his attacks on the older generation are much less playful, and equally violent. Perhaps the most powerful theme to emerge is that of nuclear terror. There is a "Hard Rain" in the winds, and the people are being fooled into thinking God is on the side of this terror. Dylan holds the older generation responsible for the impending doom. To the "Masters' of War" who hold us all hostage to nuclear terror, Dylan's anger is vented with a devastating hatred:

> And I hope that you die
> And your death'll come soon.
> I'll follow your casket
> On a pale afternoon;
> And I'll watch while you're lowered
> Down to your deathbed,
> And I'll stand over your grave
> 'Til I'm sure that you're dead.[110]

Thus, even during his early protest phase, this seemingly idealistic and socially committed young man is committed to a politics that is much different than the politics of Guthrie's

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[109]Ibid., p. 37.

[110]Ibid., p. 36.

generation. Dylan is sewing the seeds of youthful anger and rebellion that promised to indeed change the times:

> Come mothers and fathers throughout the land
> And don't criticize what you can't understand.
> Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command.
> Your old road is rapidly agin'.
> Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand,
> For the times they are a-changin'.[111]

The Poet as Activist

I do not mean to diminish Dylan's protest consciousness as mere moral posturing. Although perceived by many as an opportunist, capitalizing upon the current popularity of folk-protest music to further his career goals as a pop star, this is almost certainly an unfair criticism since Dylan himself was largely responsible for the current popularity of protest music.[112] His social consciousness at this point was genuine enough.[113] He was deeply and sincerely concerned about the arms race and nuclear terror, in spite of the fact that his concerns were expressed in terms of salvation and judgement, and not secular, proletarian revolution. He was also sincere in his concern for racial justice in America, even though his protests against racism and white terrorism were sometimes expressed in a rather eclectic manner, as exemplified by "Only A Pawn in Their

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[111]"The Times They Are A-Changin'," ibid., p. 85.

[112]Denisoff, p. 174.

[113]Scaduto, pp. 132-47.

Game." He had always held blacks in great awe, and had great respect for Negro music cultures. Moreover, the Negro was a very potent symbol of oppression for Dylan, and his concerns about racial injustice were surely honest.[114]

It was out of these concerns that Dylan entered into his only period of serious political activism. In July, 1963, he flew down to Greenwood, Mississippi to join Pete Seeger and other northern protest singers in a benefit concert sponsored by SNCC (the black activist organization Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), and to assist in a voter registration drive there. As Dylan performed to the crowd of about 250 (mostly blacks and a few white newspaper reporters), carloads of angry whites circulated the block menacingly.[115]

Then, on August 28, Dylan joined Joan Baez, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Mahalia Jackson, and Harry Belafonte, among others, at the nation's capitol to entertain and inspire the 200,000 protesting southern segregation at the March on Washington.[116] Dylan sang "Master's of War,"[117] "Only a Pawn,"[118] and a few more of his new

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[114]Ibid,, pp. 146-47.

[115]Ibid., p. 146; see also McGregor, pp. 38-39.

[116]Scaduto, p. 151; see also Denisoff, pp. 176-77 (Denisoff estimates the number of demonstrators at Washington as "nearly a million").

[117]According to Rinzler, p. 16.

[118]Scaduto, p. 151.

protest songs. Joan Baez got the whole crowd singing "We Shall Overcome," and Peter, Paul, and Mary led a mass singing of "Blowin' in the Wind." But it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who captured the message in the winds in his famous "I have a dream" speech.[119] That night the winds blew optimism, but this dream would soon shatter in a wave of public assassinations, urban riots, and national despair.

The Dylan Mystique

Within the span of a single year, the year 1963, the Dylan Mystique rose up suddenly and dramatically, breaking out of the confines of the Greenwich Village coffee house scene to reach deep into the national consciousness, bursting forever the Woody Guthrie mold.[120] Dylan quickly and unexpectedly blossomed into the classic prophet-hero: a popular seer, inspired with great genius, the source of revealed truths, one whose visions take us beyond the facade of the reality beneath, Carlyle's "light which enlightens."[121] He had seen through the "masks" of the Masters of War, he had seen the horrible and distorted visions of the "hard rain" that was coming, he had shown us that the racist assassins were but "pawns" in the game of white terrorism, and he had insisted that the answers to all of these problems were blowing

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Scaduto, p. 172.

[121] B. H. Lehman, Carlyle's Theory of the Hero (New York: Duke University Press, 1928), p. 45.

in the "winds." And the youth of the West, yearning for a messiah to deliver them from the malaise of life in the nuclear age, turned to Dylan in droves and with unbounded enthusiasm.

Bob Dylan was the first truly popular artist in America to exhibit a social consciousness. He was the first public figure in America's youth culture with a message that went beyond the traditional preoccupation with the boy-meets-girl scenario. His impact upon the popular culture of the 1960s is incalculable. Other major pop artists, like John Lennon, were profoundly affected by this scruffy little poet with a guitar.[122] Lennon would spend hours listening to Dylan's protest albums over and over.[123] In the years to come, under Dylan's inspiration, Lennon would lead the Beatles and the rock community generally in new and more socially concerned directions. Lennon would always include Dylan among his major influences.[124]

During the year 1963, Bob Dylan came to be accepted as the spokesman for his peers and his generation. Through the influence of this messiah of protest, the popular culture and youthful generation of the sixties were politicized. The effects would reverberate throughout the world for decades to come.[125]

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[122]Rinzler, p. 23.

[123]Philip Norman, Shout!: The Beatles and Their Generation (New York: Warner Books, 1981), p. 300.

[124]Lennon Remembers, edited by Jann Wenner (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1971), pp. 167, 186-89.

[125]See Rinzler, pp. 15-23; Gray, pp. 7-10.

He held his first major concert in New York City's Town Hall on April 12, 1963, unleashing a string of powerful protest songs--"Hollis Brown," "Who Killed Davy Moore?" "John Brown," "Hard Rain"--to a stunned audience.[126] To close the concert, he recited a long poem, "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie," which seemed to symbolically release him from the grip of Woody Guthrie, while acknowledging Guthrie as one of the two major influences behind Dylan's quest for hope:

> And where do you look for this hope that yer seekin'?
> Where do you look for this lamp that's a-burnin'?
> Where do you look for this oil well gushin'?
> Where do you look for this candle that's glowin"?
> Where do you look for this hope that you know is there
> And out there somewhere?
> And your feet can only walk down two kinds of roads,
> Your eyes can only look through two kinds of windows,
> Your nose can only smell two kinds of hallways,
> You can touch and twist and turn two kinds of doorknobs.
> You can either go to the church of your choice
> Or you can go to Brooklyn State Hospital.
> You'll find God in the church of your choice;
> You'll find Woody Guthrie in Brooklyn State Hospital.
>
> And though it's only my opinion,
> I may be right or wrong.
> You'll find them both
> In the Grand Canyon
> At sundown.[127]

Dylan's protests and prophesies were inspired by Christian morality and Guthrie's idealism. And, while it is true that Dylan would soon dramatically reject both, to move beyond hero-worship

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[126] Scaduto, p. 162.

[127] Writings and Drawings, p. 56.

and religion into the egoism of the star syndrome, this too would be but another phase. And, in the end, Dylan would see the error of his ways, to return to working class idealism and Christian ethics.

Dylan's second album, Freewheelin', was released in May.[128] It was to be a stunning success, selling over 200,000 copies by July.[129] Peter, Paul, and Mary soon recorded two songs from the album ("Blowin' in the Wind" and "Don't Think Twice") as a single, which would quickly become the most commercially successful protest single ever released.[130]

On May 12, Dylan was scheduled to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show, the T.V. program that had launched the careers of Elvis Presley and the Beatles. But, after the CBS decision to censor "Talking John Birch," he refused to appear, something Elvis Presley or perhaps even John Lennon would have had a hard time understanding.[131] The fact that he would turn down a chance at national television exposure on principle, is a good indication of the heroic dimensions to which his social consciousness would lead him.

Later in May he joined Joan Baez at the Monterey Folk Festival out in California.[132] Baez fell in love with Dylan and his songs. She took young Dylan under her wing, becoming, perhaps, his most

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[128]Columbia CL 1968 (mono), CS 8786 (stereo).

[129]Rinzler, p. 19.

[130]Scaduto, p. 171.

[131]Ibid., pp. 163-65.

[132]Ibid., pp. 170-71.

important promoter during this period, recording and performing his songs, and taking him on tour with her as her special guest, introducing him to the nation's college campuses and the concerned youth of America.[133] At the Newport Folk Festival at the end of July, Dylan and Baez were the main attractions: the crown prince and princess of folk protest.[134]

As Dylan left Newport, a cult was forming around him. He had become a major figure in the popular consciousness of the left, a cultural leader and prophet in the rising tide of youth rebellion. He capped the year off with a sell-out concert at Carnegie Hall to a tremendously enthusiastic crowd. After the concert, he was mobbed by frenzied, screaming fans.[135] The fame had come suddenly and was overwhelming. He was not prepared for a fame such as this. He was deathly afraid of being crushed to death by the mobs of fans or smothered by the image of protest poet. Almost immediately he began to retreat from the pressures of the popular prophet mystique.

His last protest album, The Times They Are A-Changin', was released in January, 1964, in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination.[136] The assassination seemed to make protest idealism futile. Lee Harvey Oswald had also assassinated hope, leaving only cynicism and despair. Dylan quickly lost interest in politics,

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[133]See Scaduto's interview with Baez, pp. 221-43.

[134]Ibid., pp. 172-75.

[135]Ibid., pp. 184-85.

[136]Columbia CL 2105 (mono), KCS 8905 (stereo).

leaving forever the realm of active protest. He abandoned his Greenwich Village apartment and moved up to the serenity and security of manager Albert Grossman's home in Bearsville, near Woodstock, in upstate New York.[137] In the last song on this album, "Restless Farewell," he bids farewell to movement politics and the protest community. It was all too confining. The expectations were too great and burdensome:

> Oh, every thought that's strung a knot in my mind,
> I might go insane if it couldn't be sprung.
> But it's not to stand naked under unknowin' eyes,
> It's for myself and my friends my stories are sung
> But the time ain't tall,
> Yet on time you depend
> And no word is possessed by no special friend.
> And though the line is cut,
> It ain't quite the end,
> I'll just bid farewell 'till we meet again.[138]

He was changing so rapidly now that the Protest Poet image simply could no longer contain Bob Dylan, and like the Guthrie image, it too exploded as yet another Bob Dylan began to form.

Dylan III: Punk Rocker (1965-67)

The "third" Bob Dylan wore the mask of the Hip Hero and "the angry young man." Turning to the revolutionary new medium of "punk" rock music, he sent shock waves deep into the heart of the 1960s popular culture, and, although he typically disavowed the titles, he

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[137] Scaduto, pp. 177-79.

[138] Writings and Drawings, p. 99.

emerged as a teen idol and the cultural leader of what came to be known as the Woodstock Nation: the rebellious hordes of draft-card burning, anti-establishment students and flower-power, drug-happy hippies and yippies.[139] This would be the most politically influential and commercially successful of all six of Bob Dylan's public images.

Fame had brought Dylan III a self-confidence and an arrogance that assured him that he could do no wrong. He became even more daring and innovative artistically and politically, breaking down all the barriers, flaunting all conventions and norms, searching for the very source of his creative powers: his real self, the self beneath all the social influences that surrounded him and trapped him within the prison of society. Indeed, the major theme of this period (1964-66) is that of personal freedom: the worship of the (transcendental) ego.[140]

But the fame had also brought unbearable responsibilities. For the fame had come through the image of commitment to the cause of social justice. He was now looked to for answers and solutions to all the problems of society in the thermonuclear age. But he had come to realize that there were no answers and no solutions, at least not in the old left--organized protest--tradition. After all, he had only said that the answers were in the wind, implying that it was all a great mystery. And the weight of the deep-seated

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[139]Rinzler, pp. 31-53.

[140]See Scaduto, pp. 203-08; Rinzler, p. 36; also Denisoff, pp. 185-97.

contradiction between the dogma of involvement and the hopelessness of the realities of power became too much to bear.

Dylan III rejected political involvement in favor of political apathy and radical anarchy. He rejected commitment and cause and sought the inner power of the self, and felt that, in the end, collective egoism and apathy could undermine (or at least weaken) the very foundations of social order, by simply withdrawing its popular supports. Dylan's break with society was decisive and complete, and it occurred on several separate levels simultaneously. He rejected not only the established authorities ("the Masters of War"), but also the old-style radicalism (of "Maggie's Farm") that he had come to represent (i.e., the Sing Out!/Broadside-topical song tradition and the cult of Woody Guthrie). And, in the extremes of his existential binge, he rejected as artificial all social relationships.

In the long run, it was the dark, cynical, revengeful side of Bob Dylan that emerged. Existential soul-searching turned into paranoia. And, in a series of hate-filled, vicious song poems and visions, often utilizing the "love-gone-sour" metaphor, Dylan made his break with social consciousness and political commitment. Asserting the full fury of his brutal poetic daggers, he thrust deeply into the popular consciousness of American (and Western) Youth, reflecting symbolically the anger of a new generation of social protest.

The Tom Paine Award Dinner

The first public indication of Dylan's loss of faith came in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, on November 23, 1963, and the sense of hopelessness and despair that swept through the nation--and through Bob Dylan--at this time. A few weeks after the assassination, Dylan spoke at a dinner before the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, a prominent civil rights organization, in acceptance of their prestigious Tom Paine Award, for his work in the desegregation movement.[141]

But, in his acceptance speech he quickly revealed the hostility and resentment he had for this old-fashioned, establishment, black-tie-and-furs audience. His remarks became increasingly insulting and the audience was becoming uncomfortable. Then, carelessly touching a very sensitive nerve, he compared himself to Kennedy's assassin, saying he could understand Oswald's motives, although he could never condone his actions. Dylan had clearly reached for a poor example to illustrate the frustration of the youth culture of America in the face of the entrenchment of the establishment. His hosts were outraged and offended.[142] Unknowingly, Dylan had symbolically drawn what would become the major social battle lines of the 1960s: between the old and the young, between the old and new approaches, not only to politics, but to life itself. The old

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[141] Scaduto, pp. 186-91.

[142] Ibid.

could no longer dictate to the young. For, indeed, the times were changing, and it was time for the old to step aside as the age of Youth began.

First English Tour

Even before the release of his last protest album, The Times They Are A-Changin', in January, 1964, Dylan had become thoroughly disillusioned with the politics of the old left and the artistic restraints of the topical-folk idiom. That spring he left for his first concert tour of England. There he came face to face with the British rock and roll revival. He was quickly coming under the spell of the revolutionary new developments occurring in the field of popular music, being generated primarily by the British groups, especially the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. And, in anticipation of "folk-rock," Eric Burden and the Animals had just released a rock version of an old folk standard, "The House of the Rising Sun," which Dylan had recorded on his first album.[143] Dylan was overwhelmed by the excitement of it all.

He spent an historic evening with John Lennon and Paul McCartney, where he reportedly introduced them to marijuana, a drug that was to become the very symbol of the rising tide of youth rebellion.[144] Dylan's influence would ultimately push the Beatles in a new artistic direction, away from the light pop of "I Wanta Hold

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[143]Ibid., pp. 203-04.

