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All the News That's Fit to Sing: Phil Ochs, Vietnam, and the National Press

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ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO SING: PHIL OCHS, VIETNAM, AND THE NATIONAL
PRESS

by

THOMAS CODY WATERS

(Under the Direction of Eric Allen Hall)

ABSTRACT

Though a prolific topical musician and a prominent figure of the antiwar movement during the 1960s, Phil Ochs remains relatively understudied by scholars due to the lure of more commercially successful folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. His music facilitated awareness of pressing, and sometimes controversial, issues that would otherwise have not been discussed. Focusing on Ochs' most musically productive years from 1964 until 1968, which coincide with the years of increased American involvement in Southeast Asia, this thesis analyzes Ochs in a way that has not been attempted before. It places his anti-Vietnam War songs in conversation with leading national newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, and popular magazines of the era, such as *LIFE* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Sonny Ochs, Phil Ochs' older sister, also gave a candid oral history interview for this project. This thesis argues that Ochs, as a musical journalist and activist, offered a more pragmatic and critical understanding of the war effort than was found in the popular press. Additionally, this thesis argues that his compositions are stronger and less compromising than any of his musical contemporaries.

INDEX WORDS: Phil Ochs, Anti-Vietnam War, Protest, 1960s media, Folk music revival.

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by

THOMAS CODY WATERS

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2014

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis project to my parents, Belinda and Thomas Waters, who always encouraged me to dream big and achieve my goals. Thank you for your love, wisdom, and support. I also wish to dedicate this project to the memory of Phil Ochs, whose powerful songwriting and lyricism are still as relevant today as they were during his lifetime. May this project enlighten scholars about his love of America, protest, advocacy, and music.

“One good song with a message can bring a point more deeply to more people than a thousand rallies.” –Phil Ochs

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

On Tuesday, August 27, 1968, a large group of antiwar protesters gathered at the Chicago Coliseum to celebrate President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Un-Birthday Party" being hosted by the antiwar activist group "the Mobe." In attendance were various national antiwar figures such as Abbie Hoffman, Rennie Davis, Allen Ginsberg, and Dick Gregory. One of the musicians scheduled to perform that evening was the charismatic topical singer Phil Ochs. As Ochs walked onto the lit stage, he surveyed around six thousand weary and bruised protesters nestled amidst the darkness. Many were nursing injuries sustained during a violent confrontation with Chicago police that had occurred the previous Sunday. The spirit and determination of the protesters seemed broken as a result of the upsurge in police brutality. Ochs knew just the song to rally the crowd, "The War is Over," an anti-Vietnam War song, from his new album, *Tape from California*. He began to sing, "Silent Soldiers on a silver screen, / framed in fantasies and dragged in dream, / unpaid actors of the mystery, / the mad director knows that freedom will not make you free, / and what's this got to do with me."¹

As he sang, the crowd stirred and cheered, moved by the powerful lyrics. In the packed coliseum, one man hastily reached into his pockets, took out his draft card, and burned it with his lighter. In the spotlight Ochs continued singing the rousing lyrics, "I'm afraid the war is over / it's over, / it's over." One by one, others in the audience burned their draft cards; small bursts of flames lit the various faces in the crowd. Ochs, realizing what was occurring, stopped singing and watched the audience as he continued to strum his guitar. His music emboldened the crowd

¹ Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 199; Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 101; Phil Ochs, *Tape From California* (Santa Monica, California: A&M, 1968).

to resist the war and allowed them, even just for a short time, to envision the end of the U.S. led war in Vietnam. After the performance, Ochs stepped off the stage and remarked, “This is the highlight of my career.”²

The year 1968 marked the pinnacle of Ochs’ career as a musician and an activist. Within a matter of five years, he went from being a relatively unknown folk musician to becoming an artist able to mobilize thousands to act through his music. His insightful, witty, and oftentimes controversial lyrics about pressing issues of his time are what allowed him to achieve national fame. This powerful performance, in particular, demonstrates that he succeeded in making his mark on history by rallying thousands of Americans to “wake up” and realize that their nation needed to change, their nation needed peace, and it needed a voice of reason. Ochs was that voice of reason, having spoken out vehemently in the early 1960s against the Vietnam War when the public knew very little about the extent of U.S. involvement.³

Ochs involved himself in a variety of social and political movements throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. He spoke in favor of organized labor and performed several concerts in solidarity with the striking coal miners in Hazard, Kentucky in December of 1963. He composed pro-organized labor songs such as the “Automation Song,” which advocated for the fair wages of blue-collar workers. In addition to being connected to labor organizing, he pushed for equal rights and decried the white racism and violence in the South during the Civil Rights Movement. Many of his songs, such as “Talking Birmingham Jam,” “Too Many Martyrs,” and “Here’s to the State of Mississippi” became popular anthems at civil rights rallies and marches. He even participated in a series of benefit concerts organized by the Council of Federated Organizations,

² Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute*, 102; David Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: 1999), 23.

³ Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 23; Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per minute*, 88.

a group that mobilized African American voting in rural Mississippi communities during the summer of 1964. Out of all of the social and political movements with which Ochs became involved, however, the antiwar movement became the primary focus of his activism, especially by the early-to-mid 1960s, and remained so until his death.⁴

As early as 1962, unlike most of his folk contemporaries, Ochs took a strong stance against U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Although he respected America and its service members, he viewed the Vietnam War as yet another example of the growing military-industrial complex in Cold War America. To Ochs, the war hurt America's young people, especially young men from working class families who were drafted to fight in the long and bloody engagement. Despite the controversial nature of many of his antiwar songs, Ochs received some acclaim by music critics and cultivated a devoted fan base. This is significant as he advocated for the end of the war when many American politicians and media outlets declared the war winnable and often portrayed anyone who even suggested that the U.S. withdraw from the conflict as being "unpatriotic" and, even worse, a "communist" traitor. Ochs' success in spite of the opposition to his message from the early-to-mid 1960s is significant as it shows his talents as a songwriter.

Though a prolific musician and a prominent figure of the antiwar movement during the 1960s, Ochs remains relatively understudied and underappreciated by scholars of folk music due to the lure of more commercially successful folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. This project seeks to restore Ochs into the narrative by situating him and his music within the broader historical context of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. There are two extensive biographies on Ochs: the oldest is *Death of a Rebel: A Biography of Phil Ochs*, published by Marc Eliot in 1989, and the newest is *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, published by Michael Schumacher in 1996. There is also a shorter biography on Ochs that accompanies a compilation

⁴ Schumacher, *There but for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 62, 72, 85.

of source material by David Cohen titled *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*. Although all of these texts do an excellent job of chronicling his life and relationships, but they fail to assess his relevancy to key historic events of the Vietnam War and do not offer a scholarly analysis of his songs. Additionally, his struggles with manic depression and eventual suicide tend to dominate the narratives of these prior studies. While mental illness is an important facet of Ochs' life, his music and activism are far more significant and relevant aspects of his legacy because of their continued relevancy today. Many of his compositions became anthems for not only the Civil Rights and labor movements of the 1960s but also the antiwar movement. His struggles with mental illness did not fully develop until the later part of the 1960s after he successfully established himself as a prominent topical musician and activist.

The scholarly treatment of Ochs reflects a broader gap in the literature on how musicians, artists, writers, and other influential members of society challenged the more dominant message on the Vietnam War presented by newspapers and magazines. Works such as Daniel C Hallin's *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* and Clarence R. Wyatt's *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* provide an outstanding description of how the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations influenced the news media during the Cold War. Yet none of these works offer any examples of opposition that came in the form of popular protest. They also do not show much evolution in the way that news was reported from the early to late 1960s. Whereas the studies tend to note that around 1967 to 1968 a change occurred that made the media more critical of the war effort, they homogenize the coverage from 1960 to 1967. Using the Ochs' music as a lens, this study seeks to present a more nuanced account.

Much of the recent scholarship on the folk protest music scene largely overlooks his extensive activism and assortment of topical songs. Publications such as Stephen Petrus and

Ronal D. Cohen's *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival* and Dorian Lynskey's *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs from Billie Holiday to Green Day* provide an excellent survey of folk music's history; these studies tend to oversimplify the contributions of many folk revival musicians. Although both of these works mention Ochs, his music, and some of his activism, they tend to focus on more commercially successful musicians. These works also fail to describe Ochs' anti-Vietnam War songs, and their impact, in detail. Although these two publications lack a strong narrative of Ochs, they serve to contextualize and situate Ochs' music within the milieu of the 1960s folk and topical music scene. Unlike these syntheses, my research offers the first academic assessment of Ochs' musical contributions regarding the Vietnam War and the way the media reported it. To understand Ochs' contributions to American society in the 1960s, particularly as they relate to the antiwar and protest movement, a comparison between Ochs musical reporting and reports by the popular press must be made.

There is a lot to learn from the lyrics of Ochs' compositions, as his music was derived from newspaper headlines. Ochs read newspapers and provided editorial commentary on them through his songs. His perspective is significant as most major newspapers in the early 1960s lacked any kind commentary on their headlines and left readers with simplistic, clear-cut narratives. Ochs, as a musical journalist, offered one of the earliest musical descriptions of the Vietnam War and that his music stood in contrast to articles by leading American U.S. periodicals by offering a more pragmatic understanding of the war effort.⁵

Ochs' music also provided a powerful framework to the antiwar movement—a movement that was often criticized by officials in the early-to-mid 1960s, and were stronger, and

⁵ Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: W W Norton & Co Inc: 1993), 91.

less compromising, than any of his folk/topical contemporaries' songs. Ochs' critiques are unique in that they are more straightforward and uncompromising than other musicians during this time period, much more so than his folk rival Bob Dylan. Indeed, Ochs criticized Dylan for producing more commercial oriented music. Furthermore, Ochs' personal background, which significantly influenced his compositions, sets him apart from his contemporaries. Not only did he attend a military academy from 1956 to 1958, he also majored in journalism while at Ohio State University from 1958 to 1962. Both experiences shaped his worldview and informed his understanding of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Unlike most protest musicians from his era, he had more credibility and authority to speak out against the war effort.⁶

This project also explores how Ochs developed a political consciousness and how that political consciousness affected his compositions. His transition from being apolitical, growing up in a household that eschewed politics, to becoming an anti-Vietnam War activist is significant to his development as a musician. Yet, while Ochs consistently spoke out against the U.S. led war in Vietnam, he was not anti-American. In fact, he composed several patriotic songs such as "Power and the Glory," which celebrated America, and "The Men Behind the Guns," that saluted the bravery of navy sailors. Thus, Ochs only sought to criticize what he saw was wrong with America socially and politically, and not condemn America entirely. He loved America and thought that it could be a better nation if it diminished its role as an international police power, became more peaceful, and treated all of its citizens, no matter what religion, race, or creed, with dignity and equality.

I used a variety of primary sources ranging from Ochs' personal writings to interviews about his compositions. To gain a deeper insight into Ochs' thoughts on the media and on music,

⁶ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Politics and Music in the 1960s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 126.

I used the influential, yet controversial, folk magazine, *Broadside* in which Ochs published numerous articles and songs. It was with this magazine that Ochs began to share his music and gain attention in music circles. I also conducted an oral history interview with Ochs' oldest sister, Sonny Ochs. In addition to providing me with a better understanding of her brother, she gave me a greater insight into the folk scene in New York and of members of the folk community.

This research relies on his music compositions and attempts to present them in a way that maintains their intended message. These songs are then connected to the historic events that they describe—primarily the Vietnam War. To assess the impact that his music, I employed reviews by music critics in addition to comments on his albums by average listeners. Many of the reviews of Ochs' albums are positive and praised him for his songwriting and overall message. Contrary to many popular assumptions, Ochs' music did receive some acclaim, though his music was compared, often unfairly, to the more ambiguous protest songs of Dylan's early career. Although Ochs' music described highly controversial topics, he was able to be a commercially viable and popular musician. Much of his earlier music, which was not widely released on his record albums or printed in music publications such as *Broadside*, are not included in this project. This is because many of these compositions were not widely known or distributed until later in his career or after his death. Therefore, these early compositions did not have as much of a direct impact on popular culture within my period of study.

Although aspects of Ochs' life will be factored into this research, this is not another biography of Ochs. My goal is to place his songs, lyrically, in conversation with the popular press from that era. Ochs believed that newspapers published "all the news that's fit to print," but he knew that there were other pressing issues in the news that were deemed "unfit" for an

average American audience. Therefore, this research project puts his protest songs in conversation with leading national newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, and popular magazines of the era, such as *LIFE* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. I chose these publications primarily for their reputability in reporting, regional perspectives, and mass circulation. In addition, this study analyzes the lyrical meaning and intended message of each song, in particular how his compositions gave meaning to otherwise commentary-free or “censored” news reports and how his songs reflected the growing public disagreement with the Vietnam War. My study demonstrates how important Ochs was to the antiwar movement and how significant his songs were in providing awareness to the many fears wrought by the war.

Organization

This project is organized into five chapters, which includes this introduction and a retrospective conclusion that reflect different stages of his life. My research follows a chronological narrative from the beginning until the end of Ochs’ life. However, the primary focus will be Ochs’ most musically productive years from 1964 until 1968, which also coincides with the years of increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Following the introduction, the second chapter of my work focuses chronicling Ochs’ early life from birth until 1961 when he left Ohio State University to move to New York City to pursue music career. Two aspects of Ochs’ life highlighted in chapter are his growing passion for music and his musical proficiency. Chapter two also examines his middle-class upbringing and how his father’s struggles with mental illness, brought on by his service as a combat medic during World War II, affected him and his family. This chapter also details Ochs’ experiences at Staunton Military Academy, where he became acquainted with a diverse range of American music. Lastly, this

chapter chronicles his experiences at Ohio State University and his decision to drop out of college and pursue a career in music.

Chapter three covers his arrival in Greenwich Village in 1962 through the release of his first album, *All the News That's Fit to Sing*. Ochs arrived in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City, the heart of the folk music revival, during the height of the folk music's popularity. It is within the diverse background of Greenwich Village, with its bohemian populace, that Ochs fashioned himself into a singing journalist, obtained a record deal, and achieved fame. Not only does this chapter describe Ochs' journey in the Greenwich Village folk scene, it also examines his primary rival, Bob Dylan. Chapter three also traces the United States' involvement with Vietnam and how the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, operating within the mentality of Cold War politics, influenced media coverage during the early 1960s. There is also a lengthy discussion of his first album, *All the News That's Fit to Sing*, its reception, and compare it with news resources from 1961 to 1963. There are two types of war reporting that developed during this period. The first type were descriptive reports that were more common between 1961 and early 1962. The second type of reports from this period, which were more optimistic, was common from 1962 until 1963. I propose at the end of the second chapter that Ochs went beyond what newspapers and other periodicals were willing to print by offering a necessary critique of the war situation.

The fourth chapter covers the years from 1964 until 1967 and begins with a discussion of Ochs' most political, and arguably most well-known album, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*. It focuses particularly on his two anti-Vietnam War songs included on the album: such as the title track, "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and "Draft Dodger Rag." Additionally, this section describes the shifting views of the press and the Johnson administration's changing strategy in Vietnam

and Southeast Asia. Not only did the press become sympathetic to the U.S. involvement from 1965 to 1966, they began to lash out at those opposed to the war effort. This, again, ties back into the Cold War mindset that dominated the early-to-mid 1960s media. From this, the chapter transitions into discussing Ochs' other albums, such as *Tape From California*, and his increasing fame. By 1967, particularly due to heavy death tolls, increased expenses, and false hopes of ending the war, the press finally became critical of the war effort. After nearly ten years, the mainstream press began to reflect what Ochs had been singing about for years: that the war was detrimental to U.S. society.

Chapter five chronicles Ochs' life from 1967 until 1976 with an emphasis on his activism. I describe Ochs' activism in the aftermath of his involvement with the Youth International Party (Yippie) protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Following his involvement with the Yippies, Ochs became increasingly disillusioned with the political direction of the United States, particularly under Richard Nixon, and his sixth studio album *Rehearsals for Retirement* which signaled the beginning of the end of life and musical career. I also mention his final years and his last studio album, *Greatest Hits*, which, despite its self-depreciating title, contained all new material. Then, I briefly describe his international travel.

The conclusion evaluates his legacy as a musician and activist. Although not as commercially successful as his contemporaries, Ochs offered some of the strongest source material against the Vietnam War. He was also the only artist to offer a critique of the pro-Vietnam War stories reported by the mainstream media and was also the only one to provide an alternative interpretation to their reports. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the relevancy of Ochs' music today, showing that his music continues to inspire a new generation of Americans.

My research is not intended to be a comprehensive synthesis of his social activism. For further study, I hope to examine his activism in Latin America and Africa in more detail. His involvement in international struggles for peace, democracy, and civil rights demonstrate that Ochs' music and activism transcended the American border. Although other artists engaged in global affairs, Ochs is one of the select few to journey to foreign countries and directly insert himself in international social movements. Ochs is also, arguably, one of the first innovators of world music, incorporating African rhythms and beats into some of his later songs, although none of these made it to his studio albums while he was alive. Two songs that exemplify his experimentations with world music influence are "Bwatue" and "Niko Mchumba Ngombe" released in 1973. His contributions to world music are significant, especially because he is one of the first western recording artists to create a song with African influences.

As an artist, Ochs gave a voice to those in America who wanted to express their disillusionment with the Vietnam War. Although an underappreciated figure of the antiwar movement of the 1960s, Ochs was one of the earliest critics of the war and one of the most uncompromising. As a singing journalist, Ochs provided an analytical and insightful look at the most pressing and controversial issue of his time. This project provides a detailed look at Ochs' activism, music, and the role of the U.S. government in influencing what was reported and not reported in printed news media.

