



YOUTH, MASS CULTURE, AND PROTEST: THE RISE AND IMPACT OF 1960S ANTIWAR MUSIC

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did antiwar protest music provide a voice for those opposed to the Vietnam War?

OVERVIEW

Just as the United States has a long, complicated history of war and international conflict, so too has the nation seen resistance to that activity. During the 1960s, however, protest against war became a particularly visible part of American life. Television, a relatively new phenomenon, showed both graphic, often brutal images of the Vietnam War and footage of social and political unrest at home. In this period, protest music was among the most powerful means of voicing opposition to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Although protest music was not new — one finds rich examples of music calling for change in slave spirituals, labor songs, and even the popular songs produced on Tin Pan Alley during the first World War, for instance — it reached new heights in the 1960s, as many young Americans, facing mandatory participation in the war, grew increasingly outspoken in their dissent.



Prior to the antiwar demonstrations on and around college campuses, the Civil Rights movement in particular had increased student activism. As American involvement in Vietnam deepened, many in that age group faced the disconcerting reality of conscription. Even before they shipped out, those who were drafted had begun to see the horrors of the war, most notably on television. The growing presence of television in nearly every American household thus exacerbated divisions over the conflict and helped fuel the antiwar movement. What Americans watched on television each night shaped their perceptions of the Vietnam War, which came to be known as the “living room war.” For some young Americans, called on to fight but unable to vote until the age of 21, the situation was unacceptable.

Social protest provided young people with a voice they didn't always have at the ballot box. Popular music, already a vital part of youth culture by the mid-1960s, became a vehicle through which they could hear their concerns put to music. The music helped to build the antiwar community. In earlier eras, protest music sometimes had a subtle tone, propelled by acoustic instruments. By the late 1960s, however, it took on the instrumentation of Rock and Roll and made its way to the top of the charts. Not until 1971 did the 26th Amendment grant suffrage to 18-year-olds, empowering those most directly affected by the military draft. With the war increasingly unpopular at home and no American victory in sight, the United States negotiated a peace treaty and withdrew from Vietnam in 1975. The music of 1960s protest, however, remained among the era's most enduring legacies.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The changing media representation of war during the Vietnam era
- The growing opposition of many citizens, particularly young Americans, to the Vietnam conflict in the 1960s
- The influence of the baby boom, popular media, and popular music on the antiwar movement
- The role of protest music in giving Americans who could not vote in the mid-1960s a public voice on political issues
- The passage of the 26th Amendment in 1971, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18

2. BE ABLE TO (SKILLS):

- Analyze and evaluate multiple historical sources, including images, statistics, videos, and music
- Practice literacy skills, such reading, speaking, and writing
- Understand music in relation to history and culture

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Show students two magazine covers, one from the *Saturday Evening Post* and the other from *LIFE*.



2. Briefly discuss the first image, the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* from February 22, 1919:

- What words come to mind to describe the soldier in this image?
- How do the children in the picture appear to feel about the soldier?
- What attitude toward war and soldiers does the picture convey?
- How do you imagine young Americans would have responded to the first image in 1919?

3. Now ask students to examine the second image, the cover of *LIFE* from February 11, 1966:

- What words come to mind to describe the soldiers in this image?

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: (CONTINUED)

- What attitude toward war and soldiers does this picture convey?
- How do you imagine a young person in 1966 would have responded to this image?

4. Ask students to compare the two images:

- What kind of picture is shown on each cover? (The first is an illustration, the second a photograph.) Explain to students that the first image was created by Norman Rockwell, an illustrator known for his often sentimental images of everyday life in America.
- Which war is depicted in each magazine cover? (World War I and the Vietnam War.)
- What overall conclusions can you draw about changes in the way war was represented to Americans by the media between World War I and the Vietnam conflict?

PROCEDURE:

1. Show the image of a man and woman watching footage of the Vietnam War in their living room and read aloud the following quote from The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam, by Daniel C. Hallin:

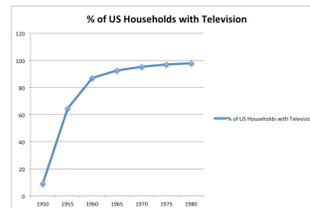


“Television news came of age on the eve of Vietnam. The CBS and NBC evening news broadcasts took their present form in September, 1963, expanding from fifteen minutes to half an hour.... The first exclusive stories the expanded shows were able to broadcast had to do with Vietnam.... Two years later, American troops went to war under the glare of the television spotlight. Vietnam was America’s first true televised war.”

2. Project the two graphs showing the growing number of television households in the United States (or distribute Handout 1) and briefly discuss:

Year	Total US Households	US Households with Television	% of US Households with Television
1950	43,000,000	3,800,000	9
1955	47,620,000	30,700,000	64.5
1960	52,500,000	46,750,000	89.1
1965	56,900,000	52,700,000	92.6
1970	61,410,000	58,500,000	95.3
1975	70,510,000	68,500,000	97.1
1980	77,900,000	76,300,000	97.9

Source: Television Bureau of Advertising, “TV Basics,” June 2012, http://www.tba.org/media/TV_Basics.pdf



- During which five-year period did television ownership in the United States grow the fastest? How does this growth appear on the line chart?
 - In which decade did the number of households with televisions surpass 90 percent?
 - What conclusions can you draw from these statistics about how much access to television news programming Americans had in 1950? In 1970?
3. Play ABC News raw footage from Vietnam.
 - Explain to students that they are about to see a series of unedited content taped for potential use in news broadcasts related to the Vietnam War. This footage was shot in 1969 and provides a “behind the scenes” look into what news reporters were seeing when they covered the war and what networks were gathering.
 - CAUTION: The video in this step contains some graphic imagery of war, including dead bodies,

PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

particularly in the segment beginning at 1:11. It may not be appropriate for young or sensitive viewers. Instructor could choose to play only the first minute, or to substitute a clip from the ABC News feature “The Agony of Vietnam.”