[144]Ibid., p. 204.

Your Hand," and toward more serious compositions, like "Nowhere Man" and "The Fool on the Hill." But their impact on him would be far more dramatic.

Another Side of Bob Dylan

In the summer of 1964, at the Newport Folk Festival in July, Dylan took the topical-folk establishment by surprise by performing his new non-protest material, mostly bitter songs of love gone sour.[145] While the young people in the audience were captivated by the new Dylan, who seemed to be expressing much of their own pain, the professional upholders of the topical tradition were appalled. He was attacked by reviewers of the festival in Sing Out! and Broadside, accused of selling out to commercialism.[146]

In August, he released Another Side of Bob Dylan, which confirmed his new direction.[147] Gone were the finger-pointing songs of social significance. To the new Bob Dylan, social criticism was a waste of time. During this period, in a conversation with Phil Ochs, who was now the major torch bearer of the protest tradition, Dylan said: "The stuff you're writing is all bullshit, because politics is bullshit. Its all unreal. The only thing that's real is inside you. Your feelings."[148] Bob Dylan, the prophet of

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[145]See ibid., pp. 208-09; see also Denisoff, pp. 182-84.

[146]See Irsin Silber, "An Open Letter to Bob Dylan," Sing Out! Vol. 14, No. 23 (November, 1964), reprinted in McGregor, pp. 66-68; also Josh Dunson, "Newport: Two Workshops of Our Times," Broadside, 49 (August, 1964).

[147]Columbia KCS 8993, 1964.

[148]Scaduto, p. 205.

protest, had turned his back on politics. His new material was deeply personal, subjective, and existential. This was a stunning reversal and it sent waves of controversy throughout the topical-protest community.[149]

Eight of the 11 songs on the new album, outwardly at least, were love songs. Some were very clearly about real-life relationships with specific women, like "Ballad in Plain D," which is a vivid portrait of a lover's quarrel with Suze Rotozdo and her "parasite sister," and the resulting disintegration of that romance.[150] Others, however, were couched in a poetic vagueness which would allow for more generalized interpretations, transcending the boy-girl theme, to represent Dylan's struggle with the larger world of promoters, fans, and critics who were attempting to trap him within some artificial, stereotypical category (protest singer, radical activist, movement leader, etc.).[151] Through the metaphor of the lovers' quarrel, he was voicing his objections to such type-casting, saying"I'm not the one you want, babe, I will only let you down."[152] And asserting his humanness above his public image as prophet and leader, he screamed: "No, no, no, It ain't me, babe / It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe."[153]

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[149]See Gray, p. 10; also Denisoff, p. 184.

[150]Another Side of Bob Dylan, side II, band 5.

[151]Scaduto, pp. 210-12.

[152]"It Ain't Me Babe," Another Side, side II, band 5.

[153]Ibid.

To the new Dylan, political activism was a trap which, metaphorically, could be symbolized by the smothering oppression of an overbearing lover. It must be kept in mind that Dylan's lovers and friends of this period were almost all committed, involved radicals. And his public image was that of the artist activist. But the new Dylan was moving beyond commitment and in these seemingly romantic love ballads he was often ridiculing his friends and lovers for their blind commitment to the meaningless, utopian charade of old left politics which, in ignorance, overlooked the realities of power and naively overstated the possibilities of change.

> But it grieves my heart, love,
> To see you tryin' to be a part of
> A world that just don't exist.
> It's all just a dream, babe,
> A vacuum, a scheme, babe,
> That sucks you into feelin' like this.[154]

The most explicitly political statement on the album is the mystical "Chimes of Freedom" that ring out loudly Dylan's major theme of personal freedom.[155] The Chimes of Freedom are tolling for the underdogs, the refugees, the rebels, the outcasts, and the unfortunate everywhere. However, they are not ringing for the committed radical activists, but for the alienated, "the abandoned and forsaken."[156] And they are chiming, not for the dogmatic and the

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[154]"To Ramona," ibid., side I, band 6.

[155]Ibid., side I, band 4.

[156]Ibid.

ideological, but for the free-thinking "guardians and protectors of the mind."[157] Moreover, this is a non-partisan, apolitical tolling, a simple statement of empathy for those who suffer as outcasts.

The whole tone of this album reflects Dylan's new inward shift, away from commitment and involvement and toward existential, transcendent freedom. Nowhere is this more clear than in "My Back Pages," the most significant song on the album.[158] Here he exposes the hypocrisy of his old approach, where he followed the path of ideas, believing the lies that life was "black and white," and accepting, uncritically, empty symbols, like "equality." He had been a phony prophet, lost in a romantic fantasy world where there was a clear and easy distinction between "good and evil," unaware that he was destroying his self through his very preaching. And, attacking the tired old rational world view, he continually repeated the refrain that summed up his new affective attitude and direction: "Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now."[159]

The break with the past and with the rationalism of ideology and commitment was now complete. The new Bob Dylan was becoming the champion of freedom and feeling, and a hero of the rapidly evolving cult of youth.

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[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., side II, band 3.

[159] Ibid.

Bringing it All Back Home

In the fall of 1964 Dylan returned to England. This time the tour was filmed and later released as a pseudo-documentary entitled Don't Look Back.[160] Joan Baez accompanied him, but Dylan was the star now and, cruelly, he never asked her to join him on stage. Their relationship quickly disintegrated, reflecting his broader split with much of what Ms. Baez had come to represent politically as well as musically.

Early in 1965, after returning from England, Dylan secretly began to experiment with electric instrumentation. In March he released his epoch-making album, Bringing it All Back Home.[161] The title referred to his return to his (and the Youth Culture's) rock roots. Coinciding with the rock and roll revival, the album was a tremendous success. It was his first million-selling album.[162]

Acutely aware of the risk he was taking with his career, Dylan cautiously included an all-acoustic side to this album, making it a transitional first step in the inevitable--but highly controversial--direction of rock music. However, while holding back musically, he plunged ahead lyrically, with his new message of rejection and rebellion, aimed directly at the naive idealism of

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[160]See D. A. Pennebaker, Don't Look Back (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968).

[161]Columbia PC 9128.

[162]Rinzler, pp. 39-45.

the left's old guard and the hypocrisy of the folk purists.

The new Dylan now realized that he had once lived in a utopian dream world where all the problems of living in a nuclear age could be overcome by determined collective action. Now he realized that there were no simple solutions and no utopian paradise on the horizon. In the album's liner notes he says simply, "I accept chaos," implying that there are no solutions to this chaotic absurdity we call reality.[163] But most of all, he rejects his image as the leader of a political or cultural movement: "i would not want to be bach. mozart. tolstoy. joe hill. gertrude stein or james dean / they are all dead."[164]

The quiet, beatless acoustic style of the traditional ballads, square dance tunes, and hymn parodies simply could not express the new bitterness, nor the hate that was being directed outwardly from the souls of the new youth cult. So Dylan returned to the original revolutionary medium of the youth revolution in America and Europe: Rock 'n' Roll music. Only in this strange, yet powerful, blending of black rhythm-and-blues and white country-and-Western, with its pounding rhythms and hard-driving electric guitars, could the youth of the West express their pent-up feelings and repressed sexuality.[165]

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[163] Writings and Drawings, p. 158.

[164] Ibid.

[165] See Albert Goldman, "The Emergence of Rock," New American Review, 3 (April, 1968); reprinted in Howard, pp. 343-64.

Thus, in "Subterranean Homesick Blues," the driving hard-rock number that opens the album, Dylan wastes no time in getting to the point. In short, biting spurts of paranoid-absurdist lyrics, Dylan expresses powerfully the condition of youth in an age of insanity, where the man "wants eleven dollar bills [but] you only got ten."[166] It is a picture of youth alienation, where the "heat" is continuous, the phone is always tapped, and "the man in a trench coat" is always watching. Dylan warns his listeners not to trust the authorities: ". . . stay away from those / that carry around a fire hose."[167] And he forcefully pounds out his new message in the famous statement, "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows," from which the terrorist S.D.S. splinter-group, The Weathermen, would take their name.[168] "Subterranean Homesick Blues" sets the whole tone of the album and reflects the new anarchistic-existentialist attitudes that were now infecting the popular culture of the West. The distrust of the established authorities and the collective disillusionment with the logic and uniformity of life in the age of machinery rings out clearly: "Don't follow leaders / Watch the parkin' meters."[169]

The theme of rejecting authority is further developed in "Maggie's Farm," which is a metaphor for the establishment generally, but specifically the old left topical-protest song establishment

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[166] Bringing it All Back Home, side I, band 1.

[167] Ibid. [168] Ibid. [169] Ibid.

who had attempted to package Dylan in their own image:

> Well, I try my best
> To be just like I am,
> But everybody wants you
> To be just like them.
> They sing while you slave
> And I just get bored.
> I ain't gonna work on Maggie's
> Farm no more.[170]

In "Outlaw Blues," Dylan describes the irony of his persecution at the hands of the dogmatists and purists of the folk community through the metaphor of the outlaw. For, although he was being portrayed in the folk press as the villain who had violated the sacred folk tradition, Dylan feels that the shoe is really on the other foot: "I might look like Robert Ford / but I feel just like Jesse James."[171]

"On the Road Again" is an open letter to Dylan's lost love (symbolizing his break with the topical-folk tradition), explaining why he had to leave. Again, using absurdist imagery, Dylan exposes the insanity of the crusade for the cause:

> Well, there's fist fights in the kitchen
> They're enough to make me cry.
> The mailman comes in
> Even he's got to take a side
> Even the butler
> He's got something to prove
> Then you ask why I don't live here
> Honey, how come you don't move?[172]

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[170] Ibid., side I, band 3.

[171] Ibid., side I, band 5.

[172] Ibid., side I, band 6.

"Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" is yet another absurdist, paranoid vision about Captain Kidd (i.e., Dylan as the personification of American youth) discovering America (i.e., discovering American Youth culture), but like Jesus, being persecuted for his unconventional behavior.[173] Here Dylan goes beyond the simple reject Authority theme to a more generalized rejection of political involvement. Here, for the first time, he uses death to symbolize social activism and commitment. Somewhere during his adventures, Captain Kidd sees a building advertising "Brotherhood" (no doubt a symbol for the "movement").[174] But when he gets inside he finds out it is a funeral parlor. In other words, by joining in the fellowship of your brothers and sisters in the struggle (whatever the cause), you annihilate your self; ego is destroyed through commitment.

On the acoustic side there are four long symbolist poems, backed minimally by a single "folk" guitar. Here Dylan reaches a new high as a poet, the music is secondary. He pursues the same themes--rejection of authority and the search for the inner experience--but from a slightly different perspective.

"Mr. Tambourine Man" can be read as a metaphor for the drug trip:[175]

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[173]Ibid., side I, band 7.

[174]This is my own interpretation, but it seems glaringly obvious.

[175]See Scaduto, pp. 215-16.

> Hey! Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me,
> I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to.
> Hey! Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me,
> In the jingle jangle morning I'll come following you.[176]

In this song Dylan celebrates the drug experience as the major avenue leading out of the rational and ideological, and into the realm of feeling and euphoria--"on that magic swirlin' ship"--beyond the reaches of authority and tradition.[177]

We are then taken on "ships with tattoed sails" through "The Gates of Eden," into that mythical land where there are no "relationships of ownership," no sins, no trials, and no kings.[178] Inside these gates there are no false promises of utopia, this is no "Maggie's Farm," this is the transcendental dream-world within the self. This is the same place where we heard the Tambourine Man, and it is precisely within this inner world that Dylan now seeks Truth.

"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" is perhaps the masterpiece of the album and a uniquely poetic achievement for a popular artist.[179] And yet its message is profoundly political, setting new standards for the protest song, politically as well as aesthetically. The theme is vintage 1960s: the generation conflict. "Ma," of course, symbolizes the older generation, the establishment, tradition, and authority. To Ma, Dylan (representing Youth) tries to explain

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[176] Bringing it All Back Home, side II, band 1.

[177] See Gray, p. 119.

[178] Bringing it All Back Home, side II, band 2.

[179] Ibid., side II, band 3.

himself and the dehumanizing and alienating conditions which have forced him and his peers to reject everything "outside the Gates of Eden":

> Darkness at the break of noon
> Shadows even the silver spoon
> The handmade blade, the child's
> balloon
> Eclipses both the sun and moon
> To understand you know too soon
> There is no sense in trying.[180]

Face it, says Dylan, your world has gone crazy, the system is disintegrating. There is no point in trying to make sense of it all. The old rationalizations are merely "wasted words," from the "fool's gold mouthpiece," played on the "hollow horn." Such empty reasoning can now only be seen as a warning: "That he who is not busy being born / Is busy dying."[181] Only the inner experience of feeling and euphoria can lead you out of the alienation and pain, while the rationalism of traditional ideologies is the path of the dead.

Now Dylan's object was to shun the false prophets, the evil preachers and teachers and advertising executives, who push "fake morals" and materialistic values. For, in the end, they will only leave you "bent out of shape by society's pliers." The new generation wants to rise above all this. They will no longer "gargle in the rat race choir."[182] Intuitively, they seem to have come to

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[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid.

a collective understanding of the situation and the only way around it, which is the only way to survive:

> A question in your nerves is lit
> Yet you know there is no answer fit
> To satisfy, insure you not to quit
> To keep it in your mind and not fergit
> That it is not he or she or them or it
> That you belong to.[183]

Thus, the younger generation, after rejecting the morals of their middle-class parents, and with the aid of drugs and a more relaxed sensuality, were now attempting to break through the binds of their conditioning, so they might transcend the limitations of conventional reason, logic, and ideology. The objective is to allow the joy of the drug trip or the sexual encounter to take you beyond the chaos of the unreal world we are all a part of, but which we cannot accept. This is the only way to transcend the pain and alienation of not belonging.

However, the struggle to free yourself from the grip of "Ma," even with the help of the "Tambourine Man," can be very hard on the psyche. For insanity is the danger one faces in transcending reason:

> My eyes collide head-on with stuffed
> graveyards,
> False Gods, I scuff
> At pettiness which plays so rough
> Walk upside down inside handcuffs
> Kick my legs to crash it off

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[183] Ibid.

Say okay, I've had enough
What else can you show me?[184]

So the message is quite clear: the times have changed, the world is no longer as rational and orderly as the old would have us believe, and adapting to the changes can be trying. But "It's all right ma," Dylan concludes, it is not your fault, "it's life, and life only."[185]

Dylan brings the album to a dramatic conclusion with "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." Again, the love theme is metaphoric and the break-up is generational, the rejection by the young of the ways of the old. And since the young represent the path to the future, it is the old who are being asked to leave:

You must leave now, take what you
need, you think will last
But whatever you wish to keep, you
better grab it fast.
Yonder stands your orphan with his
gun,
Crying like a fire in the sun . . .[186]

There is something in the wind again: the anger of the repressed, alienated, and dissatisfied younger generation. Tradition and authority are breaking down: "All your seasick sailors, they are rowing home." Your old order has become very fragile: "The sky, too, is folding under you." So it is now time to "strike another

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[184]Ibid.