CHAPTER 2

THE EARLY LIFE OF PHIL OCHS: 1940-1961

Early Life

“Philip,” said Miss Jocelyn testily from the front of her fifth-grade classroom. “Philip!” She could not help but notice that a young Philip Ochs, one of her quieter students, was staring out of the classroom window, apparently lost in a daydream. Unlike his older sister Sonny, who she had taught a few years prior, Philip did not give her his undivided attention during lessons. Losing her patience with his inattention, Miss Jocelyn stepped forward and yelled out “PHILIP OCHS!” Philip quickly snapped his head to the front of the classroom and locked eyes with his teacher. After replying with a dazed, “Huh,” the classroom of fifth graders erupted in laughter.⁷

Though he came across as being easily distracted, he was very much aware of what was going on around him. To Miss Jocelyn’s surprise, he excelled academically and earned good grades in all of his subjects despite his frequent daydreams in the classroom. This scene from his early childhood is emblematic of his personality in his adult life: he would always be a hopeful dreamer. Philip was not afraid to dream big, especially in his growing desire to become a popular musician. The creativity that emerged from his active mind contributed to some of the most endearing and thought-provoking topical songs of the 1960s.

Philip was the second child of Jacob “Jack” Ochs, a physician, and Gertrude Phin Ochs, a homemaker. Jack earned a pre-med degree at the University of Virginia before applying to medical school. Although Jack applied to several universities in the United States, none of them accepted his application because they had filled their Jewish quotas. In the early twentieth century, universities used restrictive policies such as this to limit the enrollment of Jewish

⁷ Sonny Ochs, interview by Thomas Cody Waters, tape recording, 12 September 2013, Statesboro, Georgia; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 19.

students by limiting the number of Jews that could enroll. Undeterred, Jack looked at programs overseas and was accepted at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Jack met Gertrude after becoming close friends with her brother who was also enrolled in the same medical school. Gertrude, unlike Jack who came from a working-class family, grew up as the daughter of a prosperous Scottish tobacco store salesman and lived in a lavish stone mansion with her parents. Jack, as a future doctor, proved to be a suitable match for Gertrude and the two married on June 24, 1936. On April 12, 1937, the couple welcomed their first child, Sonia. After completing medical school and interning in York, England for a year, Jack and Gertrude moved to America to start their lives as a young family.⁸

The family moved into a Manhattan apartment near Seventh Avenue and Fourteenth Street after Jack took a job working at a local medical facility. His job in Manhattan was short lived, as Jack was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1940 and assigned to a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Columbus, New Mexico. The couple welcomed the birth of their first son, Philip, on December 19 of that year. Gertrude chose to have her son in a hospital in El Paso, Texas rather than in Columbus where Jack was stationed because she did not find the hospital facilities there to be suitable. As Jack moved around for training, the rest of the Ochs family followed him, moving from Columbus, New Mexico to San Antonio, Texas to Austin, Texas. The frequent moves proved traumatic to them, as they had to readjust to new locations and new neighbors. The couple welcomed their third child, Michael, in 1943. After two more years of training, Jack was sent to Europe to serve as a combat medic for the U.S. Army during World War II. The army sent him to the front lines to treat wounded soldiers in what later became known as the Battle of the Bulge. During the time Jack was stationed overseas, Gertrude and the Ochs children

⁸ Marc Eliot, *Death of a Rebel* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1979), 9; Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 12-15; David Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: 1999), 2.

moved back to New York to stay with Jack's parents. Little did the family know that the carnage that Jack witnessed from the Battle of the Bulge was affecting him mentally, pushing him into a manic depressive state.⁹

Jack received an honorable medical discharge from the army in November 1945 and returned to the United States after five years of military service. The army issued the discharge after it became apparent that his depression affected his concentration while working on wounded patients. The Ochs newly reunited family moved into a house in Far Rockaway, New York. It soon became clear that Jack needed psychiatric treatment, and he admitted himself to a mental health facility in Long Island, where he remained for almost two years. Saddened by her husband's condition, Gertrude took an extended vacation with her three young children to Scotland in February 1947 to visit her family. When Gertrude and her kids returned, and Jack was released from the mental health facility, the Ochs family was no longer the same. The war had changed everything.¹⁰

The Dreamer

Although the Ochs family thought they would settle down following Jack's return, they soon discovered that they would have to follow their troubled patriarch as he struggled to keep a job. As soon as Jack found a job, his battle with mental illness almost always resulted in his dismissal from the practice. Because of this, the Ochs family moved around frequently, hoping that the next practice would be more of a permanent solution. As an introverted, bashful, and quiet child, Philip's naturally shy personality was only exacerbated by his family's frequent relocations. Unlike his older sister Sonia and younger brother Michael, who were outgoing and

⁹ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 15, 17; Eliot *Death of a Rebel*, 11, 12; Sonny Ochs, interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 2.

¹⁰ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* 17-18.

quickly made friends wherever they went, Philip was withdrawn and struggled to make friends. The few that he did make, never more than one friend at a time, he often lost them due to the family's frequent moves.¹¹

To get the timid Philip out of the house, his mother often sent him and his brother to the movies at a local movie theater. Soon he began to spend most of his free time watching films such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *King Kong*. It was not uncommon for Philip and his brother to watch five or six films a week. On most Saturdays, Philip and Michael spent the entire day at the movie theater, often having to be forced out by the staff at closing time. His favorite movies were westerns, especially the ones starring John Wayne. For Philip, Wayne's tough yet noble persona embodied what was great with America. Wayne's western characters were typically self-made gentlemen who fought for their values and the American way, challenging those who threatened their honest way of life. Movies provided Ochs an escape from reality. The movies allowed him to live vicariously through the actors on screen and evade the dysfunction of his family life, albeit only for a few hours.¹²

In 1951, the Ochs family relocated from Far Rockaway to Perrysburg, New York. At age eleven, Philip's mother encouraged him, much to his dismay, to join the local school band. Initially Philip tried out for the trumpet but found out that the school did not need any more trumpet players. After his mother told him to pick another instrument, he told the school band teacher he wanted to try out for saxophone. After finding out that the band also did not need another saxophone player, the school band teacher recommended that he try out for clarinet. From his first lessons, it was clear to Gertrude and his teachers that Philip was musically inclined. Sonia, also known as Sonny, recalls that her brother grew to love music early on. He

¹¹ Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters.

¹² Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 20; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 13.

spent hours at a time practicing a single note in a musical piece until he mastered it. After less than a year of playing, Philip received an “A” rating on the clarinet from Fredonia State Teacher’s College. His mother, proud of her son’s achievements, encouraged him to continue playing the clarinet in the hopes that one day he would become an accomplished musician.¹³

The family moved to Columbus, Ohio in 1954 after Jack found another job at a tuberculosis hospital. Shortly after the move, Gertrude used a small inheritance from the death of her mother to send her oldest child, Sonny, to a finishing school in Switzerland. Philip started high school at Marion-Franklin High School in Columbus. As a teenager, he continued to struggle with making friends. He spent most of his free time listening to the top 50 rock hits from WCOL. His mother, keen on pushing his musical talents, reached out to a music teacher at the Capital University Conservatory of Music to give Philip private clarinet lessons. By his sixteenth birthday, he was the Conservatory’s lead soloist, performing clarinet solos at a variety of local concerts with the group.¹⁴

After two years of attending Marion-Franklin High School in Columbus, Gertrude told Philip and Michael that she planned to send them to private school to become “cultured” like Sonny. Philip, like his older sister, was upset that he had to go to a private school and objected even more strongly after he discovered that they did not have an orchestra for him to play clarinet. He pleaded with his mother to allow him to pick a different, and she agreed. As an avid reader of the newspaper, Ochs recalled an advertisement in *The New York Times* for a military

¹³ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 23; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 2, 3; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 16-17; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters.

¹⁴ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 24; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 3; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 19-20.

school, Staunton Military Academy in Staunton, Virginia. By fall of 1956, young Philip was at the academy, away from the dysfunction of his family for the first time.¹⁵

As one of the most prestigious military academies in the United States during the 1950s, Staunton provided students with military training and helped prepare them for careers in the military or for further education at a university. Philip enjoyed the structured life of the military school and quickly became “one of the boys,” fitting in for what to him seemed like the first time. In their spare time, Phil and his fellow plebes at the academy attended movies and listened to music. He also began to lift weights and earned the nickname “Mr. Universe” for his dedication to bodybuilding. While at Staunton, Philip shortened his name to “Phil,” a clear sign that he had shed his coy, loner, image of his younger years and had become his own man. Phil also changed his appearance by ditching his thick glasses and growing out his hair and combing it back. His love for music continued to grow and he became an obsessive listener of both country and rock and roll. It was during his stay at the academy that he discovered the “king” of rock and roll himself, Elvis Presley, a musician he idolized throughout his life.¹⁶

Although Ochs played for the academy’s marching band, he became disappointed with the conductor who was more concerned about the band’s formation than its musical proficiency. Frustrated with the marching band, Ochs began writing short stories to occupy his free time at the academy. He submitted one of his stories, “White Milk to Red Wine,” to a writing contest hosted by the academy. The story rather humorously described an encounter between a bullied kindergartener and his schoolyard tormentor. When the young child challenged the bully to a fight, the bully ended up backing out on the day of the scheduled encounter, showing that he was

¹⁵ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 26; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 21-22.

¹⁶ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 27, 29; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 22, 23.

not as “tough” as he appeared. This knack for clever, yet humorous, storytelling earned him second place in the contest. His later musical compositions incorporated similar elements of wit and satire.¹⁷

When Phil visited home during the summer, he told his brother Michael all about the music he discovered. He talked to his younger brother at length about country artists such as Faron Young, Ernest Tubb, and Johnny Cash. The siblings even went record shopping for some of the artists’ albums. He also told his mother that he was giving up on the clarinet because it did not fit in to his new more “rebellious” lifestyle. Yet this new “Phil” continued to daydream and be absorbed in his own thoughts. As his graduation from the military academy approached, he decided to apply to several colleges; as yet, he did not know what major or career he wanted to pursue. He graduated from Staunton Military Academy on June 3, 1958 and was on to a new adventure by the fall of 1958: attending college at Ohio State University.¹⁸

The College Years

Yet again, Phil had to start over. Gone were all of the friends he made at the military academy. He now had to forge new friendships and navigate the unfamiliar terrain of a college campus. His first year at Ohio State was more or less uneventful, as he could not find a degree that interested him. Still uncertain about his college goals into his second year, Phil decided to take some time off to do some soul-searching before his second semester began. He told his reluctant and at times critical parents that he was taking a trip down to Florida to see if he could find success as a singer. The trip and Phil’s objective lacked planning or strategy; he had no place to stay in Florida and no connections to find employment in the music industry. He also

¹⁷ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 22-23; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 29.

¹⁸ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 27; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 23, 24; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 4.

had little training as a singer and did not have an instrument or band to accompany his music. Although Ochs dreamed of being a musician, this first attempt at becoming one ended in failure.¹⁹

Phil arrived in Miami, Florida in late February and attempted to find a temporary job while trying to establish himself as a singer. Only days after his arrival, he was arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to fifteen days in a Miami jail. The sheriff, realizing that he was a mere kid down on his luck, gave him odd jobs such as washing his patrol car, to keep him away from the “real” criminals in the jail. While Phil washed the sheriff’s car, he was allowed to listen to music on a small radio. Even while confined by his minor jail sentence, he kept his dream of becoming a musician alive. Following his run-in with the law, Phil continued to look for jobs in Miami with little avail. He went to several clubs to perform, which promptly sent him away after discovering that he had neither instruments nor a band. After failing to earn employment at several clubs, Ochs found intermittent employment, such as washing dishes at a restaurant and selling shoes at a department store. Destitute and with a weakened ego, he went to a phone booth and called his mother in Ohio and asked for money to buy a Greyhound bus ticket to make the long trip back home. His two weeks in Florida had ended in misfortune.²⁰

By the fall of 1959, Phil was back in Columbus ready for another semester at Ohio State. Eager to return to college after his humiliating Florida, he left home to set up his apartment a full week before fall classes began. He filled his room with bold shots of Elvis, his music idol, performing at concerts and in his films *Love me Tender* and *Loving You*. As a music lover, Phil also brought along his small record player and his favorite record albums. He hoped that he

¹⁹ Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 4-5; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 32-34; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 27.

²⁰ Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 4-5; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 32-34; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 27.

would find someone at Ohio State who would share his love for music and might be willing to join him in forming a band. This dream came to fruition after a chance encounter with another student at Ohio State named Jim Glover.²¹

He met Jim while living in an off campus apartment with another student. Phil played his records all the time, listening to musicians such as Elvis, Faron Young, and Buddy Holly. This annoyed his roommate who preferred there be more peace and quiet in their apartment. Once Phil realized this, he responded mischievously by turning up the volume on his record player whenever his roommate was present. It was Phil's near constant music from his phonograph that peaked Jim's interest as he passed Phil's room en route to a study session for one of his classes. Jim walked through the opened door and listened to the music while Phil lay on his bed reading a magazine; Elvis' *Heartbreak Hotel* played over the speakers. Jim saw all of the pictures of Elvis in the apartment and asked where he found all of them. Phil responded offhandedly that he collected them from a variety of places, never taking his eyes off the magazine he read, unsure if Jim was a friend or a foe.²²

Jim asked Phil if he had ever listened to The Weavers or Pete Seeger, to which he replied no. However, Jim now had Phil's undivided attention. He could tell that Jim loved music as much as he did, appreciating not only the sound of the songs but their lyrical composition as well. Jim encouraged him to come down to his room and listen to some of his records. Impressed with Jim's taste in music, Phil asked him if he wanted to become his roommate, considering that

²¹ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 27-28.

²² Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 27-29; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 28, 33.

his previous one was moving out soon. The two agreed to move in together and for Phil, Jim became the only real friend that he made while at college.²³

Jim and Phil were inseparable, even signing up to take the same classes. When Jim went home to visit with his parents who lived near Cleveland Heights, he almost always invited Phil. Jim and his family introduced Phil to politics, something that Phil rarely, if ever, discussed while living in the Ochs household. His family was, for the most part, apolitical. The Glovers discussed politics and current events around the dinner table, often straying into topics that most Americans at that time would consider controversial. Their conversations ranged from discussing Fidel Castro to criticizing the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings. Following these visits, it was common for the roommates to stay up late into the night discussing politics, history, and current events. Ochs became so intrigued with politics and history that he began to read a variety of writings by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, Karl Marx, and Mao Zedong. Jim and his family helped to develop Phil's political consciousness and made him aware of pressing sociopolitical issues. This well-rounded introduction to politics proved influential in shaping his musical compositions later in his life.²⁴

Jim and Phil also talked at length about folk music, a genre of music that was experiencing a revival in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this time, Phil became an avid listener of the more politically oriented, left-wing folk songs of the 1930s and 1940s, a far cry from the country and Elvis records that he had previously favored up until this point. Jim, who played both banjo and guitar, often played and sang songs by folk musicians Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Before long, Phil purchased an assortment of their records as well. The roommates

²³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 27-29; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 28, 33; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters.

²⁴ Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 28-30; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 34-35.

played their folk records over and over and examined the intended meanings of the songs. Soon, Phil and Jim were singing folk songs together, hitting perfect harmonies. This once again stirred Phil's dreams of becoming a musician.²⁵

During their second year at Ohio State Jim bought a brand new Kay guitar, making a jealous Phil long for one of his own. The year 1960, an election year, marked an uptick in the roommates conversations about politics. Phil, in particular, was transfixed by the rising popularity of a fresh-faced Senator from Massachusetts running for the Democratic nomination for president—John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Seeing an opportunity to come into possession of a guitar, Phil bet fifty dollars on Kennedy winning the election for Jim's prized guitar. Jim, although admiring Kennedy, felt confident that the stodgy, yet more experienced, Vice President Richard M. Nixon would easily win the election over this rising newcomer. To Jim's surprise and Phil's joy, Kennedy won. Following his narrow victory in November, Phil came into possession of a new guitar and cajoled his disgruntled roommate into teaching him how to play. Phil proved to be a quick study; within a month he could play a few songs and began to write a few two-chord melodies. Before long, the two friends began practicing various routines to ready themselves for performing together as a band.²⁶

By early 1961, Phil and Jim had formed a band and called themselves The Singing Socialists. Their songs followed the style of other folk musicians such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger and the Weavers. Their performances consisted primarily of covers of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger's music, but the duo also performed some of their own original material. As Phil continued to develop his skills on the guitar, he wrote and composed; Jim provided the

²⁵ Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 28-30; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 34-35.

²⁶ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 35, 36; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 29, 30.

musical arrangements. Most of his songs carried a trenchant political message or included some type of satirical social commentary. The year 1961 was filled with a variety of gripping international events, ranging from the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the building of the Berlin Wall, to the growing tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Phil, who had finally committed to study journalism, started to write songs based on ideas that he derived from leading newspaper headlines; a trademark of his later career as a topical musician.²⁷

Evidence of Phil's strong political songwriting can be seen in one of his first songs titled "Bay of Pigs," which offered an angry condemnation of the U.S. role in the failed military mission. His second song, "Billie Sol," offered a more humorous and less angry message by lampooning Billy Sol Estes, a Texas millionaire connected to an extensive agricultural price-fixing scandal. However, not all of his compositions were political, he also had a playful side. For example, Phil sent a song to WERE, the radio station and Cleveland Indians outlet; he hoped that the team would use his song as their theme. Although Ochs received an encouraging letter back from the station that praised his "originality" and "fine spirit," the proposed theme never materialized into becoming the team's song. This attempt, although a failure, demonstrates that Ochs was not afraid to dream big.²⁸

In their early incarnation, the Singing Socialists played mostly at small venues and at parties thrown by some of their friends. After playing at a private party put on by an influential Republican family, Phil and Jim discovered that not everyone agreed with the somewhat controversial message of their songs. The family became angered with their song selection of songs and furiously demanded to know if they were communists. Following that incident, Phil

²⁷ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 36-39, 41; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 5-6; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 31, 33-34.

²⁸ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 38-41; Cohen, Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 34-35.

suggested to Jim that they rename their band something less controversial. Although their name changed, their music and message did not.²⁹

After their rebranding, they auditioned to play at the opening weekend of a coffeehouse in Cleveland called La Cave. They managed to get through half of their first song when the manager interrupted them and gave them the gig. The two hastily prepared for their first major performance the night before by compiling a list of their usual tunes, both covers and originals, and even threw in a new song to play. Phil told Jim that he would need to memorize and practice the song by tomorrow evening's performance. On the day of their concert, Phil went to pick up Jim who was at his parent's house. On his arrival, Phil discovered that Jim was upstairs in his bedroom still asleep. Annoyed, Phil woke him up and asked him if he had practiced the new song that they were to play. Jim, still groggy, mumbled that he had not even looked at the song since they agreed to play it.³⁰

Phil, infuriated that Jim had not put in the effort to practice before their big premier together, told him that he would never speak to him again and stormed out of his friend's house. Hoping to make amends, Jim went downtown and purchased two matching black cowboy shirts for the pair to wear during their performance. Still angry that his friend had let him down, Phil refused the shirt and told Jim that it was not worth the effort to even perform. He would not go on stage and appear unprepared or look like a novice; he had to look like a star. Even after

²⁹ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 38-41; Cohen, Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 34-35.

³⁰ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 35-36; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 40-41.

repeated insistence by Jim, Phil refused to go to their concert. That evening Jim performed alone and was promptly fired by the owners.³¹

About a week later, Jim called Phil to tell him goodbye. He decided that he had to drop out of school and go where the music industry was strong, if he really wanted to become a formal musician. In their short conversation, Jim told his friend that Greenwich Village in New York City attracted a lot of up-and-coming folk music talent. Phil, still angry that Jim blew their chance at La Cave, wished him well in his new pursuits. When Jim asked if Phil wanted to join him in New York, he replied with a terse, “No.” This marked the end of the short-lived folk outfit between the two friends, but not their friendship.³²

College Conflicts

Having started his journalism courses at Ohio State, Phil became increasingly active in the journalism fraternity on campus. His goal was to become the Editor-In-Chief for *The Lantern*. His efforts paid off when *The Lantern* became aware of his involvement on campus and signed him on as a reporter. Phil wrote on a variety of campus events, such as concerts, plays, and student affairs, but his favorite topics involved political issues. The stories he wrote for *The Lantern* were, at least initially, fairly average and straightforward news reports. To be closer to campus life, Phil moved from the apartment he previously shared with Jim into the Steeb Hall dormitory where many other journalism majors lived. Around the same time, he began writing for the campus humor magazine *Sundial*; a position he had earned due, in part, to his insatiable

³¹ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 35-36; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 40-41.

³² Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 35-36; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 40-41.

wit. The pieces that he wrote for the *Sundial* were often biting satirical and conversational. His engaging writing for both of the publications earned him strong praise.³³

Phil soon discovered that there was a limit to what he could say in print. As he became more comfortable in his position as a reporter, Phil gradually included more critical and political reports. This change in the way he wrote his articles is a reflection of his growing political consciousness. Before he began writing for the newspaper, *The Lantern* very rarely, if at all, ran articles that focused on divisive national issues, let alone ones that dared to question the status quo. As a result of his uptick in politically focused articles, the editors of the newspaper started screening his stories and warned him to tone down his commentary. The struggle between Phil's freedom of expression and the newspaper's censorship intensified when he, out of cheek, published a provocative pro-Fidel Castro article on April 27, 1961, just days after the failed U.S. led military invasion of Cuba, known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In it, he questioned the United States' involvement with Cuba: "We are told that Castro is an immense threat to our [the United States] security, but does this mean security for our lives or security for our ideas?" He then critiqued the media's coverage of the situation, noting, "Our papers are quick to preach how terrible the Castro government is, but how often do they criticize Salazar, Franco or Chiang Kai-shek?" Phil later wrote about the incident in the New York satirical magazine, *The Realist*. He stated that he wrote the pro-Castro article in *The Lantern* because he was both frustrated and "suffocated by the provincial patriotism" on campus. The only thing that "aroused the students to

³³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 31-33; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 35-37.

any level of mass action was when the school decided not to go to the Rose Bowl,” he later quipped.³⁴

After the incident, *The Lantern* pulled him from all stories that focused on political topics and reassigned him to covering school events, specifically writing reviews for concerts. This was due, in part, to the conservative nature of both the editors and the paper’s donors. Although *The Lantern* wanted to keep Phil on as a reporter due to his astute writing, they knew they had to silence his political opinions or possibly lose their wealthy donors. Though angered, Phil complied with their decision—after all he still had a good chance to be editor-in-chief of *The Lantern* during his senior year if he stayed with the newspaper. To continue his political writings, he started submitting letters to the editor of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the largest newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio, criticizing their editorials. The primary complaint that he levied at the newspaper was that reporters often jumped to conclusions in their editorials without understanding the broader context and history behind certain issues. This, he felt, was especially important with tensions growing between the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁵

Phil also formed his own newspaper, called *The Word*, while continuing to work for *The Lantern*. Unlike *The Lantern*, *The Word* focused solely on political issues and had opinion-based commentary. As the sole writer and editor for the newspaper, Phil stayed up late into the night looking at national news headlines; drawing his own political commentary from their reports to print in *The Word*. The circulation of his newspaper was limited, as he did all of the typing and

³⁴ Sonny Ochs, interview by Thomas Cody Waters, tape recording, 12 September 2013, Statesboro, Georgia; Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 36-39; Phil Ochs, “Narrow View,” *The Lantern*, April 27, 1961; Phil Ochs, “Revolt On the Campus: or How I Learned How to Love the Folk Scene and Stop Worrying About Music,” *The Realist*, June 1965.

³⁵ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 31-32; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 37, 39.

duplicating by himself. Although he had high hopes for *The Word*, it never gained a strong audience at the staunchly conservative Ohio State. No issues of his newspaper are known to have survived. After abandoning *The Word*, Phil recommitted himself to his classes. After all, he was about to graduate.³⁶

Phil continued to excel in all of his classes, especially his journalism classes, earning high grades. Yet, his struggle between freedom of expression and the newspaper's censorship made him reconsider college and rekindled his ambitions to become a musician. "What's the point in being a journalism major if they're not going to print what I say," he often asked himself. Despite this growing cynicism with journalism, he continued on into his senior year hoping that his ambitions of becoming the editor would come true. Although he put in a lot of hard work during his two years at *The Lantern*, the editorial board at the newspaper passed him over for a student Phil considered less talented. The editorial board was frank with Phil: his views were too controversial. This blatant disregard of his talent and his viewpoint was the final straw for Phil and his involvement with the newspaper. Rejected, Phil went back to his dorm in a furor. He decided that he would attend the journalism fraternity meeting that night to mull things over. To his shock, the meeting focused on the importance of the first amendment in journalism. Sickened by the blatant hypocrisy, Phil left the meeting, returned to his room, and began packing.³⁷

Embittered by the censorship he faced, Phil, in his senior year, decided to drop out of college after he "realized it was impossible to be true to... [his] convictions and still be a success in journalism." Music, he began to realize, could inform listeners of the events around them just

³⁶ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 31-33; Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 37; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 6.

³⁷ Sonny Ochs, interview by Thomas Cody Waters, tape recording, 12 September 2013, Statesboro, Georgia; Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography*, 6; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 37, Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 40-41.

as much, or even more than, newspapers. Music, unlike newspapers, offered much greater freedom of expression. Phil decided to join his friend Jim in New York, with whom he was once again on speaking terms; Jim had described Greenwich Village as the happening place for musicians who produced progressive, politically oriented songs. It was, from what he could gather, a musicians' paradise. He called his mother, informed her of his decision, and with only one term standing between him and graduating with his journalism degree in 1962, Phil left Ohio State and bought a one-way bus ticket to New York City. He humorously wrote in *The Realist*, "After leaving school, I knew that I had to do something that would pay a lot of money and wouldn't require too much work, so I became a protest singer."³⁸

³⁸ Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 45; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Phil Ochs, "Billy Sol Notes," *Broadside*, September 1962; Phil Ochs, "Revolt On the Campus: or How I Learned How to Love the Folk Scene and Stop Worrying About Music," *The Realist*, June, 1965.

CHAPTER 3

THE SINGING JOURNALIST: 1962-1965

Welcome to the Village

When Phil Ochs arrived in New York in 1962, he had all but given up his hopes of becoming a journalist, at least in the traditional sense. When he stepped off at the bus terminal, guitar in tow, he knew that he once again had to start anew. Although New York seemed daunting for the young musician, he felt that his adventures there would be far different from the ones he had experienced in Miami just a few years prior. He walked around Greenwich Village in awe, his head filled with the hopes of becoming as impactful of a musician like Woody Guthrie, who, by this time, was suffering from the debilitating effects of Huntington's disease.³⁹

Ochs quickly looked up his friend Jim Glover, he hoped for a place to stay until he earned enough money to get a place of his own. He also wanted to resurrect their failed Sundowners folk group, hoping that, with their selection of original songs, they would become the next big folk act in Greenwich Village. Glover's life had changed considerably since he left Ohio State University. He had a girlfriend, Jean Ray, with whom he established a folk duo known as "Jim and Jean." The couple invited him to live with them in their apartment in the heart of Greenwich Village. Ochs and Glover resumed their discussions of politics, newspaper headlines, and ideas for songs. Before long, Ochs found a girlfriend of his own, Alice Skinner, who lived in the same apartment complex as Ray and Glover. By April of 1962, Ray was expecting and the couple subsequently married. It seemed that everything was going well for Ochs in New York. Despite his failed attempts to establish himself as a musician in the past, he felt confident that he would be able to make a name for himself as a solo artist in the Big Apple—little did he know, his ambition would soon pay off. His arrival coincided with the increasing popularity of folk music

³⁹ Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 46-47.

and an increased desire by record companies to seek out promising new folk talent to meet popular demand.⁴⁰

The Greenwich Village neighborhood of Lower Manhattan became the heart of the thriving folk scene in the 1960s. The tradition of folk music in the Village can be traced back to the 1920s when innovations in mass media technology, such as radios and higher fidelity phonographs, allowed American consumers greater access to music. Record companies, seeing the high demand for music, distributed a wide variety of genres for consumers. Domestic and foreign traditional folk music, coinciding with an international trend that celebrated rural folk traditions of the past, became one of the most popular music genres of the 1920s. Traditional folk songs, often hundreds of years old, regained their popularity and became celebrated aspects of the American identity. It was also during this time that New York transitioned from sheet music publishing and became the center of the growing recording industry in America. Although the recording industry faced a downturn during the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression, the admiration and consumption of traditional folk music continued to flourish.⁴¹

The popularity of traditional music in the 1920s and 1930s inspired musicians in the 1940s and 1950s to fuse aspects of traditional music with modern song. As a result of this combination of old and new, a new phenomenon known as the folk music revival gripped the American music scene. Many of the early musicians of the folk music revival, such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, were connected to leftist political organizations within the United States like the American Communist and Socialist Parties. Melding politics with song, Guthrie and Seeger spoke out against the inequality faced by the disadvantaged and oppressed, and

⁴⁰ Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, 46-47, 56-57.

⁴¹ Stephen Petrus and Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30-33.

advocated for political reform. From the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the folk music revival ceased to be a figment of leftist politics and entered into the realm of American popular music. Although the messages remained the same, folk musicians reached new audiences due to the ever-expanding mass media and the endearing quality of their songs.⁴²

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Village became a hub for art and music. The Village's intellectual and artistic dynamism, along with its strong record industry, proved to be a major draw for individuals intent on pursuing serious careers as musicians. Folk music, in particular, dominated the music scene in New York City. Novice folk musicians from all across the nation made their way to the city to join the "scene" in search of their first record deal. In addition to Ochs, musicians such as Tom Paxton, Len Chandler, Patrick Sky, Judy Collin, and Bob Dylan arrived in the Village in the early 1960s. Greenwich Village also drew in poets, actors, and painters, becoming a bohemian and artistic haven. Folk-oriented record companies sent scouts to music venues in the neighborhood to search for promising new talent.⁴³

Markets for folk music continued to expand in the early 1950s due to a national growth in record sales driven by the increased purchasing power of the rising middle-class. College students and younger adults became the primary consumers of folk music during this period, a trend that continued into the 1960s. During the 1950s, folk oriented record labels such as Folkways, Vanguard, Elektra, and Riverside developed in New York to cater to the new American folk craze. In addition to the development of folk record labels, an outgrowth of folk music periodicals and magazines, such as *Sing Out!*, established in 1950, and the short-lived *Caravan*, established in 1957, generated interest in the genre by bringing it to the attention of American mass culture. Folk magazines provided an avenue for up and coming musicians to

⁴² Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 38, 54-55, 70.

⁴³ Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 97, 151.

highlight their songwriting abilities and demonstrate their political consciousness. Non-folk publications such as *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times* also helped introduce the folk scene to a broader audience. Reviews of Greenwich Village folk performances by *The New York Times*, primarily the ones published by critic Robert Shelton starting in the late 1950s, gave the New York folk scene nationwide exposure. No longer was talent from the Village a local product; Americans nationwide now read about the Village's talented musicians.⁴⁴

While in New York, Ochs wrote music prolifically and collaborated with a new mimeographed magazine called *Broadside*. Established in February of 1962 by husband and wife musicians Gordon Friesen and Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, *Broadside* developed out of the couples' dissatisfaction with *Sing Out!*, which they felt no longer printed as many protest of topical songs as they had in years past. Thanks to the financial support of Pete and Toshi Seeger, the first issue cost the couple only forty dollars to print and circulate. Within the next few years, the magazine gained acclaim both within and outside of folk circles. The success of *Broadside* was due, in part, to being established at the apex of the folk music revival, when many young musicians and songwriters journeyed to New York to be a part of the scene in the Village.⁴⁵

Broadside provided a medium for musicians to display their new compositions and to debate pressing sociopolitical issues and gave readers a forum to discuss topical, protest, and folk music. Although Friesen and Cunningham struggled financially and lived humbly in public housing, the veteran musicians continued to support young, up-and-coming musicians.

Broadside played an important role in the folk music revival by sponsoring and publicizing

⁴⁴ Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 70-71, 81, 91, 102; Dick Weissman, *Which Side Are You On?: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 96-97.

⁴⁵ Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; David King Dunaway and Molly Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

controversial, young musicians, whom commercial publications had rejected. Friesen, an emcee at Gerde's Folk City, looked for local talent and invited performers to their apartment to present their material. As these young artists sang into a tape recorder in their home, Cunningham transcribed their songs. After reviewing the artist's material, Friesen and Cunningham then decided which of their compositions would be published in *Broadside*.⁴⁶

Ochs formed ties with Friesen and Cunningham in late 1962 after Gil Turner saw him perform at Gerde's Folk City. Turner, a prominent folk musician in the Village at the time and co-editor of *Broadside*, invited him to their next magazine meeting. The couple took a liking to Ochs and became, according to his older sister Sonny, like surrogate parents who provided a supportive environment for his songwriting. The couple praised the newcomer in the September 1962 issue of *Broadside*, writing that "21 year old Phil Ochs is of the excellent new crop of young topical songwriters" and that even after "starting a year ago, he has written a dozen good ones [songs]." *Broadside* also introduced Ochs to other promising young topical songwriters in New York, such as Bob Dylan, who published songs in the magazine, and allowed him to learn from their material. The magazine specialized in publishing topical songs, often juxtaposing the lyrics of the artists' compositions with news clippings of the headlines to which they were responding. At the time, *Broadside* was the most prolific publisher of pacifist and antiwar songs—more so than their folk magazine rival, *Sing Out!* Ochs embraced topical songs, as the subgenre incorporated his love for music, journalism, and activism. Topical songs are unique in that they are primarily based on current sociopolitical issues drawn from newspaper headlines. The purpose of these songs is not only to inform but also to motivate the average person to engage in the "struggle" to change their society for the better. In addition to contributing thought

⁴⁶ Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 222.

provoking editorials on current issues and the music scene, Ochs published more than seventy-three of his topical songs in *Broadside*, more than any of his contemporaries.⁴⁷

In issue twenty-two of *Broadside*, published in March of 1963, Ochs described the “Need for Topical Music” over other forms of media. Before the advent of modern news outlets, such as televisions and newspapers, he argued, topical singers served as reporters who traveled around and the spread news through their music. He argued that “one good song with a message can bring a point to more people than a thousand rallies.” He also challenged other musicians who did not embrace topical songs. Lamenting his fellow musicians, he wrote: “I have run into some singers who say, ‘Sure, I agree with most topical songs, but they’re just too strong to do in public. Besides I don’t want to label myself or alienate some of my audience into thinking I’m unpatriotic.’” Those singers who “compromise or avoid the inherent truth,” he argued, “[mislead] themselves and their audience.”⁴⁸

Ochs’ songs came primarily from conventional newspaper headlines. Fashioning himself as a “singing journalist,” his early compositions are representative of his melding of journalism and politics with song. He realized conservative nature of newspaper, which shied away from controversial topics due to the fear of being labeled as radical. Every headline, he argued, “is a potential song, and it is the role of an effective songwriter to pick out the material that has the interest, significance, and sometime humor adaptable to music.” He observed that there was a forced conformity and fear of controversy that pervaded the 1960s media. In addition to this

⁴⁷ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 57-58; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Phil Ochs, “Billy Sol Notes,” *Broadside*, September 1962; Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 221-222, 240-242; Phil Ochs, “Revolt On the Campus: or How I Learned How to Love the Folk Scene and Stop Worrying About Music,” *The Realist*, June 1965; Phil Ochs, “The Need for Topical Music,” *Broadside Magazine*, March 1963; Dunaway and Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of America’s Folk Music Revivals*, 12, 119.