[185]Ibid.

[186]Ibid., side II, band 4.

match" and "start anew," because "it's all over now, baby blue."[187]

It is hard to exaggerate the profound significance of Bringing it All Back Home. It is truly a counter-cultural classic, bridging the great gap between the politics of class conflict and the ideological struggle for the cause of the poor and the economically oppressed, and the generational conflict and the radical anarchistic cult of youth. Moreover, this album also bridged the ever greater gap between the old folk-protest song tradition and revolutionary rock music.

Folk-Rock

In April, 1965, the Byrds, an innovative group of West Coast folk musicians looking for a way to revitalize their art form, released a soft-rock version of "Mr. Tambourine Man."[188] It was an instant success. The new sound was labeled "Folk-Rock," and Dylan embraced it enthusiastically. Folk-rock was to completely transform popular rock music, softening its mindless sexuality by injecting it with a more serious socially conscience flavor. In the long run, the overall effect was the (temporary) politicization of popular music.[189]

A good indicator of this politicization process can be seen in the new directions taken by the Beatles, the very embodiment of

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[187]Ibid.

[188]See Bud Scoppa, "The Byrds," in Jim Miller, ed., The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1976), pp. 214-15.

[189]See Paul Nelson, "Folk-Rock," ibid., pp. 216-21.

pop music during this period.[190] In 1964 they had led the British invasion of the American pop charts with such empty boy-girl concepts as "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "Please, Please Me," and "Love Me Do."[191] In 1965 they were still pursuing the boy-girl theme, but from a deeper, more thoughtful perspective: "Help! (I need somebody!)."[192] They even softened their sound in the folk-styled "Yesterday."[193] In 1966, they had moved beyond the boy-girl motif and into the social and political realm with "Nowhere Man" ("The world is at your command")[194] and "Eleanor Rigby": "All the lonely people, where do they all come from? / All the lonely people, where do they all belong?"[195] In 1967, they became surrealistic in "Strawberry Fields Forever"[196] and downright Dylanesque in "I Am the Walrus."[197] By 1968, the most popular rock group in the world was reaching in to the homes of middle America with:

> You say you want a revolution
> Well, you know
> We all want to change the world.[198]

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[190]See Greil Marcus, "The Beatles," ibid., pp. 172-81; also Hunter Davies, The Beatles: The Authorized Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); also Carl Belz, The Story of Rock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 126-57.

[191]Beatles Complete (New York: Warner Brothers, Inc., 1976), pp. 40-43, 9-11, 12-13.

[192]Ibid., pp. 158-59.

[193]Ibid., pp. 206-07.

[194]Ibid., pp. 184-85.

[195]Ibid., pp. 224-25.

[196]Ibid., pp. 300-301.

[197]Ibid., pp. 280-83.

[198]Ibid., pp. 383-85.

Although criticized as politically naive, this was clearly in the same political tradition as "Maggie's Farm" and "Mr. Tambourine Man":

> You say you'll change the constitution
> Well, you know
> We all want to change your head.
> You tell me it's the institution
> Well, you know
> You better free your mind instead.[199]

Thus, in a few short years, the Beatles had effectively merged radical politics with popular music. This would not have been possible without the contribution of Bob Dylan. But, equally important were the Byrds and later groups in America who flooded into the folk-rock market: The Fugs, The Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, The Flying Burrito Brothers, The New Riders of the Purple Sage, and the Eagles. These groups radicalized popular music in the late 1960s and early 1970s, pushing the popular culture of the West far to the left politically, capitalizing upon (and aggravating) the domestic unrest that was crippling the United States war effort in Vietnam, frustrating the American political leadership, and confusing the general structure of authority in the West.[200]

At the end of May, Dylan, riding the crest of the folk-rock movement, went into the studio to record his first single, "Like a

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[199] Ibid.

[200] See "Folk-Rock," in Miller, pp. 216-21.

Rolling Stone," a bitter song of revenge. Backed by a driving rock rhythm, Dylan repeatedly screams at the rejected party (perhaps a friend or lover, perhaps the bourgeois establishment and the older generation, or perhaps the old style radicalism):

> How does it feel?
> How does it feel?
> To be on your own,
> With no direction home,
> Like a complete unknown
> Like a rolling stone?[201]

Released in June, it soared up the charts, reaching the number one position by August. It was Dylan's first popular hit.[202]

Newport 1965

At the Newport Folk Festival in July, Dylan tried out his rock act within the hallowed halls of the folk music establishment.[203] Their reaction was predictably hostile as he walked out on stage, in British mod attire, carrying an electric solid-body guitar. If his intention was to shake up the folk establishment, he was dramatically successful. The legend is that Pete Seeger, the grandfather of folk, had tears in his eyes as he watched his young

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[201] Writings and Drawings, pp. 183-84.

[202] Rinzler, p. 40.

[203] See Scaduto, pp. 245-49; there are also recordings of Dylan's Newport 1965 appearance on various bootlegged albums, for example, Bob Dylan, Passed Over and Rolling Thunder (Phoenix Records 44770, 1979), side I.

protege and friends (The Paul Butterfield Blues Band) launch into the hard-driving, angry rock sound of "I ain't gonna work on Maggie's Farm no more."[204]

The crowd, taken aback, did not seem to know how to react. There was scattered applause, mixed with boos and jeers. Then an awkward and strained silence revealed the tension of the situation, as Dylan tuned on his guitar, obviously nervous, before breaking into "Like A Rolling Stone."[205] Relentlessly, he drove his sour, rebellious message deep into the heart of the topical-folk establishment:

> Once upon a time you dressed so fine
> You threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you?
> People'd call, say, "Beware doll, you're bound to fall"
> You thought they were all kiddin' you.[206]

While it may have left its mark, topical-folk music was finished as a popular cultural form.

Again, the crowd reacted with ambivalence. Some were outraged and insulted, but most were either dazzled or confused. Dylan tried one more rock number, a blues: "Well, I ride on a mailtrain, baby,

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[204]Another rumor is that Seeger was so agitated that he threatened to take an ax to the power cables; see David K. Dunaway, How Can I Keep From Singing: Pete Seeger (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), pp. 246-48.

[205]My comments come from listening (many times) to the version of Dylan at Newport recorded on Passed Over and Rolling Thunder. While not a complete transcript--Peter Yarrow's attempt to calm the crowd between Dylan's electric and acoustic sets, for example, has been edited out--it does preserve Dylan's complete performances along with the audience's immediate reaction.

[206]Ibid., side I, band 2.

can't buy a thrill . . ."[207] Within the train imagery, he seemed to be symbolically asking the younger members of the audience to come with him on the inevitable journey into the future:

> Don't the moon look good, mama,
> Shinin' through the trees?
> Don't the brakeman look good, mama,
> Bein' where he wants to be?[208]

Dylan was, of course, the brakeman and this was indeed where he wanted to be. But this was not to be confused as a statement of his intent to be the leader of such a journey, for he was just along for the ride:

> Well, I wanna be your lover, baby,
> I don't wanna be your boss.
> I can't help it
> If your train gets lost.[209]

But, in their scattered applause, few accepted his offer. He knew he had pushed them as far as he could safely, so Dylan and the Butterfield Band fled off stage.

But in just a few minutes he was back, alone, with his acoustic guitar. Predictably, the crowd reacted with enthusiasm this time. And, as he began to sing, folk-style, "You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last . . ." the crowd again

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[207] Ibid., side I, band 3.

[208] Ibid. (these lyrics are unique to this performance).

[209] Ibid.

broke into spontaneous applause.[210] The irony, of course, was that the message was the same ("It's All Over Now, Baby Blue"),[211] only the instrumentation had changed. The song was followed by an empassioned applause. Now that he had clearly won them back, he started to leave, but someone yelled out a request. So he stayed and played "Mr. Tambourine Man" to another roaring applause. Still, the message was essentially the same as the electric set: "Take me on a trip upon your magic swirling ship . . ."[212] If anything, this was even more radical in its advocacy of drug use as a political act. But no one seemed to notice; all that was at issue here was the type of guitar accompaniment.

In retrospect, it is easy to understand why Dylan turned his back on such a pretentious and hypocritical crowd. He would no longer follow the dictates of the topical-folk music (or any other) establishment. It was all over, they would now have to get along without him. And, while topical-folk music may have survived (though primarily at the grass roots level), the Newport Folk Festival has not.

Highway 61 Revisited

Highway 61 Revisited, Dylan's first all-rock album, was released in August, 1965.[213] He continued to pursue the same basic

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[210]"It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," ibid., side I, band 4.

[211]Ibid.

[212]Ibid., side I, band 5.

[213]Columbia CS 9189.

themes of Bringing it All Back Home. Highway 61 leads out of Dylan's home country in upper Minnesota, and thus "Highway 61 Revisited" had a connotation very similar to "Bringing it All Back Home." Again, the major themes are youthful alienation, defiance, anger, rebellion, and revenge. This album is perhaps even more powerfully revolutionary than Bringing it All Back Home. Musically, it is high intensity rock from beginning to end. Politically, it is existentially extremist, radically anarchistic, and cynically nihilistic. Highway 61 Revisited represents a high-water mark in Dylan's commercial, artistic and political career. This is perhaps his most well-known album. At the time it was considered the most important and revolutionary popular music album ever made.[214]

The album's liner notes are by Dylan and offer a general overview of what is to come. They form a long, symbol-filled, absurdist story, taking place on a "slow train," filled with cryptic characters: White Heap, Cream Judge, the Clown, the Inevitables, Savage Rose and Fixable, Autumn, Paul Sargent (a plainclothesman), and the Wipe-out Gang (who run the insanity factory). Into the midst of all this chaos and absurdity, Dylan introduces Lifelessness (the Great Enemy), who, we are told, is extremely fond of phrases like "go save the world!" and "involvement! that's the issue." This is Dylan's way of presenting the major

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[214]Scaduto, p. 225.

theme of this album: Death, the death of the self that results from social commitment and political involvement. The resulting aphorism, "involvement is lifelessness," captures the very essence of Bob Dylan III.[215]

But then he goes on to tell us--as explicitly as possible for Bob Dylan--that the subject matter of this new album is "the beautiful strangers, Vivaldi's green jacket & the holy slow train."[216] I take this to mean he will be discussing the alienated condition of youth ("beautiful strangers") in the springtime of their lives (from Vivaldi's "Four Seasons"), and the great journey (on the "holy slow train") out of the darkness of their alienated condition, beyond the lifelessness of the activist-ideological world of the past, and into the mysterious, experiential, sensuous, and transcendental world of the future.

The album begins with "Like a Rolling Stone," already a hit single, rapidly becoming a sixties classic. Perhaps more than any other popular song of this period, "Like a Rolling Stone" vividly captures the political climate of the cultural mood of the counter-culture. Coming from an old folk saying ("a rolling stone gathers no moss"), the symbolism employed here has a long cultural tradition.[217] The rolling stone has traditionally been the outcast

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[215] Writings and Drawings, p. 182.

[216] Ibid.

[217] While there is a similar saying in the Old Testament: ". . . he that rollest the stone, it will return upon him" (Proverbs 26:27, ca. 700 B.C.), the earliest reference to "a rolling stone

and the vagabond, the hobo and the free-spirited tramp, unencumbered by material possessions and social conventions. Joe Hill used the phrase in his "Last Will": "My kin don't need to fuss and moan / Moss does not cling to a rolling stone."[218] And, interestingly, the rolling stone symbol was very important to the 1960s counter-culture. First, there was the British rock band "The Rolling Stones," then there was Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," and, finally, the rock magazine, Rolling Stone.

Thus, in "Like a Rolling Stone," Dylan chose a very potent symbol and a symbol with a long cultural tradition. But, ironically, he used the symbol in reverse, as a way of expressing the great cultural transformation that was turning the established into the outsider, alienating the traditional source of the alienation. In the name of the rising cult of Youth, Dylan was saying to the older generation, the traditionalists and the purists, and the established authorities: "How does it feel?" now that you are the outsider, the unknown, and the homeless, on your own, "Like a rolling stone."[219]

Next, Dylan offers the "Tombstone Blues" as a portrait of Lifelessness.[220] Here, for the first time, he fully employs the

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gathers no moss" is from Pubilius Syrus, by Pliny, in his Natural History, 35, sec. 199, from the first century B.C.; see John Bartlett, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations (24th ed.; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), p. 126.

[218] I.W.W. Songs (34th ed.; Chicago: IWW, 1974), p. 35.

[219] Highway 61 Revisited, side I, band 1.

[220] Ibid., side I, band 2.

metaphor of death. It is a way of life, a community, and a sensibility that is dying. The strange characters who make up this mythical family are locked into the ugliness and hatred of their life situation. The imagery is generally dark, chaotic, and negative. Life is hard and cold and very dissatisfying:

> Mama's in the factory
> She ain't got no shoes
> Daddy's in the alley
> He's lookin' for food
> I'm in the kitchen
> With the tombstone blues.[221]

While this may be interpreted on many levels, it translates well as a condemnation of the community of the folk purists and the orthodox old left radicalism of the topical song tradition. For this is the same family-community as "Maggie's Farm" and it is the home of the socially involved and committed activists, it is the "Movement." And Dylan characterizes this as a chaotic place, another meaningless rat-race, where the political actor is lost in a charade, fooled into believing that the world may be changed for the better. This is the realm of Lifelessness and it now gives Dylan the "Tombstone Blues." And yet he hates to see old friends trapped in such an unreal world, beside-themselves, enveloped in a false-consciousness. He would like to help:

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[221]Ibid.

> I wish I could write you a melody so plain
> That it could hold you dear lady from going insane
> That could ease you and cool you and cease the pain
> Of your useless and pointless knowledge.[222]

He would like to show them the light, the path beyond knowledge, to the platform where they are waiting for "the holy slow train."

Dylan follows the "Tombstone Blues" with his train song from Newport. Now entitled "It Takes a lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry," and again utilizing a familiar and powerful symbol,[223] the words have been polished up some, but it is still the song of the slow train. Dylan is still the brakeman, pointing the direction, but refusing the lead the way.

Then, in "The Ballad of the Thin Man," Dylan pursues a subject that is thematically similar to "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and "Like a Rolling Stone."[224] It is a long symbolist poem about Mr. Jones (the Thin Man), who is the stereotypical bourgeois authoritarian, establishment, organizational man. He is the ugly American, Whiteman, the overbearing parent, teacher, policeman, or judge. Dylan places Mr. Jones in a series of awkward, anxiety-producing situations that confuse and bewilder him. This is all very alienating and threatening to the Thin Man. It is Dylan's way of criticizing the rigidity of the older generation, with their pretentious literate, rational, civilized values. Dylan exposes Mr. Jones to the experiential, sensuous, chaotic, and barbaric

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[222]Ibid.

[223]Ibid., side I, band 3.