⁴⁸ Phil Ochs, “The Need for Topical Music,” *Broadside Magazine*, March 1963.

critique, he satirized the newspapers as telling the “whole truth and nothing but the cold war truth” to help their advertisers and thereby themselves.⁴⁹

Ochs read *The New York Times* on a regular basis and kept up with national and international headlines. Although he saw the medium of traditional journalism as limiting, he trusted *The New York Times*’ range of reporting more than other papers. Music provided a medium that allowed him to offer political commentary without the restrictions that bound the mainstream press. As Ochs scanned newspaper headlines for potential song material, one issue in particular stood out from the rest: the growing United States military involvement in Southeast Asia. In October 1962, he published a song called “Vietnam” in *Broadside* that coincided with the deployment of American military “advisors” to South Vietnam.⁵⁰

Ochs penned “Vietnam” long before the general public was aware of what was unfolding in Southeast Asia. The lyrics were much more critical than what other artists were writing at the time: “U.S. soldiers are a-dyin’ / while their mothers sit home cryin’ / It’s a crime how they’re dyin’ over there.” He later rallied Americans to “stop the fighting over there” by “[stirring] up action over here.” The closing lyrics featured Ochs singing, “Drop your congressman a line / let him know what’s on your mind / and the crisis will be over over there.” Accompanying the song is a *Newsweek* article from September 24, 1962. The article, like most print media articles, only provides a small snippet about the ongoing situation in Vietnam. It is a brief piece that describes

⁴⁹ Phil Ochs, “The Need for Topical Music”; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters.

⁵⁰ Phil Ochs, “The Need For Topical Music”; Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Phil Ochs, “Vietnam,” *Broadside Magazine*, October 1962.

General Maxwell D. Taylor encouraging the United States to act in Vietnam by providing the nation with “arms, men [soldiers]... and money.”⁵¹

Ochs condemned U.S. Cold War strategy, namely its involvement in foreign nations’ affairs, and warned against the growth of militarism. As U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia increased during the early 1960s, Ochs began to compose songs that frequently ridiculed U.S. involvement. It is also during this time that he became more of an activist figure by performing at various peace benefits in the Village and participating in marches and antiwar demonstrations. Though Ochs spoke out against U.S. policy in Southeast Asia early in his music career, many of his contemporaries took a cautious approach in their songwriting.⁵²

Bob Dylan, one of Ochs’ contemporaries, took a vague approach to speaking out, at least directly, against the war effort. For example, Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” released on his 1963 album *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, though described as being an antiwar song, is much more ambiguous and abstract than Ochs’ straightforward “Vietnam.” Although there are additional songs on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, such as “Masters of War” and “Talkin’ World War III Blues,” that critique the growing military industrial complex of the U.S. government, none of them directly address or condemn U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Unlike Dylan, Ochs’ compositions made direct references to the actual events that could not be misconstrued by listeners. Ochs continued his musical “reporting” on the U.S. involvement in Vietnam on his debut studio album and revisited this contentious topic throughout his music career.

The Debut

For Ochs, 1963 proved to be a defining year for becoming a nationally recognized topical musician. Ochs received an invitation to play at the Newport Folk Festival in Newport, Rhode

⁵¹ Phil Ochs, “Vietnam,” *Broadside Magazine*, October 1962.

⁵² Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 242.

Island in the summer of that year, an honor bestowed to only the brightest and most promising folk musicians in the nation. As the preeminent venue for folk artists to perform their songs and teach others about songwriting and composition, Ochs quickly accepted the invitation. The festival, which faced cancellation in 1960 due to lack of awareness, was set to unveil its strongest lineup of talent in July of 1963. Among those scheduled to perform at the festival with Ochs were other promising young folk artists such as Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, and Joan Baez. These young new performers would come to be known as “Woody’s Children” because they were carrying on in the tradition of Woody Guthrie, who helped spur the folk music revival in the U.S.⁵³

Ochs’ performance at Newport took place on Sunday afternoon, July 28, before an audience of five hundred people. Pete Seeger hosted the session, titled “Topical Songs and New Songwriters,” which also included performances by Jim Garland, Peter LaFroge, Tom Paxton, The Freedom Singers, and Bob Dylan. Prior to Ochs taking the stage, Seeger calmed the boisterous crowd by saying, “I don’t want to deny the next singer at least his two songs, and you’ll wish when you heard him that there was a lot more time for him too: Mr. Phil Ochs!” Ochs first performed three songs; the first two were pro-Civil Rights compositions (“The Ballad of Medgar Evers” and “Talking Birmingham Jam”), and the third was the “John Birch Society.” After the crowd praised his performance, he came back to the stage for an encore and sang “The Power and the Glory.” Ochs was so excited and fatigued by his performance that he collapsed as

⁵³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 66.

he left the stage. His performance at Newport gained him respect among fellow “folkies;” it also brought him national attention and acclaim by average folk listeners.⁵⁴

During 1962 and 1963, Ochs also performed at a variety of smaller venues, such as Gerdes’ Folk City, in the New York. Like most budding folk artists, he sang at coffee houses, cafés, and small nightclubs. Coffeehouses and cafés served as gathering places for residents of the Village, and owners quickly capitalized on the artistic offerings of their clientele by offering performing spaces for their art, poetry, and music. Intellectuals and artists came together in coffeehouses; they exchanged ideas and perfected their stage presence. Artists also sought these venues to build name recognition and put themselves “out there” in the folk circuit. Robert Shelton, of *The New York Times* viewed one of Ochs’ performances in the Village in 1963. He noted, “Mr. Ochs, who prefers to be called a topical singer rather than a folk singer...has become a sort of musical editorial writer.” He added that Ochs’ satire “is trenchant and... controversial” and that he strove to write his songs to “meet his self-imposed topical deadlines” to ensure that his songs were relevant.⁵⁵

One of Ochs’ frequent venues was the Gaslight Café, a coffeehouse located on 116 MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. A former coal cellar, Gaslight Café was a small, intimate venue that held both poetry readings and folk concerts. Although fire codes declared that the maximum capacity of the building was 110 people, it frequently held as many 130 attendees in the tiny, dimly lit basement space. Some of the early performers at the Gaslight Café

⁵⁴ “Workshop Attendance Proves Depth of Folk Interest,” *Newport Daily News* (Newport, Rhode Island), July 29 1963; *Phil Ochs: There But For Fortune*, directed by Kenneth Bowser (2011; New York City, NY: First Run Features, 2011), DVD; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 67-68.

⁵⁵Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 57-58; Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival*, 162; Weissman, *Which Side Are You On?: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 103; Robert Shelton, “New Folk Singers in ‘Village’ Demonstrate a Pair of Trends,” *The New York Times*, June 11, 1963.

included poets Allen Ginsberg and Ted Joans and folk musicians such as Roy Berkeley and Tom Paxton. Paul Rothchild, a producer from Elektra Records, discovered Ochs at the Gaslight Café in late 1963, was impressed by his passionate songwriting, and offered him a recording contract. Elektra Records, according to Ochs, was “the only company who would record me when I came out, therefore I have a great respect for them, because they would put out controversial records, whereas Vanguard [Records] was very standoffish in their whole outlook.” At the time, Elektra sought to tap into the promising new talent in the Village in the hopes of landing the next big star folk star. Ochs released his first formal solo album, ironically titled *All the News That’s Fit to Sing*, through Elektra Records in early 1964. The title plays off *The New York Times* motto “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” He achieved his recording contract and released his first album during the peak of the folk music revival’s popularity—a major feat for a newcomer to the folk scene.⁵⁶

A concept album, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* centered on leading news stories and issues from the early 1960s. It highlighted both Ochs’ lyrical talent and his ability to translate newspaper articles into thought-provoking topical songs. The album examined a variety of controversial sociopolitical topics from 1962 to 1963. The song “Talking Cuban Crisis” discussed the Cuban Missile Crisis that occurred just two years before the album’s release. Another song, “Too Many Martyrs,” decried the callous murder of the Mississippian-born civil rights activist Medgar Evers by Byron De La Beckwith, a white supremacist. This particular song, which decried Southern racism and violence, became one of the many anthems of the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, there are tracks that describe the sinking of the USS *Thresher*

⁵⁶ Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 165, 188; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 76; Phil Ochs and Gordon Friesen, *Broadside, Vol. II, Interviews with Phil Ochs*, recorded 1968, (Folkways, 1976); Weissman, *Which Side Are You On? : An Inside History o the Folk Music Revival in America*, 89; Phil Ochs, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964).

(“The Thresher”), the world’s worst submarine tragedy, condemn the low wages faced by blue-collar workers (“Automation Song”), and pay tribute to the ailing Woody Guthrie (“Bound For Glory”). The song, “Power and the Glory,” a patriotic anthem celebrating American culture and society, became one of Ochs’ most cherished and covered compositions. Two of the most provocative and critical songs, though, focused on the increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam.⁵⁷

“Talkin’ Vietnam” provided strong criticism of the Vietnam War. Significantly, this was Ochs’ first mass distributed protest song explicitly about the war. In “Talkin’ Vietnam,” he set the scene for American involvement, “Sailing over to Vietnam / Southeast Asian Birmingham” by comparing the situation to the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that resulted in the murder of innocent young African American girls. The next lines offer a critique of the U.S. government and popular press in downplaying the war as merely training, “Well training is the word we use / Nice word to have in case we lose / Training a million Vietnamese / To fight for the wrong government and the American way.” The song, again, ridicules the term “trainees” in a later verse, “Well, the sergeant said it's time to train / So I climbed aboard my helicopter plane / We flew above the battle ground / A sniper tried to shoot us down / He must have forgotten, we're only trainees / Them Commies never fight fair.” Ochs also comments on the blatant hypocrisy and brutality of the U.S. actions in Vietnam, “We burned some villages down to the floor / Yes, we burned out the jungles far and wide” and “Threw all the people in relocation camps / Under lock and key, made damn sure they're free.” Ochs also emphasized the number of troops on the ground, possibly trying to stress that this “training” was a bigger deal than what the U.S. government and the popular press were willing to admit, “And 15,000 American troops, give or take a few / Thousand / American / Troops.” He also emphasized how much this military

⁵⁷ Phil Ochs, *All the News That's Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964).

involvement was costing, singing, “Said, ‘If you want to stay you'll have to pay / Over a million dollars a day, but it's worth it all, don't you see?’”⁵⁸

Another song that commented on the growing U.S. war in Vietnam is “One More Parade.” The song starts by describing a “parade” of soldiers marching off to war, “Hup, two, three, four, marching down the street / Rolling of the drums and the trampin’ of the feet / General salutes and mothers wave and weep / Here comes the big parade.” Although critiquing war, Ochs celebrates the strength and courage of the young enlistees, “So young, so strong, so ready for the war / So willing to go and die upon a foreign shore / All march together, everybody looks the same.” The song is melancholy and ominous in its description of the parade, “Cold hard stares on [the soldiers] faces so proud / Kisses from the girls and cheers from the crowd / And the widows from the last war cry into their shrouds.” Although it is not as direct of a critique of the war as “Talkin’ Vietnam,” the song “One More Parade” is more poignant. In this plea to his listener’s morality, he questions the need for another war.⁵⁹

“Talkin’ Vietnam” and “One More Parade” underscore not only Ochs’ catchy lyricism but also his keen understanding of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Like many of his later anti-Vietnam War songs, he heavily criticized U.S. foreign policy and supported the bravery of the young soldiers putting their lives in danger. Although this album covered social issues like many other folk albums of the era, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* went much farther in its social commentary. It was commercially risky to have such sharply critical songs, especially for a new artist; however, Ochs valued the lyrical content and message of his songs over any widespread commercial success. Having had his viewpoints suppressed while at Ohio State University clearly influenced his strong and uncompromising social and political commentary in his music.

⁵⁸ Phil Ochs, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964).

⁵⁹ Phil Ochs, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964).

This bullishness, though a turnoff to some, helped to set him apart from other folk acts and led many listeners to appreciate his point of view.⁶⁰

Initial sales of the album were limited primarily to New York, though sales expanded once he began to tour and achieve greater critical acclaim. Critical reception of Ochs' first album was mixed; some critics panned him for sounding "untrained," while others praised him for being a compelling songwriter. *Variety* complimented the album, noting that it provided "a fine example of the use of modern folk music for the purpose that it was originally styled, the making of social comment." In a separate article, the magazine also admired his concerts and wrote that he "is drawing good crowds on the coffeehouse circuit," and that his "power is in awareness of the world situation and [his] ability to express it with both humor and wit in musical verse." Critic Josh Dunson of *High Fidelity* argued that the album was as "important in 1964 as Bob Dylan's 'Freewheelin' album was in 1963." An article from *Vogue* magazine also praised Ochs' strong songwriting on the album, "Ochs has not achieved Dylan's commercial success, nor simulated his 'mad poet' image, [but] his songs, some of which he recorded in an album *All The News That's Fit to Sing*, are more melodic than Dylan's, the humor dryer, and the words as pungent." The Los Angeles' *City Press* published a more critical review of the album: "[Ochs'] songs are lacking imagination and taste and tend to be overly emotional." The most popular songs of 1964, such as The Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "She Loves You" and The Supremes' "Where Did Our Love Go" and "Baby Love," were love songs. Because the album dealt with complex societal issues, it limited some of its mainstream appeal. This did not worry Ochs too much as he had once mentioned that it "never ceases to amaze me how the American

⁶⁰ Phil Ochs, *All the News That's Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964); Phil Ochs, "The Need For Topical Music," *Broadside Magazine*, March 1963.

people allow the hit parade to hit them over the head with a parade of song after meaningless song about love.”⁶¹

Despite some criticism, the music on the album resonated with average American listeners. Lucy Foster from Connecticut wrote to *Broadside* about Ochs’ music in 1963, a few months before the release of his debut album. Some of the songs she heard Ochs perform at a Thirdside concert in 1963 later appeared on *All the News That’s Fit to Sing*. She wanted Ochs to know that “his topical songs are more than a record of today’s happenings and questions.” His songs indicated “his sincere belief in what he is saying” and that audience members continue to discuss his songs’ meanings long after his concerts ended. In addition to this praise, an eighteen-year-old male reader to *Broadside* wrote that after buying *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* on a whim, he became “entranced with Phil’s work” even though his friends were initially a “little complacent.” After he played the song “The Power and the Glory” from the album for his friends, however, they went “Ochs crazy” too. These comments go to show that average listeners were more concerned with the issues Ochs’ songs discussed than the music critics. It is possible that folk listeners began to appreciate Ochs’ lyrics because of Dylan’s gradual disillusionment with political songwriting, which started in 1964.⁶²

Dylan released his third and fourth studio albums, *The Times They Are a-Changin’* and *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, in 1964. Although released in the same year, these two albums could not be more thematically different; *The Times They Are a-Changin’* covered sociopolitical topics

⁶¹ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 77; “Phil Ochs,” *Variety*, February 26, 1964; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 84-5; Betty Rollin, “A New Beat: Topical Folk Singers, Their Songs,” *Vogue*, September 1964, 83, 130; “The Hot 100 - 1964 Archive,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1964/hot-100>; Phil Ochs, “The Need For Topical Music,” *Broadside Magazine*, March 1963.

⁶² Lucy Foster, “Letters to Broadside,” *Broadside Magazine*, July 1963; Barry Brown, “Letters to Broadside,” *Broadside Magazine*, July 20, 1964.

while *Another Side of Bob Dylan* demonstrated his growing shift away from politically-fueled lyrics. Dylan met Ochs' release of *All the News That's Fit to Sing* with indifference, arguing that Ochs was not a musician but a journalist who focused on retelling current events. Ochs said of Dylan's comments in a 1968 interview with *Broadside* that "he was super arrogant then [in 1964], and he used to walk around and try to categorize all of the other writers in terms of himself, of really how good he was." Their musical disagreement eventually erupted in a verbal argument during a limousine ride that ultimately led to Ochs being physically removed from the vehicle. Although Dylan rejected Ochs' topical songwriting, the two remained friendly artistic rivals throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s.⁶³

Although seemingly minor, the disagreement between Ochs and Dylan is enigmatic of a growing schism within the American folk scene focused on whether to maintain its activist, politically charged, heritage or seek a larger consumer base. Paul Wolfe, a young songwriter and college student, wrote a letter to *Broadside* in December of 1964 that stated that Ochs, when compared to Dylan, was "much more deeply committed to the *Broadside* tradition—to news and politically oriented songs, most of which are focused on specific events." Ochs, himself, maintained that it was the duty of folk musicians, especially topical songwriters, "to crystalize the thoughts of young people who have stopped accepting things the way they were." He also felt that topical songwriters should "reinforce their [young people's] disillusionment so they'll get more involved and *do [sic]* something—not out of general rebellion (because they hate their

⁶³ Dunaway and Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals*, 153; Phil Ochs and Gordon Friesen, *Broadside, Vol. II: Interviews with Phil Ochs*, recorded 1968, (Folkways, 1976).

parents or something) but out of real concern for what's happening—or not happening [in their country].”⁶⁴

Notably absent from the two consecutive “Sing-in For Peace” concerts held at Carnegie Hall on September 24, 1965, which featured performances by Ochs, Pete Seeger, Len Chandler, Tom Paxton, and Joan Baez, was Dylan, who continued to distance himself from his earlier activism. By 1965, Dylan had shifted to the new folk-rock genre and began writing more “accessible” and less politically charged compositions. Dylan irately said in an interview with *Newsweek* on September of 1965 that he had “never written a political song,” and added, rather cynically, “Songs can’t save the world. I’ve gone through that [experience].” As Dylan adopted a more mainstream sound and moved away from political themes, musicians like Ochs filled this void of politically oriented folk. As the situation in Southeast Asia grew more serious, the need to speak out on U.S. involvement became more urgent. Ochs, as a singing journalist, took it upon himself to inform Americans of the seriousness of the escalating war.⁶⁵

Vietnam and the Vietcong

Ochs released *All the News That's Fit to Sing* just as the U.S. government escalated involvement in Vietnam. To understand the United States’ role in Vietnam, it is necessary to begin with a brief description of Western, specifically French, influence in Southeast Asia. France was one of the first nations to have direct exchanges with what today is known as Vietnam. These interactions occurred as early as the seventeenth century due to the Christianizing efforts of French Jesuit Missionaries such as Alexandre de Rhodes. Arriving in 1627, Rhodes and other Jesuit missionaries presented Southeast Asia to French religious and

⁶⁴ Paul Wolfe, “The ‘New’ Dylan,” *Broadside*, December 20, 1964; Betty Rollin, “A New Beat: Topical Folk Singers, Their Songs,” *Vogue*, September 1964, 83,130.

⁶⁵ Petrus and Cohen, *Folk City: New York and the American Folk Revival*, 242-245; Dunaway and Beer, *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals*, 151.

commercial leaders as a utopia of lost souls and immense wealth. Seeing Southeast Asia as the ideal place to expand the Catholic message outside of Europe, Rhodes propagated this idealized image of Southeast Asia to further Jesuit missions. Compelled by Rhodes' propaganda, French businessmen and clergymen formed an organization in 1664, known as the Society of Foreign Missions, to advance Christianity and to expand French interests in Asia. That same year, French leaders created the French East India Company further opening up the "exotic" Southeast Asian country to Western influence.⁶⁶

Following the French Revolution and Napoleonic Era that resulted in a downturn in religious expansion in Vietnam, missionaries renewed their efforts to spread Christianity. By the mid nineteenth century, the French navy also sought to assert influence in Vietnam, often allying with missionaries to strengthen their common goals in the region. Following the Opium War of 1841, which resulted in the English opening up China to trade, the French government saw Vietnam as an advantageous asset for commerce. On May 15, 1883, the French Parliament voted to enforce a protectorate on Vietnam to secure their colonial efforts. By 1887, France created the Indochinese Union officially incorporating Tonkin (Northern Vietnam), Annam (Central Vietnam), Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam), and Cambodia as French colonial territories.⁶⁷

After World War I, a strong Vietnamese nationalist movement developed to challenge French colonization. The prominent leader of this movement was a pamphleteer and activist named Nguyen Sinh Cung, better known as Ho Chi Minh. At the age of twenty nine, Ho arrived at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 hoping to hand U.S. President Woodrow Wilson a statement, modeled after Wilson's doctrine of self-determination, which requested a constitutional government and democracy for Vietnam. Despite never delivering the statement to

⁶⁶ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Adult, 1983), 59-62.

⁶⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 67-68, 85-88.

Wilson, as he intended, Ho attracted the attention of French politicians. Ho remained the most prominent figure of French resistance into the 1920s and 1930s, traveling to China and the Soviet Union and becoming more radical in his push for Vietnam's independence.⁶⁸

The 1940s marked a profound change for Vietnam and for Ho's push for independence. As Germany invaded France in 1940, Japan took control of French occupied Vietnam. Disguised as a Chinese Journalist, Ho reentered Vietnam in early 1941, crossing the country's border with Southern China. This marked his first return to his native country after spending over thirty years abroad organizing and campaigning for Vietnamese independence. After meeting with a diverse group of Vietnamese natives, Ho declared war on both the Japanese and the French and formed a communist led organization called the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, later known as the Vietnam Independent League and Vietminh. From 1940 until 1945, both the French and Japanese governed Vietnam, although the French were merely a puppet government of the Axis Alliance. On September 2, 1945, in Ba Dinh Square, thousands attended a speech by Ho in which he declared Vietnam independent. Borrowing the line, "We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" from the American Declaration of Independence, Ho hoped to gain the support of the United States government.⁶⁹

This declaration came only four months after Harry S. Truman assumed the U.S. presidency upon the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. In May of that year, shortly after becoming President, Truman told French foreign minister Georges Bidault that the United States supported French rule in Indochina. France, after Japan's retreat in late 1945, attempted to reinstate its colonial authority over Vietnam, resulting in a continued fight with the Vietnamese who sought

⁶⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 120-126.

⁶⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 126-127, 135-140.

independence. Seeing France as a key ally and as a deterrent to communist expansion into Vietnam, the U.S. backed their efforts to maintain Vietnam as a colony. Ho's attempt at swaying the U.S. into an alliance with Vietnam, by emulating the American Declaration of Independence, failed to materialize. What Ho achieved was more a symbolic gesture, sending a clear message that Western Powers would no longer be seen as the legitimate ruler of Vietnam.⁷⁰

Because containment of communism was the cornerstone of American foreign policy, the U.S. government increased its commitment to support France's colonial rule following the end of World War II. On March 12, 1947, President Truman gave a speech to a joint session of Congress that laid the foundation for what would become the Truman Doctrine. The Truman Doctrine, exemplifying the coming Cold War, was a key aspect of American foreign policy that offered both economic and military assistance to nations facing the threat of authoritarian governments, specifically those associated with Soviet Communism. The Truman administration believed in that if Indochina succumbed to communism, other nations would follow, like falling dominos. The U.S. funded the French effort to retake Vietnam, which by virtue of doing so, carried out their strategy of containment.⁷¹

On January 20, 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in as President and inherited the troubling situation of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. During his presidency, Eisenhower continued Truman's policy of containment and escalated American involvement in Southeast Asia. By 1954, the U.S. had spent \$2.5 billion to assist French troops in Vietnam, hoping to thwart a communist takeover of the country by Ho's Vietminh. This amount of U.S. aid is notable because it totaled more than the amount of monetary assistance France received to rebuild its economy from the Marshall Plan. It is also significant because American aid

⁷⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 137.

⁷¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 137, 169.

accounted for eighty percent of French expenditures on continuing the war in Vietnam. When French forces, finally accepting the war as a lost cause, withdrew from Vietnam in 1954 following the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. government undertook the role of containing communism in North Vietnam, and would remain in Vietnam for two subsequent decades.⁷²

In 1954, the U.S. government helped establish the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which protected their efforts to combat communism in Southeast Asia. The Eisenhower administration deployed one thousand “specialists” in Vietnam in 1955 and, from 1955 to 1960, invested over \$1 billion to stabilize the nation. It was in 1955 that the anti-Communist, Ngo Dinh Diem became the President of South Vietnam, standing in opposition to the radical message of communist Ho Chi Minh. Although not the U.S. government’s handpicked choice to lead South Vietnam, Diem became a key ally in their efforts to keep communism at bay in the region. By the early 1960s, Diem faced stiff criticism from the South Vietnamese people for his suppression of civil liberties and corruption. As a result of these frustrations, five battalions of South Vietnamese troops descended on Diem’s residence and attempted a coup on November 11, 1960. Although the coup failed, this challenge to Diem’s power revealed the continued volatility of Vietnamese society into the early 1960s.⁷³

John F. Kennedy, who was elected as president in 1961, heralded what appeared to be a new age in American politics. What he became, however, was a cold warrior not at all dissimilar from his immediate predecessors. One of his first acts as president was the approval of \$41 million in military aid. The Vietcong, a new nationalist organization that surpassed the Viet Minh after they lost prominence in the early 1960s, increased their guerilla attacks in South Vietnam. To prove his dedication to battling the communist threat, Kennedy more than doubled

⁷² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 137, 170.

⁷³ Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 58-66.

the U.S. “advisor” presence in the region. At the start of Kennedy’s presidency in 1961, there were less than one thousand U.S. advisors stationed there. By the end of 1961, the Kennedy Administration had over three thousand advisors in South Vietnam and by the end of 1962, nine thousand.⁷⁴

Limitations of the Cold War Press

The media’s coverage of the Cold War from 1955 until around 1967, in many ways reflected a general consensus regarding the Cold War. Works such as *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* by Daniel C. Hallin and *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* by Clarence R. Wyatt explore how early reports of American interaction echoed Cold War-era fear and hyper-patriotism and how the U.S. government actively suppressed information regarding Vietnam. Following World War II, the growing threat of Soviet Communism spurred the U.S. to take a more active role in containing this “threat” both domestically and abroad. As the U.S. government sought to contain communism in the world through economic and military interaction, paranoia swept the U.S. home front.⁷⁵

The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), active from 1945 to 1975, is one of the more notable examples of how the panic surrounding the Cold War gripped not only American politics but also American society. With the establishment of HUAC in 1945, the U.S. government began investigating Americans who were allegedly traitors to America and had connections to “Communist” organizations or to the Communist Party in the United States. One of the more notable actions of the committee was its investigation into “subversive content” in films. It sought to purge Hollywood, the most popular and influential outlets of American

⁷⁴ Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 71, 87.

⁷⁵ Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-5; Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 14-17, 21-23.

entertainment, of those who they deemed too “controversial.” In addition to creating a Hollywood blacklist, which irrevocably destroyed the careers of many in the film industry, HUAC also began to make anti-Communist films that spread the Cold War policy of the U.S. government.⁷⁶

The Second Red Scare, a socio-political campaign that occurred from roughly 1947 until 1957, guided at the end by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy is yet another significant example of how the ideology of the Cold War pervaded American society. During a dinner at the Republican Women’s Club in Wheeling West Virginia on February 9, 1950, McCarthy made a bold claim from a plagiarized Nixon speech of having a list of 256 communists in the State Department. Although the number of alleged communists changed in the days that followed, McCarthy gained not only the attention of the American people but also the authority to expose alleged communist espionage and subversion within the American government. Although his dubious claims came under scrutiny by the mid-1950s, the mentality that prompted this dramatic persecution of otherwise innocent individuals continued to pervade the consciousness of American society into the 1960s. As both of these actions by the U.S. government at the time demonstrate, the country was not at war with just the communists; it was also at war with itself.⁷⁷

The ideology of the Cold War, according to Hallin, had the effect of linking foreign policy with the necessity for national security, thus insulating foreign policy decisions by the U.S. government from any sort of political debate. This, he argues, coincided with the emergence of “professional” or “objective” journalism, which focused on relaying simple facts to readers rather than editorializing the information. By relying on straightforward facts, early news reports,

⁷⁶ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 15-16, 21-23.

⁷⁷ Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*, 14-18.

Hallin argues, were highly susceptible to manipulation from the political establishment. Although more “objective,” he argues that reports relied heavily on information “through which official influence flowed.” This, however, does not mean that U.S. government officials and journalists did not agree on “broad outlines of the Cold War consensus” as Hallin cautions, rather it shows that they believed in the fundamental need for U.S. containment of communism.⁷⁸

Similar to Hallin, Wyatt states that the “legitimate security concerns of the postwar era hardened the national-security mentality” of the U.S. government and made the disclosure of foreign policy decisions difficult to share with the press—at least initially. Various acts by the U.S. government such as the McMahon Act and Executive Orders 10-290 and 10-501 allowed there to be greater government secrecy than had ever been in place up until that point. Wyatt, corroborating Hallin, argues that the press began to develop journalism into a “profession” by the Cold War era and that this professionalism restricted what the papers could publish. He argues that the professionalization of journalism caused the press to “work cooperatively to achieve total victory.” This relation was reinforced by the fact that “controversial” reports would be regarded “at the best as unfashionable, [and] at the worst traitorous” by the U.S. government.⁷⁹

Both authors agree that that efforts to manage what the mainstream press reported reached new heights with the Kennedy administration. As intervention in Vietnam escalated, the Kennedy administration took active measures to curtail American media coverage of American involvement; as a result, the American people remained largely unaware of the growing conflict. In the wake of diplomatic blunders, such as the U2 incident and the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Kennedy Administration sought to show stronger presence in Vietnam. The Kennedy administration renewed the nation’s commitment to SE Asia even as it attempted to downplay

⁷⁸ Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam*, 24-25.

⁷⁹ Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 15, 22, 49-49.

the situation in Vietnam. When Kennedy proved unable to prevent Vietnam from entering the sphere of domestic politics, he manipulated the media to shape the story.⁸⁰

In November of 1961, for example, the White House, the State and Defense departments and the U.S. Information Agency, ordered all American troops in Vietnam to engage in limited cooperation with reporters. In February of 1962, the U.S. government's official communication service in Saigon, Cable 1006, carried a message from the State and Defense departments and the U.S. Information Agency which further limited reporters from obtaining information outside official government outlets. The cable ordered American personnel not to engage in interviews or imply this was an American war. Additionally, the cable encouraged the restriction of casualty information unless it came from official sources. Along with these strict orders, U.S. forces began to unload ships carrying military equipment in isolated locations away from where reporters frequented. Even as the Kennedy administration increased its troop presence in Southeast Asia, it continued to tell the press of the "limited" nature of U.S. involvement and denied it being (or becoming) a U.S. led war.⁸¹

Although American newspapers faced limited access to information and increased oversight and manipulation by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the newspapers also self-screened what they printed about the war. Scholarship supports the notion that 1960s newspapers intentionally chose to print less controversial and negative reports about the war effort—at least early on. The Cold War effectively changed how information was released and what commentary could accompany those reports. This mentality by the popular press is what soured Ochs on journalism and led him to pursue a career in music. Using his skills as a

⁸⁰ Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 91; Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam*, 27-29, 36-37.

⁸¹ Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 91-93; Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam*, 40.

journalist and his knowledge of politics, Ochs synthesized newspaper headlines to get a more complete picture of the war effort.

Early U.S. Press Coverage on Vietnam

During the early stages of the Vietnam War, the popular press faced limitations on what information their journalists could access about the war effort. The press faced even tighter control from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations over what they could publish. But what did the media have to say about Vietnam? For this period of Ochs career, articles from *The Atlanta Constitution*, *The New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* were consulted for the years of 1961 and 1963, the years leading up to the debut of his first studio album. These leading newspapers from the 1960s were selected for their reputability on a national scale and their regional perspectives—the South, the North, and the Midwest, respectively. Additionally, these newspapers have very different ideological perspectives. While *The New York Times* holds a more liberal perspective, *The Atlanta Journal* holds a more conservative perspective. *The Chicago Tribune* takes a more centrist, or moderate, perspective although its editorials take a more conservative stance. Despite these regional and ideological differences, all three of these newspapers covered American military involvement in Vietnam similarly. Their coverage is indicative of the approach the popular press took towards covering the U.S. war effort.

From 1961 to 1962, newspapers referred to the U.S. presence in Vietnam as an “advising” mission; they emphasized the limited nature of U.S. involvement despite clear indications that a war was looming. Newspapers fell into one of two categories of war reporting. The first were descriptive news reports that lacked detailed commentary and analysis; they merely told the news “as it was.” *The Atlanta Constitution* featured an article that represents this type of reporting in its April 7, 1961 issue. It discussed the increased troop presence in the

“Pacific” area, citing the deployment of an additional seven thousand U.S. armed forces overseas, yet it did not mention that this was the beginning of a U.S. led war in Vietnam. This could have, perhaps, been unclear at the time, but with such a large increase in troop presence it was naïve not to consider the implications of an increased U.S. commitment in the region. The troops, the article stated, were to only engage in “limited [ground] wars.” This was typical of the reports that fall within the descriptive category—they stressed that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was limited. Devoid from these types of articles were any kind of analysis or interpretation of the war situation—they were straightforward reports and provided only fragmentary information regarding the situation. Ochs addressed the apathy present in mainstream coverage by offering blunt commentary on the war in his song “Talkin’ Vietnam.”⁸²

The other type of coverage from this period included optimistic reports that stressed the need for continued U.S. action in Vietnam. Similar to the descriptive reports, this type of coverage of the war maintained that U.S. interaction was limited. One notable difference is that these reports promoted a positive image of U.S. involvement and began to support interaction in Vietnam. Take for example, an article titled, “US Heavily Committed in Struggle to Save South Vietnam” from the July 22, 1962 issue of *The New York Times*. It referenced US troops as “advisors” training the South Vietnamese military, maintaining that this was not a “war.” The article deemphasized the role of US troops in an attempt to sell the idea that the South Vietnamese were still the ones fighting their own war. One of the sub-headings is also brutally optimistic, stating that the United States’ involvement was “turning the tide.” Ochs believed these troops were not merely advisors and “specialists” as mentioned in this article; they were part of a prelude to bigger things. These types of reports emphasized the idea that the war was the Vietnamese peoples war; American involvement would be limited and temporary. When

⁸² Hale Montgomery, “U.S. to Shift 7,000 GIs Overseas,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1961.

comparing this article to the lyrics written by Ochs in *Broadside* in October of 1962, just three months after this article was published, it is jarring how the popular press had “whitewashed” and promoted a fatally optimistic image of the war.⁸³

These supportive and optimistic reports from 1962-1963 also promoted the myth that U.S. soldiers and South Vietnamese troops got along amiably. *The New York Times* article “US Heavily Committed in Struggle to Save South Vietnam” from 1962 shows the promulgation of this fatally optimistic relationship by the mainstream press. The article presented a congenial relationship between the US troops and South Vietnamese, “If a Vietnamese gives you a hard time all you have to do is smile at him and he just can’t help smiling back. Then the beef is over,” said an “advisor” to a *New York Times* reporter. Another article titled, “GIs Annoyed By Politics in Viet Nam War” from the October 20, 1963 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* continued to emphasize the friendly relationship between the South Vietnamese and the U.S. soldiers, maintaining “by and large, the United States soldiers seem to consider his Vietnamese counterpart a good all-round fighting man.” Despite issues with the South Vietnamese soldiers’ politics, the *Chicago Tribune* reporter argued that the South Vietnamese army “has many good and dedicated officers who want to prosecute the war as vigorously as possible.” Later the reporter wrote that, “from my own observation, [the South Vietnamese soldiers] seem to get along well with their American advisors in a free-and-easy friendly way.” He also mentioned that, following a visit to a village near the Cambodian border, Vietnamese children shouted to American soldiers, “You my pal.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Robert Trumbull, “US Heavily Committed in Struggle to Save South Vietnam,” *The New York Times* July 22, 1962; Phil Ochs, *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* (Elektra, 1964); Phil Ochs, “Vietnam.”

⁸⁴ William Ryan, “GIs Annoyed By Politics in Viet Nam War,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1963.

This collection of articles is representative of why Ochs saw the necessity to speak out on the war in Vietnam. Through his dissection of these national headlines, he was able to determine that these reports were gravely optimistic. He also knew, from his experiences at Ohio State, that the early 1960s press promoted the views of the establishment. As these cheery headlines about the war in Vietnam continued, Ochs grew frustrated. It was his duty as a “singing journalist” to tell the American people about the true story in Vietnam. This frustration came to fruition in his second album.