[224]Ibid., side I, band 5.

values of the young. Repeatedly, Dylan, as Youth, sarcastically asks poor Mr. Jones:

> And you know something's happening here
> And you don't know what it is
> Do you, Mr. Jones?[225]

And in "Queen Jane Approximately," Dylan uses the love metaphor again to attack the old ways.[226] This song could be directed at Joan Baez or the folk establishment and the old left. The message is consistent with "Maggie's Farm," "On the Road Again," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "Like a Rolling Stone," and "Tombstone Blues." To his lover, Dylan is saying, when you have tired of the old, worn out, traditional ways, ". . . won't you come see me, Queen Jane?"[227]

This is followed by "Highway 61 Revisited," the title song, which is a caustic comment on middle America.[228] Taken from the highway that runs North to South, from Canada, past Dylan's home, all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, through the very heart of America. It is an absurdist flavored glimpse of the circus parade of American life as it passes metaphorically down Highway 61:

> Now the rovin' gambler he was very bored,
> He was tryin' to create a next world war.
> He found a promoter who nearly fell off the floor,

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[225]Ibid.

[226]Ibid., side II, band 1.

[227]Ibid.

[228]Ibid., side II, band 2.

He said "I never engaged in this kind of thing before,
But yes I think it can be very easily done.
We'll just put some bleachers out in the sun
And have it out on Highway 61."[229]

Then Dylan presents "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," another drug song: "When you're lost in the rain* in Juarez and it's Eastertime too . . ."[230] But, interestingly, this is not the pleasant joy-ride with the Tambourine Man. Instead, this is the bad trip, the long, exhausting journey, leading only down:

I cannot move
My fingers are all in a knot
I don't have the strength
To get up and take another shot
And my best friend, my doctor
Won't even say what it is I've got.[231]

Dylan is feeling very small (like Tom Thumb) and is coming to the end of the line: "I'm going back to New York City, I do believe I've had enough."[232]

Dylan concludes the album with "Desolation Row,"[233] another look at the lifelessness of "Maggie's Farm" and "Highway 61." Again, there is the imagery of chaos and cryptic, but potently symbolic, characters (Cinderella, Bette Davis, Cain and Abel, the hunchback of Notre Dame, the Good Samaritan, Ophelia, Einstein, Cassanova,

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[229] Ibid.

[230] Ibid, side II, band 3.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., side II, band 4.

*"Rain" is street slang for heroin, and connotes the state of being "high" generally.

etc.). And again, the mood is dark and enigmatic, vaguely constructed symbolic visions of a distorted, confused world where all the lifeless faces are going around shouting "Which side are you on?" It is a frightening maze of hurried, blurred half-images, representing the ugly side of modern life:

> Now at midnight all the agents
> And the superhuman crew
> Come out and round up everyone
> That knows more than they do
> Then they bring them to the factory
> Where the heart-attack machine
> Is strapped across their shoulders
> And then the kerosene
> Is brought down from the castles
> By insurance men who go
> Check to see that nobody is escaping
> To Desolation Row.[234]

In the most general sense, Desolation Row is society and the trap of involvement, where the force of the Other annhilites the self.

Indeed, this is the major preoccupation of Bob Dylan III, the rebellious, paranoid, anti-authority, anti-social "angry young man," who came to represent an angry generation rejecting everything their parents held dear, searching for a new way to live and interrelate, a new level of awareness and openness, a new set of values, and a new world.

Superstardom

By the end of the summer of 1965, Bob Dylan was a superstar. He had fulfilled his life-long dream of gaining fame greater than

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[234] Ibid.

Elvis Presley.[235] Only the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were capable of causing more public excitement than Dylan. But the fame was overwhelming and destructive, and Bob Dylan would soon retreat from it. Before long, his popularity would wane. And, although he would remain a major popular cultural figure, and would even periodically shine with brilliance and generate short bursts of enthusiasm, excitement, and record sales, he would never again so dominate Western pop culture as in 1965-66.[236]

On the night of August 27, 1965, 14,000 eager fans filled the Forest Hills outdoor stadium in New York City to capacity, anxious with the excitement of what was about to happen: Bob Dylan was changing masks.[237] Careful as always, and with the memory of Newport fresh in his mind, he chose to divide the concert into acoustic and electric sets. Thus, in one evening, this crowd of young people was going to be led across the great cultural gap between the old mechanical, rational, ideological world of the past, into the electronic, existential, sensuous world of the future.

He began with just his acoustic guitar, but playing his new, non-folk material--"Tambourine Man," "It's Alright Ma," "The Chimes of Freedom," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "Desolation Row." He

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[235]Scaduto, p. 129.

[236]See Gray, p. 12.

[237]See Kramer, pp. 171-77; 179-212 (photos).

was carefully preparing the crowd for what was coming, but within a familiar, non-threatening (acoustic) setting. He ended his first set to thunderous applause.[238]

When he returned after the intermission with his electric guitar and rock back-up band, there were scattered boos and some shouts of disapproval. But quickly the music roared back and silenced the audience. Before the night was over the jeering had stopped and the crowd was listening with respect. The following month, Dylan gave another concert at New York's Carnegie Hall, using the Forest Hills' format. By now the crowd reaction was decidedly positive.[239] The tide had changed. Bob Dylan had almost single-handedly brought about the marriage of the traditionally left-wing urban folk music culture with the traditionally apolitical teen-pop music culture. The effect was revolutionary. The "bubble-gum," "teeny-bop" pop music was radicalized, and the urbane, intellectual, left-wing folk music was popularized. The popular culture of the West was creatively alive with excitement. And young Bob Dylan (24 years old) was riding the crest of it all!

World Tour

On November 22, 1965, Dylan was secretly wed to Sara Lowndes.[240] He spent most of the first year of their marriage on a grueling world tour. The first phase took him through Canada and

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[238]Ibid.

[239]Ibid.

[240]Scaduto, p. 266.

down the American West Coast in the last months of 1965. Then, early in 1966, he and his entourage flew to Nashville to record an outpouring of new material to be released in May as the double album package Blond on Blond.[241]

Blond on Blond would be the last album of Dylan's punk phase. It was an intensely personal, almost self-indulgent album. Most of the songs were views of romantic entanglements seen from a variety of perspectives: "I'm Pledging My Time (To You),"[242] "(Sooner or Later) One of Us Must Know (I really did try to get close to you),"[243] "I Want You (Sooo Bad),"[244] "Most Likely You'll Go Your Way (And I'll go Mine),"[245] "Fourth Time Around,"[246] etc. Some carried deeper and metaphoric messages: "Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again"[247] and "Just Like a Woman,"[248] creating images similar to "Like a Rolling Stone" or "It's Alright Ma." There were also some thinly disguised tributes to the two important women in his life during the period: Sara, his wife ("Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands"),[249] and Joan Baez, whom he left for Sara ("Visions of Johanna").[250]

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[241] Columbia C2S 841, released May, 1966.

[242] Ibid., side I, band 2.

[243] Ibid., side I, band 4.

[244] Ibid., side I, band 4.

[245] Ibid., Side III, band 1.

[246] Ibid., side III, band 5.

[247] Ibid., side II, band 2.

[248] Ibid., side II, band 4.

[249] Ibid., side IV.

[250] Ibid., side I, band 3.

But, all in all, this is a shallow album, politically, in comparison to Bringing it All Back Home or Highway 61 Revisited, and less thematically coherent.[251] Still, it is a further exploration of the same basic themes of personal freedom, the pain of alienation, and the pleasures of drugs and sensuality. Perhaps the most significant philosophical track on the album is "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35 (Everybody Must Get Stoned)," which Dylan uses to open the album, and to set the mood.[252] Skillfully utilizing a double entendre, he again plays with the symbol "stone" in a thinly disguised autobiographical sketch:

> They'll stone ya when you're at the breakfast table
> They'll stone ya when you are young and able.
> They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to make a buck.
> They'll stone ya and then they'll say, "Good luck."
> But I would not feel so all alone.
> Everybody must get stoned.[253]

Perhaps this captures the very essence of Dylan's views of this period. The message is to be your self, even in the face of criticism. This existential preoccupation with self--the do-your-own-thing syndrome--filtered down through the youth culture of this period to produce the flower children, the hippies and the yippies,

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[251] See Rinzler, pp. 51-55.

[252] Blond on Blond, side I, band 1; named for the two women, aged 12 and 35, who came in to the studio during the recording session to get out of the rain.

[253] Ibid.

student riots, LSD experimentation, yoga, meditation, communalism, free love, and the whole counter-culture package.[254]

The objective was to get beyond, or at least to see past, the trap of society, which only destroyed the natural inner self. Thus, the new sensibility abhorred material possessions, de-emphasized wealth and glamor, and opted for more natural, simple styles of dress and modes of being. And because of these experimental life styles, many young people, including Dylan, were often cruelly and severely ostracized by the society at large, for their long hair and strange apparel and mannerisms.[255] They began to experience, as a class, the pain of alienation, and thus came to understand what it was like to be outlaws and outcasts, stoned by society. They responded with glib laughter and flippant attitudes. They turned to drugs--marijuana, LSD, mescaline, amphetamines, tranquilizers--to free them from the trap of their conditioning and the hypocrisy of their elders.[256] They turned apathetic and inward, they got stoned.

By March, before the release of Blond on Blond, Dylan was back on tour. In April, he went to Honolulu, then to Australia, then on

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[254]See Diggins, pp. 160-62.

[255]For an unparalleled analysis of youth alienation in the sixties, see Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

[256]See Rex Weiner and Deanne Stillman, Woodstock Census: The Nationwide Survey of the Sixties Generation (New York: Viking Press, 1979), Chap. 4, "Drugs."

to Stockholm, Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, Ireland, England, Wales, and Scotland. It was a physically and mentally draining experience for Dylan. He was using amphetamines to stay awake and to keep the creative juices flowing. But things were moving so fast that he was rapidly approaching a breaking point.[257] Bob Dylan was riding the crest of a great cultural and social revolution that was flowering within the popular culture of the West and he was creating much of the lore of the emerging nation of Woodstock. He was becoming a god-like cult figure. The fame came suddenly and was nearly overwhelming. His pace of life had become so fast that perhaps it was inevitable that catastrophe would strike. And, on July 29, 1966, it happened. Dylan had a near-fatal crash on his Triumph 500 motorcycle near his home in Woodstock, New York. He was hospitalized with a concussion and several cracked vertebra. The accident forced him to remain in bed for over a month and then to begin a slow, painful recovery, while rumors spread that he was dead or had become a brain-damaged vegetable.[258] But this also gave him plenty of time to rest and to rethink his image and, in the long run, to shed the skin of his paranoid punk image and to begin the search for a new Bob Dylan.

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[257]Scaduto, pp. 266-77.

[258]Ibid., pp. 282-85.

Dylan IV: Moderate Man (1968-70)

On October 3, 1967, while Bob Dylan was recuperating in his upstate New York hideaway, Woody Guthrie, weighing less than 100 pounds, his jerking reduced to a slow, constant murmer, finally died. As soon as he got word of Guthrie's passing, Dylan agreed to perform at a memorial concert to be held in January.[259] Guthrie's death offered Dylan the opportunity for rebirth.

John Wesley Harding

Later that October, Dylan came out of his 15 months of seclusion, making two short trips down to Nashville, to record a new album with country musicians. The new album, John Wesley Harding, was released early in January, 1968.[260] It was a beautifully simple album musically. Gone was the grinding hard-rock sound. A new mellow, country-style, three-piece combo was backing a soft-voiced, mature balladeer, Bob Dylan.

But John Wesley Harding came at a time when the Beatles, at the top of their form, had just caused a sensation with Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band,[261] with its dazzlingly sophisticated electronically over-dubbed sound, its thematic coherency, and its

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[259]Klein, p. 444; see also Lillian Roxon, "The Guthrie Concert," McGregor, pp. 210-17.

[260]Columbia PC 9604, 1968.

[261]Capital/EMI SMAS 2653, 1967.

classic psychedelic counter-cultural themes ("Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," "She's Leaving Home," "Within You Without You," "With a Little Help From my Friends . . ."); innovatively pushing revolutionary rock to its very limits. And Bob Dylan, who, in many ways, had set this whole process in motion, was now apparently retreating into the safer territory of country-western music. To many at the time, this was considered the end of Bob Dylan.[262]

But there was plenty of subtlety and artistry, and a great deal of social and political symbolism on John Wesley Harding. Dylan had, once again, gone against popular trends (psychedelic electronics) and was pointing in a new direction, anticipating the country-western revival. Dylan admitted that he could not keep pace with the high technology approach of the Beatles, and he no longer wished to play radical politics with his music, but it was not the end of the Dylan phenomenon.[263] By the end of the decade, the Beatles had disbanded, and during the 1970s country music would seriously challenge rock's hold on the popular music culture in the West.[264] And Bob Dylan was one of the pioneers of this shift toward Nashville.

In the prose parable, "The Three Kings," on the album cover, there are hints of Dylan's new direction.[265] After the visit of the

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[262]Scaduto, pp. 285-86.

[263]Ibid.

[264]See Kaye Northcott, "The Life and Death of the Cosmic Cowboy," Mother Jones, 6, No. 5 (June, 1981), 14-21, 48.

[265]Writings and Drawings, pp. 255-56.

the three kings, who had come to ask Frank (a symbol of Christ and Dylan's alter ego) about Dylan's new album, Vera (Frank's wife) asked Frank: "Why didn't you just tell them that you were a moderate man and leave it at that . . ."[266] The latest Dylan is indeed a moderate man. He has left existential egoism behind him and has returned to the people and to altruism. Dylan's John Wesley Harding was a friend of the poor and "was always known to lend a helping hand."[267]

In fact, Dylan seems to be repenting and asking for forgiveness. In a rather overt reference to the Tom Paine Awards confrontation, Dylan, in "As I went out One Morning (To Breathe the Air Around Tom Paine's),[268] confesses that he has gone astray, and that, in his weakness, he has given in to the temptress of the youth revolution. And now, in "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," he has seen a vision of his implication in the death of a martyr.[269] Could this be another Song to Woody? Was this vision of the martyr "in the utmost misery" inspired by the death of Guthrie? If so, Dylan now chooses to cloak his martyr in the image of the great Christian philosopher of the early middle ages. Thus, the two basic threads of Guthrie's folksy idealism and Dylan's Judeo-Christian ethics seem to once again converge in John Wesley Harding, after the self-destructive, existential binge of his punk rock phase.

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[266] Ibid.

[267] John Wesley Harding, side I, band 1.

[268] Ibid., side I, band 2.

[269] Ibid., side I, band 3.

Rinzler points out the similarities between Dylan's lyrics, in "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," and those of Alfred Hayes in "Joe Hill."[270] Both melodies and opening lyrics do bear striking similarities. Just compare Dylan's "I dreamed I saw St. Augustine, alive as you or me," with Hayes' "I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night, alive as you or me," and the resemblance cannot be doubted. This seems to support the argument that Dylan is now repenting for his part in the death of the Joe Hill tradition, the cult of Woody Guthrie, and the positive social values that have adhered to them. He is now retreating from chaos, and is sorry for the damage he has done.[271]

While it would be impossible to seriously argue that John Wesley Harding represents Dylan's return to the Guthrie fold, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the album was at least partially inspired by the death of Woody Guthrie.[272] And while not exactly a return to "folk" music, there is clearly a conscious attempt to recapture the acoustic simplicity of traditional American folk-styles: long narrative ballads (Dylan, like Guthrie, has always been very effective as a balladeer), songs of outlaw heroes, hoboes, drifters, fair damsels, jokers, and thieves. However, Dylan uses these traditional folk symbols and images to achieve poetic effects that go far beyond the folk genre. John Wesley Harding is

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[270]Rinzler, p. 59.