CHAPTER 4

I AIN'T MARCHING ANYMORE: 1965-1967

The Singing Journalist Turns Activist

“As President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to the American people to report that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply.” On August 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson, less than a year after assuming the office, informed Americans in a televised address that the North Vietnamese attack on the *USS Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin required immediate military action. Johnson used the event to propel the U.S. into further combat in Vietnam, pushing for Congress to accept the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which declared that the president can take “all necessary steps, including the use of armed force” to deter foreign aggression. The resolution, unbeknownst to the American general public, was drafted several months before the Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred. The Johnson administration merely waited for an auspicious time and situation to escalate the war in Vietnam to a new level. By August 7, just five days after the incident occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin, the U.S. Congress passed the resolution by an overwhelming majority, thereby increasing U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. This resolution became the only authorization passed for the war in Vietnam, as no formal declaration of war was ever made. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed President Johnson to dramatically increase the American troop presence in Vietnam, which further signaled that this war would last much longer than originally expected.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Report on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident,” The Miller Center, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3998>; “Red Viets Fire on U.S. Ship: Destroyer Maddox Escapes 3 Torpedoes,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 1964; “Age of Nondeclared Wars,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1964.

Following the passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, an upsurge of activism against the war swept through the entire nation, especially among college students. On April 17, the group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) held their first march on Washington D.C., drawing about 25,000 student protestors to the nation's capital. Not only did the SDS march become the first national anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Washington D.C., it also became, at the time, one of the single largest antiwar demonstrations in American history. Less than a month later, a few hundred UC Berkeley students initiated a march on the Berkley Draft Board. The May 5 demonstration at UC Berkeley culminated in a black coffin being presented to the draft board's staff and forty male students burning their draft cards. By November of 1965, another peace organization, known as SANE, led another protest in Washington D.C., with a total of 30,000 participants, surpassing the number of protestors at the SDS's demonstration just six months prior. Before congregating at the Washington Monument to hear speeches by Coretta Scott King and Benjamin Spock, the participants walked around the White House peacefully with signs that read, "Stop The Bombing" and "War Erodes the Great Society." While anti-Vietnam War activism increased from 1964 to 1965, Ochs busily worked on his second album—one that took a harder stance against the escalating U.S. war effort.⁸⁶

Ochs, having mutually separated from Alice due to the pressures of his near constant performing and recording, renewed his effort at creating a strong follow-up to *All the News That's fit to Sing*. For his second album Ochs pushed himself to write more politically charged songs that condemned the Johnson administration's efforts in Vietnam. With his second album, Ochs began to feel more comfortable with his songwriting abilities, stating in an interview with *The Village Voice*: "I can tell I'm just beginning to write decent stuff." He continued: "As I reach

⁸⁶ Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17-18; "Students at UC March on Draft Board," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1965.

new levels, I can begin to fathom what Dylan's songs are all about... I'm beginning to read poets like Brecht." It seemed that Ochs was in the midst of another transformation, one that signaled that his music was adopting a stronger, less compromising, political message. No longer was Ochs just a singing journalist offering commentary on the war; he was becoming an activist.⁸⁷

Released February of 1965, *I Ain't Marching Anymore* provided some of his strongest material against the Vietnam War. Unlike his debut album, *I Ain't Marching Anymore* was more provocative as it encouraged the growing antiwar movement. The songs on the album were more critical and focused on larger issues rather than specific news stories. For example, he discussed the plight of the jobless and poor ("That's What I Want To Hear"), the cruelty of the death penalty and the electric chair ("The Iron Lady"), the importance of union organization ("Links on the Chain"), and the evils of racism in the American South ("Talking Birmingham Jam" and "Here's to the State of Mississippi"). There is even a song on the album that honors the bravery of U.S. sailors who serving in combat ("The Men Behind the Guns"), "Let's drink a toast to the admiral / And here's to the captain bold / And glory more for the commodore / When the deeds of might are told." Despite all of the topics Ochs "reported" on, the Vietnam War remained the dominant topic in his music.⁸⁸

He discussed his Vietnam protest songs in an interview with *Broadside* in early October of 1965. He told Sis Cunningham and Gordon Friesen that, "something in my psyche has to feel the responsibility of what goes on in Viet Nam." Later he mentioned that when "we [the U.S.] bomb North Viet Nam I... [am] disgusted and repelled." He admitted "I do laugh about it [the war in Vietnam], and say well it must be a joke, [because] it's so ridiculous... but then I write a very serious song about it." The main motivation for his protest songs, he stated, was that "I get

⁸⁷ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 90-93.

⁸⁸ Phil Ochs, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, (Elektra, 1965).

so repelled by certain things...[that] my response comes out in the form of song.” He then added that the “one thing that helps carry me through [life]... [is] this close identification with the problems of the world where things like Viet Nam go on.”⁸⁹

The album’s title track, “I Ain’t Marching Anymore,” is particularly important, as it quickly became the anthem for the antiwar movement. In the opening lines of the song, Ochs satirized the fact that America was born out of war. He sang, “Oh, I marched to the Battle of New Orleans / At the end of the early British war, / A young land started growin’ / The young blood started flowin’ / But I ain’t marching anymore.” The song also described U.S. involvement in other wars, specifically the Indian War, the U.S. Civil War, and both world wars. Ochs provided this anecdote to show how bloody American history has been, and how destructive and unnecessary the wars were. War is also characterized as being initiated by the old and fought by the young: “It’s always the old to lead us to the war, / Always the young to fall.” Ochs also questioned whether fighting is necessary at all, adopting a strong pacifist message: “Now look at all we won with a sabre and a gun, / Tell me, was it worth it all?” Each time Ochs asserted the chorus, “I ain’t marching anymore,” it became more and more meaningful and personal, calling listeners to stand up and declare that they are not marching for another unnecessary war.⁹⁰

Another song from the album, “Draft Dodger Rag,” conveyed Ochs’ growing antiwar sentiments. Although the song is humorous and upbeat, it deals with a very serious issue: how desperate young men were to avoid being drafted. Due to the light and highly satirical nature of the song, Ochs promoted a more positive image of draft resistance than was present in the media. The song begins by describing the average “red-blooded” American young person, “I’m just a

⁸⁹ Phil Ochs, “An Interview With Phil Ochs,” *Broadside Magazine*, October 15, 1965.

⁹⁰ Sonny Ochs, telephone interview by Thomas Cody Waters; Phil Ochs, *I Ain’t Marching Anymore*, (Elektra, 1965).

typical American boy / From a typical American town / I believe in God and Senator Dodd / And in Keeping' old Castro down.” In making his song’s character “average,” Ochs made the song instantly relatable. After this, the song mentions how the young man wanted to “fight,” but after he was drafted he feels the dread and harsh reality of fighting in a war: “And when it came my time to serve / I knew better dead than red / But when I got my old draft board / Buddy this is what I said.” As a result of this sudden realization, the young man goes through a whole host of excuses to prevent him from being drafted to Vietnam, “Sarge, I’m only eighteen, I got a ruptured spleen / And I always carry a purse / I got eyes like a bat, and my feet are flat / My asthma’s getting worse.” What Ochs satirized is the variety of excuses used by men who wanted to avoid the draft, having the young man argue that he was too young, has a physical ailment, is homosexual, has poor vision, and has flat feet. Other excuses include, “goin’ to school” (a reference to the provision that exempted full-time students from military service until they had completed their education) and needing to water a rubber tree plant (which was grown in Vietnam during French occupation). Ochs’ portrayal of draft resisters was light hearted; they were patriotic Americans who simply refused to fight.⁹¹

Although more successful than Ochs’ first album, *I Ain’t Marching Anymore* was not a runaway success when compared to other hits from 1965. Popular “top 40” songs from 1965 included pop hits such as the Beatles’ “I Feel Fine,” the Supremes’ “Come See About Me,” and the Temptations’ “My Girl.” Ochs had more positive reviews from this album, although there was hesitancy by the general public to accept his controversial message. *Billboard* featured the album in its “folk spotlight” of its March 27, 1965 issue. The review asserted, “Phil Ochs has become the master of the topical folk songs and he sings with a flair that stirs listeners.” It also stated that his “repertoire covers the racial situation, capital punishment, war and sundy [sic]

⁹¹ Phil Ochs, *I Ain’t Marching Anymore*, (Elektra, 1965).

other topics that bother thinking people today.” A reviewer from *Record World* wrote that Ochs “seems to respond to the violence of the everyday world [in this album] and implies that anyone who doesn’t concern themselves deeply is apathetic and worthless.” His album also received a positive review from the *Denver Post*, though the reviewer questioned its broader appeal, “Mr. Ochs is still marching, against war, against intolerance, against the South, and nearly everything else that troubles people today, but you have to be in tune with this kind of music to like it.” Even though he did not achieve a chart topper from this album, the album had a profound protest message. The song, “I Ain’t Marching Anymore” quickly became one of his signature tracks. Ochs himself commented on the title song of the album stating, “The fact that you won’t be hearing this song over the radio is more than enough justification for the writing of it.”⁹²

Coinciding with the release of his second album in 1965, Ochs immersed himself in the antiwar movement, becoming more even critical of the war. He attended the “End the Vietnam War” demonstration at Haverford College that year and performed in front of thousands of Ohio State students at an antiwar rally organized by the Free Speech Front. His most notable involvement with the antiwar movement was his participation with the May “teach-ins” at Berkeley organized by the Vietnam Day Committee (VDC). After the insistence of Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist*, Jerry Rubin, an antiwar leader, invited Ochs to participate in the event. Ochs gladly accepted their invitation and broke off all of his commercial engagements in late May to perform at the teach-in.⁹³

⁹² “The Hot 100 - 1965 Archive,” *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1965/hot-100>; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 91; “Folk Spotlight – *I Ain’t Marching Anymore*,” *Billboard*, March 27, 1965; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 99; Sonny Ochs, interview by Thomas Cody Waters.

⁹³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 99.

For three days, he performed a short selection of his songs following speeches by politicians and activists who spoke out against the war. His experience at Berkeley further shaped his growing activism; he knew that his music spoke to, and for, the antiwar movement. Following his performances at the VDC teach-in at Berkeley, he sought to go to every anti-Vietnam War event on college campuses that he could. He frequently gave up paying gigs to participate in various campus demonstrations. Despite Ochs' efforts to draw positive attention to the antiwar movement, the popular press became uniformly against it from 1965 to 1966. This marked a significant effort by the popular press to dispel the rising influence of the antiwar movement.⁹⁴

“Changes”

Around the time Ochs' second album debuted, the national news media changed the way it covered the war in Vietnam. The popular press increased its coverage of the war and became fiercely supportive of the Johnson administration's commitment to U.S. involvement. Additionally, the papers attacked those who challenged/opposed the war effort. As the antiwar and anti-draft protest grew by 1965, President Johnson stated he was “dismayed” by the anti-draft movement. Johnson also promised action by the Justice Department to investigate prominent anti-draft organizations as alleged “communists.” Other cabinet members echoed President Johnson's sentiments. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach stated that there were without a doubt “communists” involved in the movement. Bill D. Moyers, the White House Press Secretary, remarked to the press that “even well-meaning demonstrators can become the victims of communist exploitation.” Newspapers gave disproportionate coverage to the administration's agenda and promulgated the myth of communist affiliations in antiwar groups.

⁹⁴ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 99.

This section contrasts how the press viewed draft resisters as “enemies” with Ochs’ more positive and understanding outlook.⁹⁵

Because draft resisters “threatened” the success of the war, many newspapers spread the administration’s myth that they were either communists or hated America. An article from the October 19, 1965 issue of the *New York Times* entitled, “Draft Protestor Is Seized By F.B.I. for Burning [Draft] Card,” provides an excellent illustration of this type of coverage. David J. Miller refused to be drafted and burned his draft card in front of an audience, declaring that he believed that the draft was immoral. Miller, a college graduate, was the first person to be arrested under the federal law banning the burning of draft cards. Officials arrested him when he stopped at a service station to repair his flat tire whilst traveling with the Catholic “peace crusade.” Although this report does not seem pro-war at first, it is in the continuation of the article, a few pages later, which reveals evident contempt towards Miller. It is within the subheading, which is a continuation of the main story, that a prominent sign of pro-war sentiment is displayed, “Draft Card *Foe* Seized in Card Burning.” The article had, in effect, labeled Miller as being a part of the “others”—those who are “against America.” While this article does not directly condemn Miller, the subheading reveals hostility against Miller; Miller was not a “patriot,” he was an unpatriotic “foe” of the United States and of the war effort. Interestingly, the article also noted that Miller was wearing a “ban-the-bomb pin,” possibly making a subtle mockery of it. Newspapers argued that protests such as this provided “fuel” for Chinese and Soviet rhetoric against the United

⁹⁵ Robert B. Semple Jr. “Johnson Decries Draft Protests; Presses Inquiry,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1965; “Draft Protestor Is Seized By F.B.I. For Burning Card,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1965; Phil Ochs, *I Ain’t Marching Anymore*, (Elektra, 1965).

States. Therefore the mainstream press suggested that the antiwar demonstrations were, in action, “aiding” the enemy.⁹⁶

In addition to labeling antiwar and antidraft protestors as un-American, the mainstream press also painted antiwar protestors as being “dirty.” For instance, conservative political pundit William F. Buckley Jr. referred to antiwar protestors as “young slobs” whose “prancing protests” challenged America’s “commitment to a beleaguered people” in South Vietnam. Even liberal humorists like Art Buchwald said that the “demonstrators are unwashed and uncombed.” He argued: “If we clean up our demonstrators there would be no objection to their demonstrating.” Even though Buchwald was supportive of their right to protest, he still reaffirms the stereotype that the antiwar protestors are grubby “rabble-rousers.” These stereotypes served to marginalize the protest movement and reassert the necessity of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.⁹⁷

The national press into 1966, a year after the release of *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, maintained that the war was steadily improving; thus the mainstream media attempted to sway readers to continue supporting the war in Vietnam. Editorials emphasized that victory was eminent when in reality the war was far from over. An editorial in *LIFE* suggested that the war was going so well that there would be a “quiet end” to the war by 1967. In the editorial, Hedley Donovan, the editor-in chief of Time Inc. which owned *LIFE*, argued that for “all the war’s strangeness and difficulty, and for all the dangers, and uncertainties ahead, our side is doing fairly well.” He added that the war would not end “around a conference table but in a quiet withdrawal.” Later, he dismissed the notion that the U.S. is “bogged down” in Asia, rather he

⁹⁶ “Draft Protestor Is Seized By F.B.I. For Burning Card,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1965; “Protest Top News For Press in Peking,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1963.

⁹⁷ William Buckley, Jr., “The Intellectual Dishonesty Of the Viet Demonstrators,” *The Atlanta Journal*, April 22, 1965; Art Buchwald, “Rabble-Rousers and Beatniks,” *The Atlanta Journal*, April 23, 1965.

suggested that the U.S. is “deeply, inescapably *involved* [sic] with Asia and have been for decades.” The *Saturday Evening Post* also ran an article in its June 1966 issue that maintained the “win at all cost” mindset. Joseph Alsop contended in his editorial, “Why We Can Win in Vietnam,” that if Americans “looked at this war’s military aspect without regard to such political factors as instability in Saigon, or hesitancy in Washington to give full backing to Gen. Westmoreland, you have to conclude that the situation is full of promise.” He also stated that America “needed courage... and resources” to win and that with “method and determination... [the] little war can be won in... South Vietnam.” These articles are representative of the “win at all cost” mentality of the mainstream press that all but dismissed the calls for the war’s end by antiwar protestors.⁹⁸

How relevant is “Draft Dodger Rag” in relation to the events happening during 1965 and 1966? The United States passed a federal law that banned the burning of draft cards in 1965. Additionally, consider that the Johnson administration continually lowered the draft requirements to drag young men into fighting a war that grew worse with every passing day. The December 24, 1965 issue of *The New York Times* also ran an article that described the Defense Department and Selective Service reclassifying the Selective Service requirements in 1965. As a revision to the previous standards, the new draft requirements incorporated more than 800,000 individuals who had previously failed mental or physical evaluations. In “Draft Dodger Rag,” Ochs portrayed the average draft dodger as an America-loving patriot who simply refused to fight in an unnecessary war. Ochs gave a prominent voice to those who resisted the draft, many of whom had little power, and helped to satirize how unjust and unnecessary the war was.

⁹⁸ Hedley Donovan, “Vietnam: The War is Worth Winning,” *LIFE* magazine, February 25, 1966, 27-28; Joseph Alsop, “Why We Can Win in Vietnam,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 4, 1966, 86.

Compared to the press coverage at the time, Ochs' music brought attention and depth to the draft issue, specifically why it was reasonable for draftees to resist.⁹⁹

Rather than admitting the faults with the war, as Ochs did in his musical reporting, the mainstream press continued to advocate for U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Ochs, along with other antiwar activists, continued to fight to end America's involvement in the war. His music is important as it gave a different interpretation than what the mainstream press was willing to print. As an independent "singing journalist," Ochs was able to offer a more nuanced interpretation of the war in Vietnam. As the war raged on, and the war effort deteriorated, Ochs thought of a clever way to end the conflict—by encouraging listeners to declare it to be over. The act of declaring the war over, he thought, would rouse the Johnson administration to end the war.

"The War is Over"

Ochs continued his activist voice on his next album, *Phil Ochs in Concert*, which he released on Elektra Records in 1966, his last album with the record label that started his career. Although the album included songs from live concerts, also incorporated some studio-recorded songs. Topical songs such as "Bracero," which decried the cruelty faced by Latino and Latina migrant workers in the U.S., "Cannons of Christianity," which criticized organized religion, and "Love Me, I'm a Liberal," which satirized how some liberals say they want to take progressive action but rarely do, are emblematic of his increasingly political songwriting. Other songs such as "I'm Going to Say It Now" and "When I'm Gone" stressed the importance of free speech and engaging in social action. Another song, "There but for Fortune," described how a person or, as mentioned in the last verse, a country can start off young and free and can become corrupted over time. The song became one of Ochs' most well-known compositions. Ochs, who wrote

⁹⁹ Jack Raymond, "Draft Seeking to Tap Pool Of 2 Million Rejected Men," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1965; Phil Ochs, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, (Elektra, 1965).