[271]See Gray, pp. 32, 216-17.

[272]See Jon Landau, "John Wesley Harding," in McGregor, p. 264.

a significant departure from sour punk rock and youthful anarchy and rebellion, but it is by no means a return to folk-protest. The sound is "country," and not "folk," and the message is decidedly apolitical.

Instead of being political, the message of John Wesley Harding is personal and religious. It is Dylan's reaffirmation of faith. Scaduto refers to it as Dylan's version of the Bible. The songs take the form of parables which recount Dylan's fall from grace and his rebirth, songs of repentance, salvation, faith, and hope.[273] To the extent to which he touches upon political ideas, he is merely reaffirming the ideals of Christian charity and brotherhood.

Turning against involvement, during the punk phase, had only led to alienation, despair, and loneliness. He now sees that he was only a "Lonesome Hobo" then, without family or friends.[274] He had not trusted his neighbor and was therefore doomed to "wander off in shame."[275] He now pities those "poor immigrants," like the punk Dylan, whose "visions in the final end must shatter like the glass."[276] He now realizes that he was a "Wicked Messenger" then--a false prophet.[277] But now he has been confronted by those who have

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[273]See Scaduto, pp. 286-87.

[274]John Wesley Harding, "I Am a Lonesome Hobo," side II, band 2.

[275]Ibid.

[276]Ibid., "I Pity the Poor Immigrant," side II, band 3.

[277]Ibid., "The Wicked Messenger," side II, band 4.

opened his heart, saying: "If you can not bring good news, then don't bring any."[278]

In the moral to "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest," Dylan has again come to accept his responsibility to his fellow man, saying: "If you see your neighbor carryin' somethin', help him with his load."[279] He also now realizes he has a responsibility to follow the right path, for one should never be where one does not belong, and one must be careful not to mistake Paradise for the bordello of material success (in Dylan's case, the bordello of superstardom).[280] The new Bob Dylan is even prepared to compromise with the dreaded landlord, the very symbol of authority. Now that he is where he belongs, Dylan is not about to move "to no other place." All he asks of the Establishment now is: "If you don't underestimate me, I won't underestimate you."[281]

And in "All Along the Watchtower," taking his imagery and theme directly from the Bible, the new reborn Dylan has moved beyond the position that "life is but a joke."[282] He has "been through all that," and no longer wishes to talk falsely or to follow a false

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[278]Ibid.

[279]Ibid., side I, band 5.

[280]Ibid.; see Scaduto, p. 291.

[281]Ibid., side II, band 1.

[282]Ibid., side I, band 3; it is from Isaiah 21, see Herdman, p. 102.

prophet. For "Two riders" are approaching, the winds are howling, and the apocalypse is at hand.[283] It is time for some soul-searching, time to embrace your fellow man, and make your peace with God.

While he had not necessarily returned to the Guthrie fold, he was clearly back in the mind games arena, offering a new kind of advice, enlightening his public with more visions and dreams, full of hidden meanings and moralisms. Dylan had returned to the mind guerilla. John Wesley Harding was a great commercial and artistic success. Within a month of its release, it was number 2 on Billboard's LP charts, eclipsing the Rolling Stones' Their Satanic Majesties Request, and posing a serious threat to the front-running Beatles' Sgt. Pepper.[284] It remains among his greatest popular and aesthetic achievements. But it also marks another crucial turning point for Dylan, he is doing the mind guerilla again, but to a square dance tune, shuffling across the floor of a country church, shaking with the spirit.

The Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert

On January 20, 1968, at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert, Dylan gave the public its first view of his new self. It was his first public appearance since the accident 17 months earlier. When the news of Dylan's appearance got out, ticket sales went out of

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[283]Ibid.

[284]Hubert Saal, "Dylan is Back," McGregor, p. 243.

sight. Prices quadrupled on the black market. It was going to be a truly historic event.[285]

At first it seemed as if Dylan was going to steal the show. But, as the concert opened, Dylan's quiet, unobtrusive posture was reserved and respectful, shoulder-to-shoulder with the folk aristocracy. There was Pete Seeger, Guthrie's pal; Arlo Guthrie, his son; Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Guthrie's look-alike, sing-alike double; Tom Paxton, one of many pre-Dylan heir-apparents; and new-comers Judy Collins, Odetta and Richie Havens. It was awhile before the audience even noticed Dylan.[286]

And although Dylan eventually made his presence felt in a series of rockabilly performances of some well chosen Guthrie standards--"Dear Mrs. Roosevelt," "Grand Coulee Dam," and "I Ain't Got no Home"--he was clearly there only to pay tribute to his fallen hero. There was much less ego presence and less arrogance. Dylan was all smiles, humbleness, and respect. The concert was a great and moving tribute to Woody Guthrie.[287]

A Few More Protests

The wind had been taken out of Bob Dylan's "tattooed" sails. Perhaps it was the accident, or perhaps he had already lost his nerve and used the accident as a cover. But, for whatever the

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[285]Lillian Roxon, "The Guthrie Concert," McGregor, pp. 210-17.

[286]Ibid.

[287]Ibid.

reasons, Bob Dylan backed away from the jarring pace of the star syndrome and the maniacal competition for the latest hit single and the newest musical trend.[288] Instead, he settled into the quiet seclusion of his family life.

He did not produce another album until the April, 1969 release of Nashville Skyline, which not only confirmed his country-western direction but also his moderate conservative political leanings.[289] The album began with Dylan harmonizing with Johnny Cash on "Girl From the North Country."[290] Nashville Skyline outraged Dylan's political critics, but it clearly helped his career.[291] Its happy songs of love ("Tonight I'bb Be Staying Here With You") and passion (Lay, Lady, Lay") took Dylan deep into the mainstream of America's popular culture, reaching into the vast blue-collar, Bible-belt sector. But, of course, in the process he was leaving radical politics farther and farther behind.[292]

Then, in 1970, Dylan's career reached an all-time low with the release of Self-Portrait, which featured Dylan crooning old pop standards ("Blue Moon") and folk songs ("Copper Kettle," "Gotta

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[288]Scaduto, pp. 256-60.

[289]Columbia KCS 9825.

[290]Ibid., side I, band 1.

[291]See Hubert Saal, "Dylan's Country Pie," McGregor, pp. 295-97.

[292]See Tom Smucker, "Bob Dylan Meets the Revolution," ibid., pp. 299-305.

Travel On").[293] There were a few original songs, some old ("Like a Rolling Stone," from the August, 1969 Isle of Wight Concert), some new ("Quin the Eskimo"), but mostly poorly arranged and badly performed.

The critics had a field day with Self-Portrait. Dylan was again accused of selling out to commercial interests, of losing his creative talents, and of deliberately alienating his followers. There were even public calls for a Bob Dylan boycott.[294] In the midst of all this, Dylan fed the fires by actually showing up at a Princeton University ceremony to receive an honorary doctorate in music.[295] Bob Dylan's public image and popularity began to suffer greatly.

Then, in June, 1971, as if responding to the overwhelming popular pressure to conform to his old image as a political radical, Dylan released a protest single, "George Jackson," about the brutal murder, by prison guards, of the imprisoned Black Panther leader: "Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down / Lord, Lord, they laid him in the ground."[296] However, it is more likely that the song was inspired by a genuine outpouring of feeling for an old friend. His message was ultimately quite outside of the scope of the

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[293]Columbia C2X 30050.

[294]McGregor, p. 359.

[295]Rinzler, p. 67.

[296]Ibid., p. 78; also Broadside, 116 (November-December, 1971), n.p.

traditional left, far more pessimistic, nihilistic, and despondent:

> Sometimes I think this whole world
> Is one big prison yard.
> Some of us our prisoners,
> Some of us our guards.[297]

The following August, Dylan appeared at ex-Beatle George Harrison's benefit concert for the refugees of the fighting in Bangla Desh, performing acoustically, backed by Harrison's lead guitar and Leon Russell on bass. He sang in a familiar voice a long string of his older protest material: "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall," "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It takes a Train to Cry," "Blowin' in the Wind," "Mr. Tambourine Man," and "Just Like a Woman."[298] This nostalgic journey into the past filled the politicos with the hope Dylan would return to the protest fold.

Dylan, of course, had not returned to the radical fold, but he had returned to the pop culture mainstream, where he remained throughout the 1970s. However, in 1975, he did return, briefly, to the protest idiom with the single "Hurricane," about the injustice of the incarceration of boxer Ruben ("Hurricane") Carter.[299] And, in spite of Dylan's rather lame radicalism (". . . he could have been the champion of the world . . ."[300]), Carter was eventually released,

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[297] Ibid.

[298] George Harrison and Phil Spector, producers, The Concert for Bangla Desh (Apple Records, 1971).

[299] Broadside, 129 (July-December, 1975), 1-4.

[300] Ibid.

largely due to Dylan's involvement.[301] However, Dylan spent most of the 1970s sharing his own personal struggles: concentrating on the ups (New Morning, 10/70)[302] and the downs (Blood on the Tracks, 1/75)[303] of marriage; and the passion (Desire, 12/75)[304] and freedom (Street Legal, 1978)[305] of divorce. Finally, late in 1979, Dylan released Slow Train Coming,[306] once again taking the public by surprise and again losing many followers and gaining many more, by coming out of the born-again closet. His most recent album to date, Sayed (1980),[307] confirms Dylan's latest rebirth. Perhaps this will be the last Dylan, the man behind all those masks, but if the past is a reliable indicator, it is surely just another mask.

Political radicals, of both the old and new left, have been very disillusioned by Dylan's refusal to return to politics and deeply shocked by his religious conversion. Many felt he had sold out, embraced the enemy and joined the establishment. There feelings were neatly summed up in a slogan, coined evidently by the fanatical Dylanologist A. J. Weberman, who has perhaps been Dylan's most outspoken critic.[308] Weberman's anti-Dylan slogan wound up on

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[301] See Shepard, p. 49.

[302] Columbia KC 30290.

[303] Columbia PC 33235

[304] Columbia PC 33893

[305] Columbia JC 35453

[306] Columbia FC 36120

[307] Columbia FC 36553

[308] See A. J. Weberman

[308] See A. J. Weberman, "Dylan Meets Weberman," McGregor, pp. 378-88.

campaign-style buttons, dramatizing the slogan which plays on Dylan's tendency to don the mask. I have seen newsphotos of John Lennon wearing such a button in the early 1970s, when the anti-Dylan campaign was at its height. The button reads simply: FREE BOB DYLAN.[309]

The Holy Slow Train

The Free Bob Dylan Campaign assumed that the real Bob Dylan was the protest poet turned revolutionary rocker, the political inspiration and spiritual leader of the counter-culture. But the Free Bob Dylan Campaign never really understood what their hero had been saying. Bob Dylan had never abandoned the ideology of revolution, because he had never embraced it. He had explicitly stated that the answers were not to be found in rational dialogues in books or discussion groups, for the answers were "blowing in the wind." Dylan was never an ideologue, and always a mystic. Likewise, Dylan had never abandoned the leadership of the movement, even in the sense of the cultural leader and prophet of the counter-culture, because he had never accepted it. Again, he had been quite explicit on this point. When he said "Don't follow leaders," this applied to himself as well as the establishment authorities, because, as he had also

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[309] A Tribute to John Lennon and the Beatles, from the editors of Us magazine (New York: Concentric Enterprises, Inc., 1980), p. 27.

written, "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows."[310]

Through all the various masks he may have donned, he had abandoned nothing and changed very little. Most of his changes were mere theatrics. He had dramatically switched from acoustic to electric, from folk to rock and then to country, to keep the attention of his audience, to give them a show. But the underlying message, the means of expressing it, and the images, symbols, and metaphors employed had changed very little.

Throughout his career, Bob Dylan has remained true and consistent to two fundamental themes. First, the Guthrie cult of the hobo-rambler, consistently utilizing the metaphor of the railroad and the highway, to express his worship of freedom. And secondly, an eclectic brand of Christian mysticism, where social and political concerns are continually expressed in Biblical imagery and moral mind games, with an overriding eschatological fascination for the subjects of death and dying, salvation and Judgement. The real Bob Dylan is a Christianized hobo, riding the holy slow train, on a journey to Glory.

These interpenetrating themes are evident from the very beginning in Bob Dylan's "Freight Train Blues," "Highway 51," "Gospel Plow," and "See That My Grave is Kept Clean." In the protest phase this trend continues. For Broadside he wrote songs

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[310]From "Subterranean Homesick Blues," see Writings and Drawings, p. 160.

like "Only a Hobo," "This Train A-Travelin'," "Talkin' Devil," and "Dreadful Day." The concern for the cult of the hobo can be seen in the title symbolism of Dylan's second album, Freewheelin'. Much of his protest imagery takes place on the road. "Hard Rain" is the tale of a traveller ("Where have you been my blue-eyed son?"), and in "The Times They Are A-Changin'," the "old road" is rapidly aging. Dylan's protest songs are also filled with moral overtones and Biblical symbolism. Jesus condemns the war mongers in "Master's of War," and in "With God on Our Side" Dylan's passivism finally comes down to "If God is on our side he'll stop the next war."[311] And finally, the eschatological references in Dylan's protest songs are well known: a "Hard Rain" is about to fall, there is a "Dreadful Day" ahead, when we will all suffer from the "World War III Blues."

The punk Dylan continued to utilize the hobo motif, and took the romanticization of freedom to even greater lengths. Included among these absurdist poetics and anarchic revelations are a great deal of hobo imagery and Biblical symbolism. The punk Dylan rides the mail train listening for the "Chimes of Freedom," heading for the "Gates of Eden," on the run from the lifelessness of "Desolation Row." In his reckless quest for freedom, he abandons the pretentious protest world of "Maggie's Farm" and heads on down "Highway 61." Throughout his travels, the punk Dylan encounters such potently

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[311]Ibid., p. 87.

symbolic characters as Abraham, Cain and Abel, the Good Samaritan, Delilah, and John the Baptist.

In light of all this, John Wesley Harding is not a significant departure from the twin themes of hoboism and Christianity. The imagery of "The Drifter's Escape," the "Lonesome Hobo," and the "Poor Immigrant" are by now vintage Dylan. So too are the biblical symbolism of "All Along the Watchtower" and the Christian morality of "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest."

Both of these themes continued throughout the 1970s, in his epoch-making album Blood on the Tracks, and his first major concert album Before the Flood. Thus, his supposedly abrupt conversion to Christianity in Slow Train Comin' (1979) was anything but abrupt. And the fact that he chose to set this religious album within the hobo metaphor of the slow train is an indication of the continuity of Dylan's latest change.

In his dedication of the 1973 compilation of his songs and poems, Writings and Drawings, Dylan sums up his influences and the purpose of his art, in a prose style reminiscent of Woody Guthrie, with predictable hints of King James:

> Dedicated to the rough riders, ghost poets,
> low-down rounders, sweet lovers,
> desperate characters,
> sad-eyed drifters and rainbow angels--
> those high on life from all ends of
> the wild blue yonder . . .
>
> To the magnificent Woody Guthrie . . .
> who sparked it off

and to the great wondrous
melodious spirit
which covereth the oneness
of us all . . .[312]

Bob Dylan's politics, such as they are, involve the romanticization of freedom, a concern for the social outcast, and the moral condemnation of the alienated conditions of life in the nuclear age, sustained by images of hoboes, outlaws, prophets, and saints on a slow train bound for Glory.

And so it is that, in spite of all his changes, Bob Dylan has in fact continued the tradition of Woody Guthrie, but in a de-politicized form. Both rode the slow train. Both were bound for Glory. However, their differences hinge on the connotation of the word "glory." Guthrie tended to have a secular concept in mind. His destination was the One Big Union. But, of course, it must be granted that Guthrie's unionism did have a religious component (remember "Jesus Christ" and "Union's My Religion?"), but in most of his songs Woody kept this religiosity under control and sub-ordinate to his syndicalist fantasies. Dylan, on the other hand, played the mystic from beginning to end. The reference to the "oneness" in the dedication to Writings and Drawings is one of the few explicit utopian references in Dylan's writings, and this reference is decidedly religious. But Dylan was rarely this straightforward. More often--as in "The Chimes of Freedom," "Mr.

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[312]Ibid.; dedication page (no page number).

Tambourine Man," and "The Gates of Eden"--his utopianism is dripping with mystical vagueness. But in the end (on Slow Train Coming), Dylan's conception of "glory" comes down to the Christian's conception of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus the differences between Guthrie and Dylan center on the role each gives to religion. Guthrie was by far the most politically radical, and perhaps it was his sensitivity to the atheistic aspects of the left-wing Marxist-based ideologies of his generation that kept his religiosity under control. But Dylan's sensitivities to his generation's dionysian qualities probably had the opposite effect. The cult of drugs and sex had abandoned the rationalism of Marxian ideologies and sought meaning in transcendental mysticism, which allowed Dylan's eclectic religiosity to surface.

Dylan's major contributions, therefore, to the social protest tradition, and the places where he parts company with Woody Guthrie, are twofold. First, more than any other protest writer before him, Dylan took the protest genre into the realm of serious art, breaking the confines of the Guthriesque "folk" sound along the way. Secondly, Dylan took his protest art farther into the mainstream of Western popular culture than anyone at the Pageant of Patterson or the John Steinbeck Committee for Agricultural Workers Benefit could have ever imagined. But, in the process, the music's original political contents were completely emptied, or at least significantly diluted. And yet, the potion that filled the new cup of protest was nevertheless a powerful revolutionary brew.

The cult that formed around Bob Dylan, especially the pre-1968 Bob Dylan, was indeed a revolutionary cult. They did not, however, embrace the politics of their elders. Their politics was contained in their apathy. Their's was the politics of negation. It was a politics of hate, revenge, and nihilism. It was induced by the hypnotic effects of drugs and a more relaxed sensuality. But, unfortunately, the quest for passion and existential freedom involved only a politics of escape. And this has been the basis for the youth counter-cultural punk rocker's politics throughout the seventies and into the eighties. It is the politics of Britain's "New Wave" of mid-seventies punk bands (The Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, the Clash, the Strangers, etc.). It is the politics of the character "Pink" in Pink Floyd's The Wall. Bob Dylan, the mystery tramp, was the father of this punk movement.

It is probably to his credit that Dylan abandoned this form of politics early. It demonstrates his positive sensibilities. To fall back on Christianized hoboism, while not a complete return to the syndicalism of the old left (which by 1970 was, to say the least, an anachronism), was at least a socially responsible thing to do. It was at least a return to involvement. The other path, the path of existential nihilism, leads, not to self-liberation (annihilating lifelessness), but only to despair and negativity (ahhihilating life itself).

But, unfortunately, Dylan's abandonment of nihilism cost him his hard-core cult following. Since 1968, Dylan has no longer been

capable of capturing the hearts of the counter-culturalists. No longer the Moses leading the children of the technocracy out of the dehumanized void of Maggie's Farm, across the vast deserts of the industrial wastelands into the pleasures beyond the Gates of Eden, Bob Dylan is now the once-heroic revolutionary poet who lost his nerve and blinked in the face of chaos. To the disappointment and disillusionment of the multitudes who followed him, Bob Dylan has returned to the safe, familiar comforts of the holy slow train.

Conclusions

But among the other working class heroes discussed above, Dylan's greatest lacking is not his political religiosity, for this may indeed have served him well. The Bible still has a broad appeal, and, in spite of his religious fundamentalism, Bob Dylan is far from finished as a popular singer. Dylan's greatest weakness, ironically, may be his very success, his longevity as a popular figure. He is the only singing hero in this study who is still living. What Bob Dylan lacks, through no fault of his own, is the martyr syndrome.

This may sound morbid, but had he died in the 1966 motorcycle crash, his public image would have crystallized in the punk rocker phase, and he would probably possess a stronger cult following than the living Dylan does today. As his life has continued, so have his changes. He has continued to seek new audiences and to alienate old ones. Unfortunately, the public perception of these constant shifts of position has cost him a great deal of credibility. All of

this could have been avoided by his death. Such are the dialectics of martyrdom. A dead man not only evokes the sympathy of the public, but he also now possesses the correct dramatic structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end. And the tragedy of his death provides the necessary drama to fuel the mystification process. Thus it may be that a coherent mythos may adhere to the hero's legendary persona only after death has freed him from the confines of his mortal existence. In the aftermath of his death, the hero's crystallized image is deified through a canonization process. The hero becomes a god and the focal point for a cult which arises in his sacred name. Perhaps only after his death will we be able to adequately assess the Bob Dylan phenomena.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS: WELL JUST FOLLOW ME

If you want to be a hero
well just follow me . . .

John Lennon, 1970

This has been a study of the role of the singing hero in the totalization of the utopian sensibility of the social protest song culture in America. It has been a study of the utopian dimensions of American radicalism as reflected in the songs and song writers of the left. It has proceeded through a study of John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan, four heroes of the protest tradition, and four of the various lyrical incarnations of the utopian sensibility. Four guerilla minstrels playing mind games. Four radical troubadours in the service of social consciousness. We must now face the question: How has the guerilla minstrel hero served the utopiam sensibility?

We have argued that the mythos of the singing hero is a totalizing agent, giving a human quality to the abstractions of utopian consciousness. The utopian hero is therefore a role model and a source of vicarious utopian identity. But this is only part of the story. At least within the context of the social protest singing culture, heroism can also have negative, counter-revolutionary, and corrupting influences upon the utopian sensibility.

The utopianism of the protest song tradition has ideally been totalized through shared song: the attempt to realize the utopian metaphor of harmony. For utopianism clings to song the way clouds cling to the sky. And the singers are romantics gazing upon those imaginary clouds. But when the heroic image of the singer-song writer overtakes the songs and the shared singing, then those clouds turn grey and the blue sky falls into darkness.

Heroics in the American protest singing tradition has manifested itself in the rise of the "star-syndrome" and the "cult of originality."[1] The elevation of the protest singer-song writer to the level of hero, whether folk hero or pop star, is the substance of the star syndrome. The star syndrome thus refers to the transformation of the protest poet into a public personage. The cult of originality flows very naturally from the star syndrome, and involves the rejection of old familiar songs (songs from the public domain) for newly written ones. The prophets of protest are heroic precisely because of their ability to generate new songs with new messages for newly emerging sensibilities.

While I certainly agree with Carlyle that great men are important sources of cultural and political leadership,[2] it is the vicarious and elitist qualities of heroic leadership that are the source of the corruption of the utopian sensibility of American

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[1]See Denisoff, Great Day Coming (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 167-97.

[2]See Archibald MacMechan, ed., Carlyle on Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (New York: Ginn and Company, 1901).

protest culture. Protest hero-worship (in the form of the star syndrome and the cult of originality) has created a politically apathetic (i.e., non-participatory) following and an aristocratic leadership (of isolated and unaccountable "stars"). What Carlyle (a conservative) failed to see (or saw but was not concerned by) were the authoritarian and totalitarian possibilities inherent to charismatic leadership.

Hero-worship, in spite of its humanizing qualities, is thus also possessed of aristocratic and authoritarian possibilities. It elevates the few over and above the many. It is, therefore, from the perspective of the utopian sensibility, essentially dystopic and counter-revolutionary. Just as the cult of Marx and Lenin corrupted the communist utopian ideal into the Stalinist totalitarian state, hero-worship in the culture of protest has corrupted the utopian ideal of union singing into the idolization of the popular protest singer. As the guerilla minstrel has evolved into the superstar, the grass-roots, generative, and participatory nature of protest singing has steadily declined. And, as a result, the protest genre, from a political perspective, has become increasingly hierarchic and non-democratic. Once actively sung together, protest songs are now only listened to alone.

This argument (on the non-participatory effects of protest heroics) runs deep in the scholarly and journalistic accounts of American protest song culture. However, it is usually associated only with the post-Dylan era. After the controversial Newport Folk

Festival of 1965, the protest press (i.e., Sing Out! and Broadside) was alive with the debate over the rise of the superstar and the cult of originality. It was almost unanimously felt that this was a new and dangerous phenomena that was destroying forever the collective, participatory ideals of the old-left topical "folk" protest tradition.[3] I can accept this argument, but only up to a point. The place where I depart from the old left view is in the timing. As I have attempted to demonstrate, protest heroics and the cult of originality did not begin with Bob Dylan and folk-rock. In twentieth century America, the cultural guerilla has always relied upon heroism and idolization for its continuing totalization.

In the creation of the public image of Joe Hill, the I.W.W. and the labor press of the teens were every bit as personality-oriented as the protest culture of the sixties. And the Guthrie era is no less guilty of succumbing to the lure of heroism. While the folk revivalists would have argued forcefully for the generative-participatory ideal, as we have seen, Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, and the People's Songs, Inc. network carried on an extremely effective public relations promotion of the cult of Woody Guthrie. And the idolization of Guthrie was to be an important, perhaps crucial, force in the continuing totalization of the protest tradition. In other words, heroism was an influential element in

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[3]Denisoff, pp. 185-97, does an excellent job of summarizing this debate with full bibliographical information.

the protest equation long before Bob Dylan plugged in his electric guitar at Newport.

By far the most ubiquitous explanation for the rise of the star syndrome and the cult of originality is the economic argument. This is the classical Marxian argument that, upon entering the capitalist realm of the commercial music industry ("Tin Pan Alley"), popular protest singers (like Bob Dylan) were corrupted by greed for wealth and bourgeois comforts. The music industry is the culprit who took protest music away from its roots in the American working class. The people (i.e., the workers) were thereby alienated from their own music as "folk" music was cleverly packaged into a popular commodity to be bought and sold in the pop music market place. And since one of the more important marketing strategies of the music industry has been to stress the protest singer's public image over and above his or her song's content, the star syndrome quickly infected protest music culture after it entered the popular field. After all, from the point of view of the entrepreneur, stars sell records, and radical politics does not.[4]

Again, while there is obviously much validity to this argument, it is not the full story. While the marketing strategies of the music industry have indeed done much to further the cult of originality and the star syndrome in American protest music, it is by no means the root cause. The protest hero was in existence long

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[4]Ibid.

before the modern business practices of the music industry took over protest song culture.

The corruption of protest song culture is also often explained in terms of the developments in the technology of communications. With the rise of mass communications technology, an increasing emphasis has been placed upon image and personality over substance and content. The heroic image of the protest prophet singer has overtaken the prophet's message, hero-worship has begun to replace revolutionary consciousness, and cultism has triumphed over utopian ideology as the foundation of the protest singing tradition in America and the West.[5] However, while it is clear that media developments have aggravated the trend toward hero-worship, it cannot be blamed as the fundamental cause. The protest hero is not a child of mass communications technology.

The origins of the protest hero mythos are to be found in the minstrel traditions of medieval Europe. Long before the introduction of print into the West, these wandering troubadours travelled among feudal kingdoms singing epic ballads of love and romance, and chronicling in song the events of the day, often with a decidedly partisan flavor which cast them in the role of defenders of the interests of a particular noble family or feudal class.[6] The Robin

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[5]Ibid., pp. 185-86.

[6]Albert B. Friedman, ed., The Penguin Book of Folk Ballads of the English Speaking World (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. xxv-xxvi.

Hood ballads, for example, which date from as early as 1100, are derived of this tradition (as opposed to the "folk" tradition) and are among the earliest ballads in the European tradition to express definite socio-political concerns. In almost all versions of this popular English ballad, the class struggle, in one form or another, serves as the central tension fueling the drama of the story. The famous outlaw hero (whom Scott in Ivanhoe depicts as a guerilla leader of the Saxons holding out against the Norman regime)[7] is a great champion of the poor and the small land owning yeomanry in their struggle against the villainous tyranny of the nobility and the clergy.[8]

The point I wish to stress here is that the protest singing tradition originated, not out of the folklore of the medieval peasantry, but is derived of the minstrel tradition. The wandering troubadour (the medieval equivalent of the modern professional singer-song writer), and not the authorless "folk" were the first to use the song form for explicitly political purposes.[9] One early minstrel, for example, a certain Adam of Hale (1240-1287) gained a widespread notoriety in conjunction with the Robin Hood ballad, as the author of an early version ("Jue de Robin et Marion").[10] This

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[7]Ibid., p. 325.

[8]Ibid., pp. 325-47.

[9]John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), p. 2.

[10]Arthur Elson, The Book of Musical Knowledge (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1927), p. 35.

is but a single illustration of the point that the star system and the cult of originality were very much in evidence at the very beginning of the protest tradition in the West. The phenomenon of the protest hero is thus in some sense a function of minstrelsy and not subsequent developments in the economics of the popular music industry or changes in the technology of communications.

As Europe began to emerge from the darkness of medieval times, political radicalism, as we know it today, began to take shape in the revolt against the Catholic church.[11] It was also a time when the modern song culture of protest, so closely bound in form and function to the protestant hymn, was also taking shape.[12] Radical preachers like John Ball of London's Great Revolt of 1381, were becoming the new minstrels of protest. An embryonic secular utopianism was evident in Ball's preaching, which encouraged his followers to persist in "one head."[13] Inspired by the events leading up to 1381, Ball also gave to protest one of its earliest radical chants: "When Adam delved and Eve span / who then was the gentleman?"[14]

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[11]George H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson, A History of Political Theory (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1973), pp. 294-96.

[12]Greenway, pp. 12-13.

[13]Ibid., p. 2.

[14]In other words, when Adam plowed the fields and Eve spun wool for their clothing, there were no class divisions in Eden. Greenway, p. 2, includes this quote but does not attribute it to John Ball. Sabine, p. 296, also uses this quote, but mentions no author. The connection to John Ball is made by Will Durant in The

This early protest against the injustices of feudal class divisions marks the beginning of the modern era in the song literature of the culture of protest. It also illustrates a further development in the star syndrome and the cult of originality. The couplet above attributed to Ball would have certainly been quickly forgotten had its author not figured so prominently in this early revolt and died a martyr's death at the hands of the royalist reaction (having been hanged, drawn and quartered, and his severed head placed on a spike on London Bridge with the other leaders of the revolt).[15] John Ball was a hero and a martyr in the protest tradition at a time when mass communications and the recording industry were quite unimaginable.