“There but for Fortune” in 1963, first released the song on the compilation album *New Folks Volume 2*, which featured a collection of original songs by Ochs, Eric Anderson, Lisa Kindred, and Bob Jones. On her 1965 folk album *Joan Baez/5*, Joan Baez covered “There but for Fortune,” turning it into a hit single which peaked at the number fifty on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Baez’s cover of “There but for Fortune” earned her a Grammy Award nomination for “Best Folk Recording” in 1965. The success of “There but for Fortune,” particularly under Baez in 1965, is a testament to Ochs’ superb songwriting skills, but it also shows the lack of recognition he received by the recording industry that celebrated more accessible performers.¹⁰⁰

Although he did not have any direct anti-Vietnam War songs on the album, Ochs did include a song on *Phil Ochs in Concert* that condemned U.S. military intervention abroad called “Cops of the World.” The song starts by humorously describing how quick the U.S. was at reacting militarily to incidents it did not approve of, “You’d better watch what you say, boys / Better watch what you say / We’ve rammed in your harbor and tied to your port / And our pistols are hungry and our tempers are short.” The song also subtly critiques American consumerism, “Our boots are needing a shine, boys / Boots are needing a shine / But our Coca-Cola is fine, boys / Coca-Cola is fine / We’ve got to protect all our citizens fair / So we’ll send a battalion for everyone there / And maybe we’ll leave in a couple of years.” Though it is not a direct criticism of the Vietnam War, the song makes several allusions to the war such as “We’re hairy and horny and ready to shack / And we don’t care if you’re yellow or black” and “We’re the Cops of the World / And dump the reds in a pile, boys / Dump the reds in a pile.” Like Ochs’ direct condemnations of the Vietnam War on his last album, his indirect assessments of the war effort were biting in their reproach. Despite Ochs’ seeming shift away from writing protest songs about

¹⁰⁰ Phil Ochs, *Phil Ochs in Concert*, (Elektra, 1966); Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 111; Phil Ochs, *New Folks Volume 2*, (Vanguard, 1964); Joan Baez, *Joan Baez/5* (Vanguard, 1964); “Chronology,” *Joan Baez Website*. <http://www.joanbaez.com/chronology.html>.

Vietnam, he continued to involve himself with antiwar demonstrations on campuses and be a vocal critic of the war unlike Dylan, who had already distanced himself from the movement.¹⁰¹

Billboard released a fairly positive review of the album that stated, “Phil Ochs comes across well with folk fans and the college crowd.” Later in the review *Billboard* wrote that his new compositions “express distress at war, the plight of the bracero, Santo Domingo and policemen.” Although the album broke into *Billboard*’s top 150 and sold well, there were no singles released from the album. He hoped that one day he would receive the greater recognition that he deserved as a songwriter, musician, and activist. This desire to appeal to a more popular audience is evident on his fourth album, *Pleasures of the Harbor*.¹⁰²

Recorded and released in 1967, *Pleasures of the Harbor* marked a profound change in Ochs’ style, as he shifted to a more commercial and melodic sound. By this time, Ochs had signed with A&M Records, having left Elektra. As a result, he received a copious amount of publicity from the company that allowed him to participate in a cross-country promotional tour. A&M had also recruited a record producer to assist Ochs on his new album. Orchestral arrangements, banjos, and a tack piano pervaded the album; Ochs was no longer tied to his acoustic roots.¹⁰³

Even though Ochs maintained his social critiques on the album, they were toned down, with an emphasis being placed on more social rather than political issues. In fact, there are no direct anti-Vietnam War compositions on this album. *Billboard* featured Ochs in their “folk spotlight” for *Pleasures of the Harbor*. In the review, the *Billboard* staff wrote that this album

¹⁰¹ Phil Ochs, *Phil Ochs in Concert*, (Elektra, 1966).

¹⁰² “The Hot 100—10/9/1965,” *Billboard*. <http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1965-10-09>; “Folk Special Merit-Phil Ochs in Concert,” *Billboard*, April 23, 1966.

¹⁰³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 111, 125, 134.

presented a “slightly different Phil Ochs... one with more than just a guitar on numbers.” They add that the album is “very hip musically” and that Ochs was still a “protestor de luxe [sic].” Initial sales of the album were strong, although there was controversy surrounding the song, “Outside of a Small Circle of Friends.” The song included references that marijuana is “more fun” than consuming a beer, though Ochs used the lyrics metaphorically. As a result of the misinterpretation, some radio stations refused to give it airtime. Despite this, “Outside of a Small Circle of Friends” reached number 119 on the *Billboard* “Hot Prospect” list.¹⁰⁴

It was not until the 1968 release of *Tape from California* that Ochs returned to direct Vietnam protest music. The entire album was recorded in a week and filled with songs that Ochs had conceived while traveling and touring. He said that the songwriting in the album involved a combination of lyricism and politics. For this album, Ochs returned to his acoustic roots, while keeping some of the orchestration featured in *Pleasures of the Harbor*; he wanted to find an ideal balance between the two. Critical reaction to *Tape from California* was fairly positive; it was better received than *Pleasures of the Harbor*. Reviewers praised Ochs for staying true to his protest roots in this album by unveiling societal “hypocrisy.” A review from the Associated Press praised Ochs in *Tape from California* and wrote that he was a master lyricist who provided a detailed picture with only a few lines of lyrics. *Billboard* wrote, “Ochs bids for a top chart with his most powerful package so far.” It adds that he is a “fine composer... [who] mixes a warm, credible voice with brilliant lyrics and memorable melodies.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 139-140; “Folk Spotlight – *Pleasures of Harbor*,” *Billboard*, November 4, 1967.

¹⁰⁵ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 156; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 185-187; “Album Reviews – *Tape From California*,” *Billboard*, July 20, 1968.

Two songs from the album dealt directly with the Vietnam War, “White Boots Marching in a Yellow Land” and “The War is Over.” In the song “White Boots Marching in a Yellow Land,” Ochs continues his critique on the US presence in Vietnam, “Train them well, / the men who will be fighting by your side / And never turn your back if the battle turns the tide / For the colors of a civil war are louder than commands / When you're white boots marching in a yellow land.” In the lyrics Ochs referenced the South Vietnamese soldiers who were trained by U.S. troops to fight the communist Vietnamese in the North. He also suggested that the tide was turning in the war (the U.S. was losing), and that civil war could not be stopped by U.S. military action there. Ochs also described the harsh abduction and interrogation techniques of the U.S. military on alleged “communist” Vietnamese and suggests that it was a waste of time, “Blow them from the forest and burn them from your sight / Tie their hands behind their back and question through the night / But when the firing squad is ready, they'll be spitting where they stand / At the white boots marching in a yellow land.” There is also a clear declaration from Ochs that the war was a lost cause, “The comic and the beauty queen are dancing on the stage / Raw recruits are lining up like coffins in a cage / We're fighting in a war, we lost before the war began.”¹⁰⁶

Undoubtedly the most profound and ambitious song on the album is, “The War is Over.” Ochs opened the song by commenting on the sheer fantasy of the situation in Vietnam, suggesting that it was all like a movie gone awry. Though the war still raged around Ochs in 1968, the mere statement of saying that the “War is Over” was a powerful assertion for the time. The song helps the listener imagine how much better the world could be without the war—by simply declaring the war is over, it could be “over.” Ochs believed that the United States was on the verge of destroying itself by continuing the war, “So do your duty, boys, and join with pride /

¹⁰⁶ Phil Ochs, *Tape from California* (A&M, 1968).

Serve your country in her suicide / Find the flags, so you can wave goodbye / But just before the end even treason might be worth a try / This country is too young to die.” But Ochs remained hopeful that the United States could overcome its destruction stating that the nation is far “too young to die.” Ochs could also be subtly playing off the fact that the men fighting the war effort were too young to have died. The song ends with a clever and optimistic statement, again, reiterating that the war could be undone by simply declaring it was over, “You only are what you believe / I believe the war is over / It's over, it's over.” In these lines Ochs called listeners to join him in ending the war.¹⁰⁷

The Critical Press

By the end of 1967, the war in Vietnam was showing signs of failure. This was reflected in the songs of Ochs and in the popular press at the time. By 1967, media coverage of the war changed dramatically. It adopted a more cynical voice, similar to the one Ochs expressed since the very early stages of the war. The media no longer promoted an optimistic view of the war situation; reporters realized that the war was deteriorating rapidly. Finally the popular press observed what Ochs had observed in the early 1960s—that Vietnam was a war in which the United States’ should not have embroiled itself.

Newspapers at this time began to focus on the lack of progress during the war and the increased monetary cost and death toll. The headline of a *New York Times* article from August of 1967 is representative of this new, more critical nature of the popular press, “Vietnam War Shows Signs of a Stalemate Despite Increasing US Commitment.” In the opening paragraph of the article, there are obvious signs of contempt with the war that were not present in the articles examined from the early to mid-1960s. Take, for example, that the author wrote, “A little more than two years ago, on July 28, 1965, President Johnson committed the United States more

¹⁰⁷ Phil Ochs, *Tape from California* (A&M, 1968).

decisively than ever to the war in Vietnam... [deploying] 50,000 more American troops to this stricken corner of Southeast Asia.” As described by the author the war was “not going well” and “[v]ictory was not close at hand” and that “[i]t may be beyond reach.” The Johnson administration, the author believed, was negligent in saying that the war was merely a “stalemate” and not a failure. The war also marked “the most frustrating conflict in American history” and that warfare there “careened along, week by bloody week, through wet seasons and dry, through two Christmas cease-fires, through peace feelers and escalations.” This is reminiscent of Ochs critiquing the cost of war in “Talkin’ Vietnam” from *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* from 1964, a full three years before the publication of this article.¹⁰⁸

An editorial from the November 18, 1967 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* reiterates the notion of a more critical press in the late 1960s. The editorial stated, “there appears to be a definite change in popular feeling about the war in Vietnam.” This, the writer argued, stands in contrast to “a year or two ago, [when] anybody who opposed the war got a distinct feeling of loneliness, and the general view seemed to be that... we all had to fall in behind the leadership of the president.” The Vietnam War, the author argued, “is Johnson’s mistake, and, through the power of his office he has made it a national mistake.” Like Ochs, the popular media began to see past the rhetoric of the Johnson administration and see the war as a lost cause. No longer was the media promoting the “win at all cost strategy” it had advocated just a few years prior.¹⁰⁹

It was also in 1967 that the Johnson administration shifted its outlook on the war in Vietnam. The February 3, 1967 issue of *The Atlanta Constitution* quotes President Johnson as saying that the U.S. would consider “‘almost any step’ by Hanoi to end the war in Vietnam.” Johnson maintained that the U.S. was ready to “give... prompt and serious consideration” to

¹⁰⁸ R. W. Apple Jr. “Vietnam: The Signs of Stalemate,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 1967.

¹⁰⁹ “Changing Views on Vietnam,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 18, 1967, 90.

peace talks—a dramatic change from his prior statements to continue the war and achieve victory. With the situation in Vietnam deteriorating, Johnson and his administration realized that they could no longer continue the war. The article mentioned that Johnson faced “intense questioning” by the press. The writer, rather critically, wrote that Johnson had all but “dashed hopes” that the war would end. Unlike in earlier years of the war, the press no longer felt as bound to present the administration’s perspective. They now sought to bring an end to the war, just like Ochs.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Merriman Smith, “Johnson Says There’s No Serious Sign Red Wants to Stop Fighting,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 3, 1967.

CHAPTER 5

LATER LIFE AND ACTIVISM: 1967-1976

Antiwar Protest Involvement: 1967-1968

Bullets, blood, and mayhem—is America losing in Vietnam? On the evening of January 31, 1968, nearly fifty million Americans sat in their living rooms confused and horrified by what was unfolding before them on their television screens. Images of thousands of communist soldiers invading the seemingly impenetrable urban cities of South Vietnam proved to be eye opening to many who thought that the war effort was under control. Their main target became the U.S. embassy in Saigon, the foremost symbol of American strength in the region. As the violence unfolded in and around the embassy, video cameras captured the bloodied bodies of the dead U.S. and Vietnamese troops strewn upon the ground. Americans could hear the explosions and the exchanges of automatic gunfire between U.S. and the communist soldiers; they also could see the exhausted and shocked faces of U.S. servicemen. Television put Americans on the frontlines of the war from the comfort of their living rooms; these televised images and sounds had a deep impact on how Americans began to look at the war effort. No longer could Americans say with complete certainty that America would win the war.¹¹¹

In the aftermath of what would later be known as the Tet Offensive, favorable public opinion of the war started to decline dramatically despite U.S. and South Vietnamese troops successfully regaining all of the territory they lost to the Communist North Vietnamese. While the Tet Offensive was not the sole cause for the growing discontent with the war, it did provide a renewed desire for its end. The Tet Offensive was not a tactical loss but a psychological one; it dramatically affected the way American people, soldiers, and politicians viewed the war. The

¹¹¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 523-526; Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 185.

events surrounding the Tet Offensive demonstrated that the Johnson administration's war policy was ineffectual and not ameliorating the growing division within Vietnam. Newspapers, which by this time were being displaced by television as the primary means of conveying the news to the American people, ran headlines that showed their growing disappointment with the war. For example, the February 2 issue of *The New York Times* wrote that there was now immense "doubt on recent official claims of progress" and that the whole event was a "humiliating surprise" for American forces in Vietnam. Publications such as *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* ran similar stories about the Tet Offensive, and wrote that the American people were manipulated into thinking that the war was improving. This growing criticism dramatically affected the U.S. political scene. It resulted in a resounding loss for the Democratic Party in 1968. With the election of Republican President Richard M. Nixon, who campaigned to end the war in Vietnam, it seemed that the conclusion of the conflict was eminent. Little did Americans know that it would take until 1975 for the war to officially end.¹¹²

As the war in Vietnam took a dramatic turn for the worse in the late 1960s, Ochs continued his social activism. He not only wrote songs criticizing U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, he also engaged directly in anti-Vietnam War related protest. Ochs' increased participation in protests in 1967 coincided with a dramatic increase in antiwar rallies nationwide. While living in Los Angeles in early 1967, he began to plan one of the city's largest antiwar demonstrations up until that point. Simply called "VD Day," the peaceful demonstration took inspiration from his song "The War is Over" that later appeared on his album *Tape from California*. Mirroring the Victory in Europe and Victory Over Japan celebrations of World War II, the "VD Day" planned by Ochs was a fictional celebration of the "end" of the Vietnam War. Like in his song, he felt that if enough people came together at a demonstration and declared the war "over," it would

¹¹² Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, 182, 187.

result in chain reaction that would bring the war to an end. Ochs picked the Cheviot Hills Park in west Los Angeles for his June 23, 1967 demonstration. The event had both musical performances and speeches by those who opposed the war effort. Coinciding with the demonstration at Cheviot Hills Park, he planned another small rally to take place concurrently at the new Century Plaza Hotel. President Johnson planned to speak there at a five hundred dollar per plate dinner following a performance by The Supremes. Humorously, Ochs announced that the protest would have a penny per plate dinner in the vacant lot next to the hotel. He decided he would lead the event in front of the Century Plaza Hotel before attending his Cheviot Hill Park demonstration; he wanted to see Johnson and wanted Johnson to see him.¹¹³

“The war is over!” cheered the protestors led by a grinning Ochs as they marched in front of the hotel. Police officers already lined the area, worrying that the event would erupt in chaos. The Los Angeles Police Department ordered thirteen hundred officers to monitor the protest around the Century Plaza while holding another two hundred officers in reserve. Snipers sat on rooftops watching the demonstration below while a military helicopter hovered overhead with a 20-mm cannon. The crowd of protestors began to pile into the empty lot across from the hotel. Parked in the lot was a flatbed truck that would serve as an informal stage for Ochs’ performance. He crawled up on top and someone handed him his guitar—the stage was set for the protest.¹¹⁴

As Ochs prepared for his first song of protest, the crowd grew ecstatic and soon began cheering for him to perform. After Ochs performed a rousing rendition of his song, “The War is Over,” the police announced over a bullhorn that the protest must end immediately. After the

¹¹³ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 130-132; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 139-140.

¹¹⁴ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 143-144.

crowd ignored the request, the Los Angeles Police Department moved into the crowd, swinging their nightsticks at any of those who happened to cross their path. Protestors screamed once the police moved in; they began trampling over one another as they tried to escape. Ochs, horrified at what was unfolding before him, jumped off of the flatbed truck and yelled for the crowd to rejoin the other attendees at the Cheviot Hills Park event. Shaken, Ochs told the other organizers about the situation at the Century Plaza—all agreed that their second event had to go on at all cost.¹¹⁵

Scheduled to speak at the “VD Day” event in Cheviot Hills Park that evening was accomplished pediatrician and author Dr. Benjamin Spock, H. Rap Brown of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and heavyweight-boxing champion Muhammad Ali who had recently lost his title due refusing to fight in Vietnam. Although the event at Cheviot Hill Park began on schedule at six o’clock that evening, it was soon interrupted by police who had followed the crowd back to the park from the Century Plaza Hotel. Police officers broke into the crowd at Cheviot Hill Park yelling and swinging their nightsticks. Ochs sat in horror as he watched his rally become torn apart by the police—a direct violation of their first amendment right to free speech and peacefully assemble. What hurt him the most was the overt violence police used against what were otherwise peaceful, and defenseless, event goers. Despite the disruption of his “VD Day” events in Los Angeles, Ochs remained committed to declaring the war “over” and improving America through his activism.¹¹⁶

By November of 1967, Ochs had put together another “VD Day” rally, this time in New York City in Washington Square Park. He planned for the rally to begin in Washington Square

¹¹⁵ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 132; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 144-146.