But even if we confine our discussion to the culture of protest in America, we find many examples of protest heroes prior to Joe Hill and the Wobbly mind guerillas. Foner in American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century lists 277 known composers of protest songs in the pre-I.W.W. labor press.[16] Some, like John Siney, a mine union leader, Ira Steward, of the eight-hour movement, and John A. Sovereign, grand master workman of the Knights of Labor,

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Story of Civilization: Part VI, The Reformation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 41. His source for this is Charles Oman, The Great Revolt of 1381 (Oxford: 1906), p. 51.

[15]Durant, p. 45.

[16]Philip S. Foner, American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), Index of Composers, pp. 347-49.

were quite famous.[17] A few, like Morris Rosenfeld, gained enough respect to have their works published and widely circulated.[18]

Thus, long before the song writers of this study came into existence, long before the advent of mass communications technology, and long before the rise of the pop music industry, a cult of originality and a star system of a sort, were already firmly established in the culture of protest in Europe and America.

Something intrinsic to the song of protest seems to require originality of authorship, and something in the protest song seems to foster the heroic public image of the protest singer-song writer. We know that songs of protest arise out of historical-political events. Perhaps, as some have suggested, such songs are simply too dull to stand alone. In contrast to folk songs, the topical nature of the protest song seems to tie them very closely to their composers. Such songs rarely outlive their authors because the events they describe quickly lose their significance. Protest songs generally have an ephemeral and anachronistic nature. They are so linked to history that they pass quickly in and out of fashion.[19] Perhaps this is why they are so dependent upon their composers for their existence. Since they rarely survive to pass through the folk process into the public domain, they may only survive in the mythos of their heroic composers. Thus, those that

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[17]Ibid., p. xv.

[18]Ibid., p. 321.

[19]See Greenway, pp. 5-10.

do survive do so on the strength of the public personality of their authors and not necessarily because of the merits of their melody or message. As we will soon see, the fact that the protest song is so hero-dependent will have a significant impact upon its role in the American culture of protest.

Thus, while it is clear that heroism extends far back into the recesses of protest history, and is thus independent of both economics and changing technologies of communications, it is equally clear that the development of mass communications and the emergence of economic incentives through the rise of the recording industry have, in effect, radically transformed the heroic guerilla minstrel, dramatically altering his role in the totalization processes of protest culture. In other words, the protest song hero has played the mind guerilla through media both hot and cold, and through both pre- and post-industrial economics. But, while these developments have not been, in and of themselves, responsible for the rise of the guerilla minstrel mythos, they have been responsible for luring the protest song hero forever out of the remote and esoteric regions of the left-wing labor circles, and thrust him square into the mainstream of American (and Western) popular music culture.

It is to the long term implications of this unfolding popularization of the protest hero that we must now turn. We must examine the contribution of each of our heroes to the culture of protest in twentieth century America, and particularly the overall effect on the utopian sensibility. Heroism we take to be an

independent phenomena. We seek not its origins, but its changing nature and its role in the evolution of the culture of protest. In other words, we seek to understand the changing nature of the guerilla minstrel hero in the continuing totalization of the American protest singing tradition.

Joe Hill's Will

In America, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the modern (i.e., post-literate) notion of the "guerilla minstrel" first crystallized in the public image of Joe Hill. The I.W.W., through the Hill myth, created for America the mythos of the guerilla minstrel. Since the publication in 1975 of Foner's American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century, it has been unambiguously established that the American revolutionary song form pre-dates the Wobblies.[20] While the I.W.W. certainly contributed much to the philosophy and politics of protest singing, their unique contribution to revolutionary song culture in America was the imaginary construction of the minstrel guerilla mythos in the form of Joe Hill.

The image of I.W.W. created for Hill has stood the test of time. It has subsequently been admired and emulated by several generations of would-be cultural guerillas, sustaining the chords of protest and the harmonies of the utopian vision throughout the

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[20]Foner, p. xi.

twentieth century. It is the image of a common, ordinary worker ("one of us"), full of youth and beauty ("labor's flower"), selflessly dedicated to the cause of the One Big Union ("a rebel true blue"), who is cut down in the prime of his life by a ruthless and insidious injustice, perpetrated upon him by the "white-handed lowsome power" of the "Authorities of the State of Utah." To the workers, the loss of one so special (a "singer of Labor's wrongs, joys, hopes, and fears") is a devastating loss, a loss they vow never to forget.[21] So determined were the efforts of the Wobbly myth-makers that Joe Hill has indeed never died.

However, the totalizing impact of the Hill mythos has been a mixed blessing to the song culture of the American Left, perhaps one that, in the long run, may even have been self-defeating, contradictory, and counter-revolutionary. On the positive side, the Hill mythos has been an extremely effective totalizing agent, as the personification of the idealized utopian consciousness, and as a revolutionary standard for individuals to identify with and imitate. As a symbolic vehicle, reifying the syndicalist vision of the Wobblies, the Hill mythos has been a focal point for the continuing totalization of the utopian sensibility in the folklore of the American Left.

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[21]The parenthetic quotations are taken from "Joe Hill," a poem by Ralph Chaplin that appeared in the ninth edition of the I.W.W. Songbook in 1916; reprinted in Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 156.

But, on the negative side, the Hill mythos is in many ways an elitist corruption of the Wobbly's union singing ideal. The committee that produced the first edition of the "Little Red Songbook" had explicitly intended that the songs selected to represent the I.W.W. would be communal or "union" products. Rank and file workers were encouraged to send in songs and poems. The Wobbly labor hymn was, from the beginning, intended as a medium that was to reach the ordinary, unsophisticated worker with a message he could understand, appreciate, and find inspirational. In theory, any worker could express himself in song, and all were encouraged to do so. The Wobblies' theory of protest singing was thus inherently democratic and participatory.[22]

But, with the rise of the Hill mystique, the "Little Red Songbook" began to lose this democratic-participatory quality, as Hill's songs began to dominate the song book and overshadow the works of all other Wobbly song writers.[23] In the process, the generative initiative of the non-professional worker-song writer was delegated to an imaginary and mythical surrogate. Where spontaneously generated songs, or songs long in the public domain and therefore familiar to all, were once genuinely shared expressions of a common utopian sensibility, now they were to become akin to tablets handed down from on high. Ever so subtly, as the fiction of the guerilla

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[22]See Richard Brazier, "The Story of the I.W.W.'s 'Little Red Songbook,'" Labor History, 9 (Winter, 1968), 91-105.

[23]See Charles Wayne Hampton, "The Politics of Music: A Study of the Political Song as Used by the I.W.W.," the author's unpublished

minstrel mythos was substituted for the positive participatory experience of spontaneous, worker-generated singing, the communal praxis of union singing was transformed into something artificial and vicarious. Where the utopian sensibility was once a genuinely shared song, it was to become an increasingly aristocratic enterprise, induced by the force of idolization upon apathetic sheep and week-end revolutionaries, who, in their aloneness, would listen in awe, instead of singing with affection and in solidarity.

Since Joe Hill, the utopian practice of evoking the evolutionary spirit through ritualized singing has, in the process, substituted a mythical idolization for the goal of oneness. The implications for this shift of emphasis are ultimately dystopic and totalitarian. As we will soon see, this dialectic between the positive, participatory, communal totalization, and the negative, elitist, vicarious totalization has, over time, produced a protest song culture aggravated by the "star-syndrome" and the "cult of originality," which has become decreasingly participatory and increasingly vicarious; increasingly aristocratic and decreasingly communal.

A Picture From Life's Other Side

The Woody Guthrie mythos, while very much in the tradition of Joe Hill, has had an altogether different impact. It was not part

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Master's thesis, submitted to the faculty of the Department of Political Science, Appalachian State University, August, 1977, pp. 84-86.

of a union's organizing strategy, nor was it oriented toward the propagation of a specific left-wing ideological system. At least in comparison to Joe Hill, the cult of Woody Guthrie was largely non-institutional, and to a great extent non-ideological.

Unlike Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie is respected more for his song-writing talents than for his political activism. Although it is true that his reputation as a song writer was gained through songs that were perceived as political, these songs were, in fact, more social comment than propaganda. Guthrie took much of the crudeness out of the protest song, shaving off the more sharply ideological edges, adding a more subtle artistry, and a more refined and insightful perception. Compared to Joe Hill, Guthrie was much more of an artist than a polemicist. And yet, his works were intrinsically political. But, his class-conscious politics was natural and relaxed, and not forced or awkward.

Woody Guthrie began the popularization of the protest song form. He did this not with labor hymns, but with folk songs. The image we have today of the protest singer as a guitar toting bohemian in blue jeans and work shirts singing folk songs in dark, smoke-filled coffee houses, comes directly from Woody Guthrie, and not from Joe Hill. Joe Hill did not play the guitar, and, as a Swedish immigrant, had little or no appreciation for America's traditional music. He wrote his songs either to familiar hymn tunes or to the melodies of pop songs. It was Woody Guthrie (or, more precisely, the network of individuals and organizations

behind the Woody Guthrie mythos) who turned the folk song into the protest song and, in the process, infused the utopian sensibility of the protest culture with the values of rural America.[24]

The Guthrie mythos is rooted in the soil of America's folk music revival, and has been an integral part of growth of folk song into the realm of popular music. The core of the Guthrie mythos is thus his rural authenticity as a genuine product of the folk community, and the embodiment of the great American common man of the 1930s. The mystique of Woody Guthrie thus begins with Guthrie the okie and refugee of the dust bowl. He is perceived as the classic victim of the Depression in the southwest, forced out onto the road at a tender age by the twin calamities of drought and economic failure. But Guthrie, the survivor, took to the road very naturally. And so the symbolism of the road and the rails--the hobo-rambler mystique--clings very tightly to the Guthrie mythos.

Within the Guthrie mythos, hoboing is a political metaphor: the life style of the outcast, homeless, alienated victims of hard times. The boxcar was a haven from oppression; the rails a symbol of freedom. But Guthrie was no ordinary hobo, for he possessed a very special gift: he was a "ballad-maker." And he packed his road experiences into the songs he wrote and sung. He left behind great documents in song of the struggles of the children of the Great Depression.

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[24]See Nat Hentoff, "The Odyssey of Woody Guthrie: The Rebel Who Started the Folk-Song Craze," Pageant (March, 1964).

Since his songs portray the plight of the economically disadvantaged, his image is that of a class-conscious "people's" troubadour. He was a minstrel with a mission to use his songs as a weapon in the class struggle: as a means of exposing and striking out against the injustices perpetrated upon common ordinary folks by those sick with greed and the lust for power.

Guthrie's folksy image is therefore infused with a fundamental sense of rebelliousness. His image is that of a defiantly unconventional young man, filled with disdain for the conventions of polite society. His crude, unkempt manner and his undisciplined demeanor were deliberate attempts to affect the behavior of clumsy common folks in the company of city slickers. His politics was decidedly unsophisticated and anti-intellectual. Guthrie was a political romantic, reaching out through a sentimental media to an audience he perceived to be largely uneducated. His is the image of the dedicated cultural guerilla selflessly committed to the cause of the poor and oppressed.

Guthrie's folk image had great conviction because he was of the folk. He had experienced their poverty, exploitation, and powerlessness. He, too, had suffered. He, too, had lived (and therefore understood) life's other side. It may well be that the suffering Guthrie endured, the hardships and strife encountered early in life, and the disease that slowly and cruelly robbed him of his life, were the forces that ultimately totalized the Guthrie mythos. The despair over Guthrie's fate at the hands of Huntington's

disease touched a nerve in the hearts of the myth-makers and torch-bearers of the protest song establishment (most notably Pete Seeger and the remains of the Almanac Singers-People's Songs, Inc. network). And through their efforts, the image of Woody Guthrie was canonized in the protest song tradition.

The force of the Guthrie mythos strongly impacted upon the utopian sensibility of protest culture, which began to lose its syndicalist qualities and to take on a populist and nationalist character. A utopian sensibility began to take shape in the image of the American gemeinschaft: rural, naturalistic, agrarian, and anti-industrial.

The cumulative effect of all this may have made the utopian vision more acceptable and accessible to the average working class American, but it also had a certain de-politicizing effect, especially when contrasted to the Wobbly vision. Americanization would invite certain patriotic misinterpretations of Guthrie's songs (like "This Land") and, in the end, take enough of the radical edge off of the folk protest song to prepare it for presentation to the mass audience and a popular culture.

The Guthrie mythos, like that of Joe Hill, also contributed to the further decline and deterioration of the generative and participatory nature of protest singing. Although he would certainly have argued to the contrary, the Guthrie mythos has contributed much to the "star syndrome" and the "cult of originality." Most of Guthrie's better known compositions were long, descriptive, narrative ballads,

designed for the audience to listen to quietly, without singing along. And, by affixing his name to his songs (and often to plagiarized melodies), Guthrie was violating the very folk process and communal ideal he seemed to be espousing. He was accepting exclusive credit for songs that he would have admitted were rightfully the product of the people.

But over and above all this, Guthrie's image as a hobo rambler, traveling from town to town in search of a mythical "union place," has perhaps done the most damage to the utopian vision and sensibility. Guthrie's hoboism glorified individualism and romanticized freedom. It was, therefore, essentially apolitical and escapist. By drifting on down the road every time something went wrong, the followers of Guthrie lost sight of community and the communal ideal.

Guthrie's image also contains threads of an out-of-control sensuality, a stubborn egoism, and a notorious social and economic irresponsibility. These are admittedly qualities rumbling beneath the surface of the Guthrie mythos, but they are there, nevertheless. And these are qualities much closer to the sensibilities of the 1960s counter-culture than to the Popular Front Marxism of Guthrie's day.

The Guthrie mythos has thus contributed to the corruption of the communal ideal and the utopian values of altruistic love. This has been replaced by a more banal Dionysian lust for an ego-based ecstasy. The Guthrie mythos elevated an individual above the communal

ideal, and gave free reign to that individual's eccentric visions. These visions--when compared to those of the Wobblies--were wildly unorthodox and dangerously individualistic.

The Mystery Tramp

Bob Dylan was the first full-fledged superstar in the protest singing tradition. He was the first guerilla minstrel to pass out of the limited and esoteric labor and left-wing circles, and into the realm of mainstream American popular music. But Dylan was also the first anti-hero in the protest tradition. The first to actively reject the crown of the protest hero. Even while leading the thrust into the arena of popular culture, Dylan was rejecting the political idealism of the Guthrie tradition, and repudiating the utopian sensibility of the old left. For Dylan there were no kings in utopia, and he had no desire to lead a movement to a place that, in essence, already existed within us all. Bob Dylan only wanted to express himself through his art and his songs. Aesthetics had become more important than ideology. Through Bob Dylan, the star system and the cult of originality brought to protest culture an unprecedented crisis, seriously challenging the utopian sensibility. The communal ideal was largely abandoned in exchange for the "ecstasy principle," erotica replaced altruism as the basis for utopian consciousness, and transcendental mysticism replaced the ideology of collective action.

In rejecting the folk idiom in favor of rock 'n' roll music, Dylan was rejecting an essentially communal song form for one that is essentially sensual. "Rock 'n' Roll" is, after all, a euphemism for sexual intercourse,[25] while "folk" is a term that implicitly refers to a specific social category.[26] Folk is thus a class concept with natural political overtones, while the lustful imagery of rock 'n' roll has no such political connotations. And yet, as a medium of expression, rock music is much more powerfully revolutionary than folk music. Like folk music, rock is also a working class musical form, originating out of Negro folk forms. Rock music is the American folk music of the 1950s and 1960s, the very embodiment of youth rebellion. But, at least prior to Dylan, Rock was essentially an apolitical dance music. Bob Dylan gave rock 'n' roll music its radical sensibility.

But this was, however, a non-utopian, egocentric, revolutionary sensibility. Dylan's rock is a free-flowing anti-authoritarianism, deeply steeped in a paranoid cynicism about politics, both radical and conventional; and a highly pessimistic--even nihilistic--disposition toward the possibilities of social change. Lacking faith in political ideals, antagonistic to social commitment and

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[25]See Mike Jahn, The Story of Rock: From Elvis Presley to the Rolling Stones (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. 8.

[26]See Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1978), pp. 1-4.

involvement, the new sensibility was apathetic and anarchistic politically. Bob Dylan gave us the cult of chaos and non-involvement.

Instead of actively seeking social change, the new left protestors chose to disassociate themselves from social convention completely. They withdrew into themselves through psychedelic drugs, promiscuous sexual experimentation, and high-intensity rock music. These child-mystics seeking chemical enlightenment, formed an army of new barbarians armed with electric guitars. They sought joy in the practice of shocking the conventional sensibilities with their outrageous dress and manner, reifying their disdain for convention through their appearance and their life styles. They were the cultural guerillas of the new order.[27]

The Dylan mythos is much more complex than that of Guthrie or Hill. The Dylan phenomena was not only much more far-reaching, it was also more dynamic, volatile, and unstable. Bob Dylan is fundamentally a persona that is always changing. The Bob Dylan of today is not the Bob Dylan of yesterday, or tomorrow. Indeed, in many ways the Dylan cult is the cult of change. Thus, any generalizations about the Dylan mystique must be qualified carefully as to which Bob Dylan one is referring. But, as we have seen, there are certain traits and qualities which transcend all of Dylan's changes. It is therefore possible (if dangerous) to discuss a single overall Dylan mythos.

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[27]See Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, The New Radicals (New York: Random House, 1966).

First of all, Bob Dylan's reputation rests upon his image as a popular poet and prophet. He is viewed as a visionary and a seer, one capable of mystical insights into the ultimate nature of reality. Bob Dylan was, and in a very real sense remains, the spokesman of his generation. To the generation of the sixties, his words have all the force of scripture. His albums are treated as holy texts. He is quoted the way the Bible is quoted: out of context, to back up obscure points, and to justify the peculiarities of one's life style.

Another important element of the Dylan mythos is his image as an innovator and trend-setter, living on the edge of emerging sensibilities, perpetually passing through the threshold of the latest musical, political, and philosophical developments. While his ability to find such thresholds is clearly diminishing (no one can stand in the doorway forever), it is such an important aspect of his legend that it must be mentioned. Only Bob Dylan had the foresight and the nerve (and it took a great deal of both!) to make the transition from folk to rock. And eventually even the most stubborn folk purists crossed that great divide in his wake. A similar, though less dramatic, process occurred as Dylan turned to country and western music. Some have even followed his lead into gospel. To this day, the release of a new Dylan LP creates a rumble in the pop music culture of America.

And through all of his various changes--changes which have taken him in a clearly apolitical direction--the image of Bob Dylan as a revolutionary, as a rebellious and unconventional left-wing

intellectual, somehow persists. The image of Bob Dylan as the embodiment of youth rebellion has remained an important element in the Dylan mythos. One of the more startling contradictions in the Dylan mythos is thus his image as a non-leader. It seems to contradict every other part of the mythos. It is a direct refutation of his image as a highly innovative, trend-setting, superstar revolutionary and spokesman for his generation. His stance against cultural leadership, his refusal to play the role of "boss" or "conductor" is perhaps the fundamental flaw in the character of the Dylan mythos.

And finally, that dimension of the Dylan mystique that has most recently come to light, his religious nature, is, as we have seen, an element that runs deep in Dylan's public character. Dylan, the prophet-seer, is a mystic and a spiritual leader, almost a counter-cultural preacher. His powers of insight are believed to approach that of the supernatural. And, as a poet and singer, Dylan has been consistently preoccupied with the symbolism and imagery of religion, mysticism, and spirituality.

So we have in Bob Dylan a complex and diverse contradictory mythos, and one harboring certain functional inconsistencies. The superstar revolutionary who abandoned revolutionary politics. The trend-setting cultural leader who refuses to lead. The non-ideological cynic who is fundamentally religious. Surely it is a confused image, if not fundamentally flawed with inauthenticity.

Perhaps this confusion is the natural consequence of the transformation of the protest troubadour into the superstar. Perhaps inauthenticity is the mark of the 1960s sensibility. Dylan's confused image is perhaps but a reflection of the confusion of the sixties counter-culture.

One of the greatest ironies within the Dylan mythos is that it is crystallized directly out of the Guthrie mythos, exemplifying in a very dramatic manner this dissertation's thesis. Young Dylan was a Guthrie devotee of the most fanatical sort. Bob Dylan's utopian sensibility, revolutionary consciousness, and guerilla minstrel image was expropriated directly, yet vicariously, through the worship of the Guthrie mythos. Hero-worship was thus the vehicle that totalized young Dylan's political and artistic sensibilities.

But soon after Dylan's face-to-face encounter with the dying legend he began to grow cynical. In a horrifyingly vivid manner, the Guthrie mythos was exposed, naked and pitiful, before the impressionable eyes of young Dylan. Dylan, in "Song To Woody," for example, seemed to intuitively grasp the unreality of heroism and the artificiality of the vicarious experience of hero-worship. In breaking out of the Guthrie mold, Dylan shattered the idealism of the topical-folk tradition. But the irony is that, in refusing to follow Guthrie, Dylan created his own mythos and his own cult following. While preaching the anarchy of "don't follow leaders," Dylan was becoming a superstar and cultural leader of unprecedented scope and magnitude. His refusal to follow in the steps of Woody

Guthrie transformed him into Guthrie's replacement, as the new prophet singer of the nation. By refusing to follow blindly in the path of the Master, Dylan created an independent mythos, but one that would be followed just as blindly as the source of a new brand of vicarious political identity. Rejecting heroism had only resulted in more of the same, and at an even more disturbing level.

And a further irony is that, while rejecting Guthrie's idealism, Dylan was substituting perhaps an even more abstract and impractical sensibility. Dylan's Christianized protest abandoned rational ideology in favor of mystical spiritualism. His view of utopia (in "Chimes of Freedom" and "Gates of Eden," for example) became vague, dark, and uncertain. The only certainties were existential anxieties. Dylan's utopianism ultimately collapsed into egoism and the worship of freedom, before finally resolving itself into Christian fundamentalism (on Slow Train Coming).

But even at the height of his political period (from Freewheelin' to Highway 61), Dylan's radicalism ignored the communal ideal and scorned the collective sensibility, leaving only political apathy and the ecstasy principle as the fundamental outlines of the new sensibility. And even after returning to community (on John Wesley Harding), his embrace of the utopian sensibility was religious and not political. It was a "slow train" utopianism that was ultimately only "pie in the sky" radicalism. Dylan's impact has therefore ultimately been counter-revolutionary, transforming young idealist dreamers and mind guerillas of the socially conscious left into apathetic passive sheep.

Furthermore, the Dylan phenomenon exacerbated the already well-established trends in the protest tradition toward an increasingly non-generative and non-participatory format. After Dylan, this tendency reached a point where practically all political sensibility was dictated from above by specialists. Whereas Guthrie's protest songs could be fairly easily learned and reproduced by the non-professional musician, Dylan's more complex electronic sound, his personalized and bitter love songs, and his strange, but demanding, vocal and lyrical phrasing, has put much of his music outside the reach of the ordinary protester (for example, only Dylan is capable of singing "Like a Rolling Stone" or "Subterranean Homesick Blues"). Dylan's music, even more than Hill's or Guthrie's, took on the character of tablets handed down from the mountain, designed to be listened to and meditated upon, but never to be shared in a participatory sense.

In giving such complete legitimacy to the star system and the cult of originality, Dylan's ultimate effect on the protest tradition was, in essence, elitist and authoritarian. Dylan transformed protest into an aristocratic enterprise. While Dylan's music is perhaps only complex in comparison to Hill and Guthrie, those who followed in his wake (the Beatles and the other British punk bands like the Stones and the Who; Simon and Garfunkel; The Byrds; the Doors; Jefferson Airplane; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; and so forth) clearly produced a highly sophisticated sound, generated "aristocratically" by talented, technical specialists. It was designed for vicarious participation only.

And yet, at the same time, ironically, it became a social force of unprecedented magnitude and effect. However, the ultimate result was the mystification of the protest process and the loss of the individual participant, as well as the communal ideal. In the end, the protest tradition has been reduced to the blind cult followings of super-heroes.

Just Follow Me

John Lennon's dictum, "if you want to be a hero just follow me," seems to sum up the evolution of the utopian sensibility within the American protest tradition.[28] He seems to be saying that if you want to live heroically, if you wish to live in utopian ecstasy, you may do so vicariously through me. Since we are not all capable of heroic deeds because we are too "up-tight," "hung-up," afraid to free outselves from the restrictive "bag" of social convention, we now seem to need the hero. Utopianism has come to mean transcendence. To be utopian is to "shine like the sun," to soar above the madness of social reality, to daringly push yourself beyond your conditioning to the very limits of rationality and convention and into the realm of pleasure and personal happiness. Since such transcendence is rarely achieved in ordinary life, we have come to depend upon the hero to transcend vicariously for us.

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[28]John Lennon, Plastic Ono Band (Apple Records SW 3372, 1970), side I, band 4.

Yet one detects a note of heavy sarcasm as Lennon sings ". . . well just follow me."[29] The tone is off-handed and careless (not "follow me," but "well just follow me"). It is sung with despair and despondency. This is where the imaginary quest for utopia has finally led: nowhere. For you are not being asked to join the oneness of humanity, or the brotherhood of mankind; but merely to blindly follow a hero. And, for that matter, you are being asked to follow a doubting hero, one who denies his own heroism, one who refuses to lead, and one who insists that a working class hero is just "something to be."[30] Again, there is an annoying hesitation, a sense of uncertainty, in Lennon's voice as he sings the line "a working class hero is something to be."[31] It is almost a question, and especially when viewed within the context of the rest of the album it seems to imply that the mythos of the hero is an absurdity, playing upon the fears and weaknesses of the public. In reality, Lennon admits to being just a confused kid with a guitar, singing a few coarse words in a flat, uninspired voice, accompanied by a few simple chords. But he is also saying that if it makes you, the fan, happy--if you feel heroic vicariously, if you receive some special hope, some meaning--then go ahead, "just follow me."[32]

Utopianism was once a noble, idealistic, and optimistic perspective. And one that flowed so naturally from the songs of the

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

working class. The act of singing reified the solidarity of the communal ideal. But the utopian ideals are no longer communal, and solidarity comes, not through shared song but through hero-worship. And, as a result, something has turned sour. Blind faith in show business personalities has replaced the participatory ideal of the mind guerilla. And when even the leaders have lost faith then utopianism has been lost and cynicism prevails. The dream is over.

Lennon did go on to write "Imagine" and "Mind Games," and tried to regroup and redirect the mind guerilla, but the times had changed. The youth of the seventies could not be so easily conned. Things turned so sour in fact that, not only did Lennon's record sales drop but he was, in the end, actually gunned down by one of his fans. And while the counter-culture and the mind guerilla network led by Yoko Ono and the rock press attempted to turn Lennon's death into a noble, worthy martyrdom, it remains far removed from the martyrdom of Joe Hill. Hill died defiantly for something; Lennon was assassinated by a demented admirer for nothing.

The protest singer began the century with vision and determination, and then quietly lost his way. Although the protest song has been perfected in an artistic and technical sense, and the means of communicating these songs has developed at an unimaginable rate, offering literally unlimited possibilities, both the political superstructure of the protest song culture (i.e., shared, participatory singing) and its utopian foundations (i.e., the communal ideal) have

crumbled, leaving only the paranoid search for belonging, as in Pink Floyd's "Pigs on the Wing":

> If you don't care what happens to me
> And if I didn't care for you,
> We would zig-zag our way through the
> boredom and pain,
> Occasionally glancing up through the rain,
> Wondering which of the buggers to blame;
> And watching,
> For pigs on the wing.[33]

Heroism is the force behind this souring of protest. Heroism has nurtured the rise of individualism, political apathy, and elitism, and in the process has virtually destroyed the communal ideal. The star system and the cult of originality have replaced forever the generative and participatory qualities of American protest song culture. Political idealism has given way to hero-worship, and the objects of this worship have turned increasingly ignoble and unheroic. The solidarity of protest culture now has a vicarious nature and a cult-like structure. Only an artificial totality remains and one with increasingly dystopic tendencies.

The only healthy utopian forces that work in today's culture of protest exist and must be encouraged to continue to exist at the grass-roots community level. The Highlander Center just outside Knoxville, Tennessee, is an excellent example. Only at this level is the communal ideal of generative and participatory singing

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[33]Pink Floyd, Animals (Columbia Records JC 34474, 1977), side I, band 1.

possible and effective. Singing with your friends and neighbors on your front porch is more effective utopian politics than listening to records or the radio or watching M.T.V., isolated and alone. But perhaps the best strategy would be to form small, community-based singing organizations (in the tradition of the worker choruses or People's Songs, Inc.) to sing out in genuine solidarity against the wrongs affecting your family and your community. But clearly, the worst of all possible strategies is to follow singing heroes blindly and vicariously, especially millionaire superstars who imagine themselves to be working class heroes.

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VITA

Wayne Hampton was born in Asheville, North Carolina, on October 15, 1947. He attended the local public school system, graduating from Lee H. Edwards High School in 1966. From 1966-68 he attended the University of North Carolina at Ashville, until his education was interrupted by a four-year enlistment in the United States Navy. He returned to the University of North Carolina at Asheville in 1972 and received a B.A. in political sociology in May, 1975. He then entered the graduate program at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, receiving an M.A. in political philosophy in the summer of 1977. In the fall of that year he entered the doctorate program at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he remained until accepting a one-year position as a Temporary Instructor in Political Science at Valdosta State College in Valdosta, Georgia, for the academic year 1981-82. In the fall of 1982 he returned to Knoxville to complete work on his doctorate.

He is married to the former Lisa Ward of Union City, Tennessee, and they have a daughter, Abbey.