¹¹⁶ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 146.

Park on November 25. He would perform a short concert before having participants march with him to the army recruiting station on 42nd street to protest. From there, he would lead the group moved to the United Nations building to declare that they wanted peace. Unlike his event in Los Angeles, it was a successful endeavor with no challenge from the authorities. Ochs began his “VD Day” in New York City by singing “The War Is Over” in Washington Square Park to two thousand people while wearing a replica Civil War uniform. He then led the demonstrators on a march through half of Manhattan. As the protestors approached a passerby, they would ask tell them, “Did you hear? The war is over!” On October 21st, Ochs also briefly participated in another anti-Vietnam War demonstration, Washington D.C., though he only attended the early stages of the protest due to radio show appearance later that day in New York. While at the event, he had the privilege of speaking to a crowd of around 150,000 people about advocating for the end of the war. Ochs later described the event at Washington D.C. as being rather dull due to the crowd’s lack of interest. Despite this, he later said that events such as the march in Washington D.C. showed strength and held the government accountable to its people. Both of these events demonstrate that Ochs could mobilize people to end the war through his songs and through direct social action.¹¹⁷

By 1968, Ochs associated with the radical antiwar and countercultural group known as the Youth International Party or the “Yippies.” Ochs became acquainted with the organization through his friendship with the group’s founding members Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, and Paul Krassner. Although united behind the same cause, which was protesting the war in Vietnam, Ochs and the Yippies took radically different approaches in their activism. Whereas Ochs took a moderate approach to protesting the war, the Yippies raised the stakes of their

¹¹⁷ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 170-173; Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per minute*, 98.

demonstrations by engaging elaborate, absurd, and oftentimes unsavory political theater and pranks to bring about social change. Despite their differing modes of protest, both Ochs and the Yippies traveled to Chicago, and joined other antiwar groups, to protest the Democratic National Convention. The Yippies, along with the Mobe, another countercultural group against the war, scheduled various events for the mass demonstration of the convention from speeches to concerts to marches. Their protests were meant to show their support for antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy as the nominee for the party and opposed the inevitable nomination of then Vice-President Hubert Humphrey who sought to continue President Johnson's military policy in Vietnam. Ochs, as a special guest of the McCarthy campaign and friend of the Yippies, was eager to insert himself into the protests in Chicago.¹¹⁸

The first act of protest that Ochs engaged in while in Chicago was the purchase of a pig for twenty-five dollars for a Yippie publicity stunt. The pig, which they named "Pigasus," was announced as the Yippie's nominee for President on Friday August 23, 1968. Assembled in an alleyway near the Chicago Civic center, Ochs and the Yippies drew a large crowd of nearly two hundred people. Ochs, Rubin, and five others were arrested midway through their nomination speech after the police deemed they did not have a permit and were blocking traffic. The police also attempted to capture a squealing Pigasus from the protestors. While being wrestled into the back of a police vehicle, Ochs shouted to the police that the police were guilty of police brutality for manhandling the pig. Ochs and the others did not stay in police custody long as they were released that evening after posting bail. The event, as bizarre as it was, was actually quite successful in drawing media attention to the Yippie's cause.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per minute*, 100-104.

¹¹⁹ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 164-165; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 196-197.

On August 24, protestors had their first violent confrontation with Chicago's police. Although the day began smoothly with very little aggression between the demonstrators and police at Lincoln Park on the north side of Chicago, tensions began to rise just before midnight as the police began enforcing a mandatory curfew. After the protestors refused to leave the area, the officers advanced into the park and fired tear gas into the crowd. After the police rid the park of demonstrators, they set up defensive lines to remove them from the surrounding area. By Sunday, the police resorted to clubbing anyone who stood in their way—even residents not involved in the protest, paramedics attending hurt protestors, and members of the press. Ochs later performed to many of the beaten protestors from Lincoln Park on Tuesday, August 27 at the Chicago Coliseum for President Johnson's "Un-Birthday Party." It was during this event that Ochs motivated six thousand protestors, with his songs "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and "The War is Over," to continue their protests efforts. His music moved the crowd so much that many of the men in attendance burned their draft cards as an act of defiance. The next day, Wednesday August 28, Chicago police hit the protestors with another wave of violence.¹²⁰

On "Bloody Wednesday," as it later came to be called, Chicago police descended upon a group of several thousand protestors. After some members in their group threw rocks, sticks, and bricks at officers following the beating of a Yippie who scaled a flagpole, the police moved in to put the demonstrators in their place once and for all. Many protestors were arrested and some were beaten badly; all of this occurred just down the street from the hotel where the Democratic convention's delegates roomed. Ochs, who witnessed the bloodshed, came away from the event horrified. How could their efforts for peace culminate in such brutal violence? Though defeated, he hoped that the Democratic nominee would select McCarthy as their nominee that evening. He

¹²⁰ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 198-199; Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per minute*, 102.

soon found out that the convention, despite their extensive protesting, selected the establishment candidate, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, for the Democratic nominee for President.

Frustrated, angry, and disillusioned Ochs' hopes for a better future for America died on that day. In an interview conducted shortly after his involvement with the protests in Chicago Ochs said, "Chicago was the formal death of democracy in America." Though cynical, he added, "the crisis in America is so great [that] I want to devote all of my [songwriting] energies to it." In a separate interview with Izzy Young of *Broadside*, Ochs, again questioned the ability for him to change American society saying, "I've always tried to hang onto the idea of saving the country, but at this point I could be persuaded to destroy it."¹²¹

The Final Years: 1969-1976

Following his involvement in the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests and return to Los Angeles where he now lived, Ochs fell into a deep depression. He was angry, both with the direction the nation was heading in Vietnam under the newly elected President Richard M. Nixon and the radical fringe of the antiwar movement. With opposition to Vietnam becoming mainstream, he also began to question his place as an activist. Despite his cynicism, he remained convinced that music, specifically his music, could initiate social change. Although the popular press and television began to incorporate more opinioned and detailed reporting, he continued to see the limitation of journalism. With the events of the Chicago protest on his mind, he started to write songs for his sixth studio album.¹²²

Released on A&M Records in 1969 *Rehearsals for Retirement* stood in contrast to all of his previous albums. It lacked sardonic humor that garnered him praise from listeners and critics

¹²¹ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 201-202; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 201; Stew Albert, "Great Ochs From Little Ac---AARRRG," *Berkley Barb*, (Berkley, CA), November 1-7, 1968; Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per minute*, 103-104.

¹²² Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 166-167.

and featured his harshest lyrics yet. The cover itself was also radically different from his earlier albums—it featured a picture of his fictional tombstone. The tombstone on the cover read that he died in Chicago, Illinois in 1968, which was the same time he felt that all hope for America was lost. For Ochs, this album was both a personal statement on his life and an indictment of the late 1960s. Songs such as “My Life” and “Rehearsals for Retirement” chronicle Ochs’ cynicism and depression whereas others like “I Kill Therefore I am” and “Where Were You in Chicago?” focus on police brutality against protestors. Although he demonstrated that he could create darker and more cynical compositions, it failed to garner much attention among critics and fans and became his worst selling album up until that point. It sold barely thirty thousand copies before being pulled from the A&M catalog. Despite the poor sales and lack of recognition generated by *Rehearsals for Retirement*, Ochs continued to enjoy a moderately successful music career, though much of his performances in the early 1970s focused primarily on his early material. Songs such as “I Ain’t Marching Anymore,” “There but For Fortune,” and “Changes” continued to be favorites among audiences.¹²³

In 1970, he released his seventh and final studio album dubbed *Greatest Hits*, which, despite its self-depreciating title, contained all new material. Ochs picked the title because he thought it would be humorous for die-hard fans considering that they knew he never had any chart topping songs. Additionally, the title was a condemnation of the record industry that often repackaged popular artists’ songs to increase record sales. The album cover features Ochs on a red curtained stage wearing a gold lamé suit designed by the same tailor, Nudie Cohen, who made the one for Elvis Presley. Ochs chose the suit to both parody and pay homage to his

¹²³ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 211, 213, 215; Phil Ochs, *Rehearsals for Retirement* (A&M, 1969); Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 176; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 176.

lifelong music idol. It also factored into his concept of making himself into a mix of Elvis, who represented popular music, and Che Guevara, who was a radical political revolutionary.¹²⁴

Ochs mixed elements of rock and roll, country western, and folk for his compositions on *Greatest Hits*. Unlike his last studio album, *Greatest Hits* contained only one political song, “Ten Cents a Coup.” All of the others tracks were deeply personal; the song “One-Way Ticket Home” referenced his desire to go home and escape the bustle of his music career whereas “Boy in Ohio” celebrated the nostalgia of his childhood. The last track, “No More Songs” proved to be the most prophetic out of all the tracks on the album. Whereas the song “Rehearsals for Retirement” signaled the beginning of the end of his music career on his last album, “No More Songs” was his last studio composition.¹²⁵

Greatest Hits became both a commercial and critical failure like *Rehearsals for Retirement*. Ochs continued to perform regularly from 1970 to 1973, though many of his long-time fans did not like the direction his music was taking. Although he headlined a series of concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York City for his *Greatest Hits* tour, audiences reacted negatively to his new “Elvis Guevara” persona. Following his poorly received *Greatest Hits* concerts at Carnegie Hall, he vowed to never perform again. He decided that he would stay as far away from the rigors of his music career as he could; he wanted an escape.¹²⁶

From 1971 to 1974, Ochs set out to see the world by traveling to Europe, Australia, South America, and Africa. He also began to immerse himself in international politics, having traveled to Chile to support Salvador Allende’s new democratically elected government. While visiting

¹²⁴ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 226-227; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 194-195.

¹²⁵ Phil Ochs, *Greatest Hits* (A&M, 1970).

¹²⁶ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 194, 199.

Chile, he met the folk musician and political activist Victor Jara, whose songwriting proved influential in Allende's rise to power. For Ochs, Jara was his Chilean counterpart, mixing art with politics to initiate sociopolitical change. Following the September 11, 1973 military coup that resulted in the assassination of Salvador Allende and the killing of his prominent supporters, like Victor Jara, Ochs organized a May 9, 1974 benefit concert in their memory. Called, "An Evening With Salvador Allende" the benefit concert featured performances by Ochs, Arlo Guthrie, and his old friend and competitor Bob Dylan.¹²⁷

While touring Africa in 1973, Ochs became captivated by the various African languages and wanted to record a single in the Lingala language. He co-wrote two songs in Langala, "Bwatue" and "Niko Mchumba Engombe," and recorded them with the Pan African Ngembo Rumba Band in Kenya. Though the record sold poorly in Africa, these two songs can be considered early examples of what is known as world music. During his trip to Africa, while taking a walk alone on the beach in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, three robbers nearly beat him to death. The next morning, he was found sprawled out on the beach and was taken to a local hospital. While at the hospital, Ochs discovers that his vocal chords were irreparably damaged from his attackers' attempting to strangle him. The loss of the upper vocal range proved detrimental to an already deeply depressed Ochs. Despite his doctor's orders, telling him to limit his singing, he fulfilled his commitment to perform at a concert in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ochs drank heavily during the concert, slurring his words and even falling off stage. In a interview with *The Star* conducted after the concert he said, "Yeah, man, I was pretty crazy, getting all that beer down was not a normal part of my act." He later added, "I've got trouble with my voice. In Dar es Salaam three guys jumped me and strangled me as they robbed me."

¹²⁷ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 235-240, 287, 293-297.

Although Ochs passed off his drinking following the incident as being out of the ordinary, his drinking soon became a way for him to self-medicate and escape his worsening depression.¹²⁸

At the same time that Ochs' career was ending, so was the war in Vietnam. "Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam," said President Gerald Ford to the convocation audience at Tulane University on April 23, 1975. "But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned." With those words, Ford who assumed the presidency from the disgraced Nixon just months before, had officially declared the war in Vietnam "over." The news proved to be vindication for Ochs' whose efforts, along with so many others in the movement, helped to influence the end of the war. To commemorate the event, Ochs began planning for his third, and final, "The War Is Over" rally to be held in Central Park on May 11, 1975. He convinced a number of prominent individuals to appear at his rally such as Odetta, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte, Peter Yarrow, and Joan Baez. Over one hundred thousand people joined Ochs and his comrades for their "The War Is Over" rally; all celebrating the return of peace to America after almost twenty years of direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Ochs sang an upbeat rendition of "The War Is Over" and was later joined by Baez to sing their "hit" song "There but for Fortune." Even though Ochs came away from his "The War Is Over" rally with a sense of triumph, his depression soon crept back in as he asked himself, "What will I do next?"¹²⁹

The following year, his mental instability worsened to the point that he had to receive care from family and friends. A once friendly and outgoing Ochs became withdrawn and, at times, aggressive to his friends and family. He became so disconnected from his former self that

¹²⁸ Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 223-224.

¹²⁹ Gerald R. Ford, "Address at a Tulane University Convocation," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4859>; Eliot, *Death of a Rebel*, 244-245; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 305-306.

he began to call himself “John Train.” Despite his declining mental state, he continued to perform, though he stunned his audiences with his drunken, out of control behavior on stage. His family, friends, and doctors attempted to do all they could to help Ochs during this difficult time in his life, hoping that his condition was temporary. On Friday, April 9, 1976 he took his life in Sonny’s apartment, where he had been staying for several months, while she was away at work teaching at a junior high school. He died almost a year following the official end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. It appears that fighting against the hypocrisy of the war was the only thing that kept Ochs in his final years. After the war ended, he had no will left to live; he lived to see his dream of making the war “over.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: the Life of Phil Ochs*, 311, 314-318, 323, 327, 351.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Phil Ochs is significant not only for his music, but for his social and political activism and his resolve to create a more peaceful, equal, and accountable America. His life provides a medium through which scholars can examine the folk music revival, the evolution of the Cold War era popular press and its coverage of the Vietnam War, and antiwar organizing of the 1960s. When compared to the popular press and topical musicians of the era, Ochs was less compromising in his message and went further to oppose a war that he thought hurt American society. As a “singing journalist,” he melded aspects of music, journalism, and activism to inform Americans about issues that popular press thought too controversial to be published. To adequately assess Ochs’ contributions to American society in the 1960s, one must examine his contributions as a musician, journalist, and activist.

As a musician Ochs composed songs that incorporated humor and satire to evaluate contentious social and political issues. He became one of the first topical musicians to write a song about the war. Additionally, he produced more songs over the span of career that directly criticized and analyzed the war than any of his contemporaries. While other more popular folk musicians abandoned political songwriting starting in 1964 and embraced a more accessible sound, Ochs renewed his efforts to bring attention to the problems associated with the war. For instance, Bob Dylan abandoned politicized folk music just as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution significantly increased U.S. commitment and involvement in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Although Ochs never received the mainstream success that Dylan did, possibly due to his less compromising stance on the war, he did achieve moderate fame, secured a strong fan base, garnered praise from critics, and gained respect among those in the folk community. Even when

compared to some of Dylan's earlier political songs, Ochs' antiwar compositions were much less ambiguous and much more accessible to listeners. Whereas Dylan's lyrics could be misconstrued, such as the case with some interpretations of "Blowin' in the Wind," Ochs' songwriting is much more direct, such as the case with "Talkin' Vietnam," with specific references to the war. This almost journalistic approach to his songwriting is yet another reason why Ochs and his music are so impactful.

Although not a traditional journalist, Ochs had formal training to become a journalist from Ohio State University. Through his experiences at Ohio State, specifically with his conflict with the school newspaper *The Lantern*, Ochs realized that there was a limit to what made the front pages of newspapers. After discovering folk music through his friend Jim Glover, Ochs began to appreciate topical songwriting, which melded journalism with song. When compared to the popular press of the early to mid-1960s, Ochs' antiwar compositions offer a more skeptical view of the war. This is significant as the popular press lacked any kind of commentary of the war effort. The mainstream press, due to the effects of the Cold War political climate, promulgated the myth that America was winning in Vietnam. Headlines of American success in Vietnam were far more common, at least in the early-to-mid 1960s, than those that were critical.

Ochs used his talent to offer an alternative to the homogenous viewpoint of the popular press that chose to print less controversial reports for fear of being investigated or branded communist. Through his records, radio airplay, and his concerts, he was able to expose pressing current issues to a larger audience—he continued in the tradition of a long line of singing journalists, who raised awareness about controversial current issues to initiate positive change. Complementing his musical journalism, Ochs was also not afraid to engage firsthand in sociopolitical protest.

Ochs added another dimension to his music by demonstrating how music could translate into political action. Ochs engaged in various antiwar demonstrations and even organized his own series of rallies, his “The War Is Over” campaign of the late 1960s, centered on ending the war. His rallies succeeded in attracting thousands to voice their concern and demonstrated their opposition to efforts to expand the United States’ role in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. His presence at rallies complimented and reinforced his music’s message. While Ochs campaigned for peace, he did not insult or ridicule soldiers as some antiwar activists have been accused of doing. In fact, Ochs composed several songs that celebrated America and its brave servicemen. Although Ochs was a patriot who loved America, he realized that the nation’s leaders were fallible and could make mistakes. Through his music and activism, he sought to hold them accountable for the failures of the Vietnam War. While Ochs is most well known for his antiwar activism, he also involved himself in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and fought for worker’s rights.

Ochs’ music continues to be as relevant today as it was in the 1960s. With songs focusing on sociopolitical themes such as inequality, the military industrial complex, racism, and police brutality, his songs easily fit in with modern social movements such as the recent Occupy Wall Street movement or the current Black Lives Matter movement. Ochs demonstrated that the combinations of activism and song could become a force for social change. Many of the issues Ochs fought to highlight are still around today, providing all the more reason to look back on his compositions and wrestle with their message. Despite other artists receiving greater attention over the years for being champions of the 1960s antiwar movement, none were more passionate or endearing as the singing journalist Phil Ochs.

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