4. Explain to students that American men between the ages of 18 and 26 were required by U.S. law to register with the Selective Service System. Every registrant was assigned a selective service number. In December 1969, two lotteries were held. These lotteries determined the order in which men born from 1944 through 1950 were required to report for military service in the year 1970. Students should know that this process is typically referred to as the “draft.”

Until the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted in July of 1971, the voting age was 21. (Ask students if they know the current voting age.) Therefore, many of the young men being drafted into the military could not vote, which meant they could not vote the politicians making decisions about the Vietnam War in or out of office. They did not have a say in the political process.

5. Briefly discuss as a class or in small groups:
 - Ask students to imagine that it is 1970, and they are 18 years old. How would they feel if they, their family members, or their friends were required to fight in the war in Vietnam? How might seeing the war on television make you feel about this?
 - Next, have students imagine that they are going to write or listen to some music to express their feelings about the war. What would the lyrics be about? What might the music sound like?
6. As a class, listen to and analyze clips of two Vietnam War-era protest songs, “War” by Edwin Starr and “Ohio” by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Distribute Handout 2, which contains the

lyrics heard in the clips.

7. Play the clip of “War” and have students read the lyrics. Discuss:
 - What is the song about? What message do the lyrics send?
 - How would you describe the style of the music?
 - What instruments do you hear? (Drums, bass, tambourine, electric guitar, saxophone.)
 - What adjectives would you use to describe the sound of the music? Does the sound of the music complement the meaning of the lyrics?
 - This song was released in 1970, the same year the first soldiers selected in the draft lottery were sent overseas. Do you think a song like Edwin Starr’s would have been popular or unpopular in that year?
8. Project the chart showing the top five songs on Billboard’s “Hot 100” popularity chart for September 5, 1970. This chart shows the top five songs in the United States based on sales and radio airplay. Ask:

The Billboard Hot 100							
Date: September 5, 1970							
Chart Positions: Top 5							
Chart Position	Recording	Artist	First Charted Date	Position	Previous Position	Peak Position	Weeks In Chart
#1	“War”	Edwin Starr	11-Jul-70	1	1	1	9
#2	“Ain’t No Mountain High Enough”	Diana Ross	8-Aug-70	2	9	2	5
#3	“Make It With You”	Bread	13-Jun-70	3	2	1	13
#4	“In The Summertime”	Mungo Jerry	11-Jul-70	4	4	4	9
#5	“(They Long To Be) Close To You”	Carpenters	20-Jun-70	5	3	1	12

Source: Academic Charts Online

 - What position does “War” hold?
 - How many weeks has it been on the popularity chart? What date did it first chart?
 - What conclusions can you draw about how popular this song was in 1970? Why do you think it was so popular?
9. Play the clip of “Ohio” and have students read the lyrics.
10. Explain that the song is about an antiwar protest at Kent State University in Ohio on May 4, 1970. Students were holding rallies to protest a decision made by President Richard Nixon to bomb the country of

PROCEDURE: (CONTINUED)

Cambodia (which is next to Vietnam), thereby expanding the war in Southeast Asia. The Ohio National Guard was called in to control the protests. The Guard fired bullets into a crowd of student protestors, killing four and injuring nine.

11. Play the video of Graham Nash discussing the song and briefly discuss:

- What was the process by which Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young wrote and recorded “Ohio”?
- Why did they scrap their top-selling single to record a protest song?
- What does this process, and the speed with which they executed and distributed the recording, tell us about protest music’s relevance and potential impact?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY:

Ask students to revisit their answers to the discussion questions in Step 6. Did the songs “War” and “Ohio” sound like the music they thought they would have wanted to hear as teenagers in 1970? Why or why not?

WRITING PROMPT

Imagine you are an 18-year-old involved in the antiwar movement, and you are about to be drafted. Write a letter to a friend that addresses the following: Imagine you are an 18-year-old involved in the antiwar movement, and you are about to be drafted. Write a letter to a friend that addresses the following:

- The impact of the media in shaping your perceptions of the war
- How antiwar music both reflected and helped you express your feelings about the war
- The impact of the 26th Amendment on your life

EXTENSIONS:

1. Have students watch clips of Vietnam War protests from 1969, which are taken from unedited, behind-the-scenes footage. Ask students to write a short description of what appears to be going on in each segment of the video and to note when and how music is used by the protestors.
2. While the nature and visibility of protests changed, antiwar sentiment itself was not new in the 1960s. Have students listen to recordings of two popular songs from the World War I era, “Over There” (1917) and “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” (1915). How do the two songs present contrasting views toward the war? Which is more like the Saturday Evening Post cover in the motivational activity? Which has more in common with the protest songs of the 1960s?
3. Have students watch the 50-minute ABC News special “The Agony of Vietnam,” from 1965.
4. Ask students to analyze additional antiwar protest songs from the 1960s, using the template in Handout 3. Possible songs to use include Phil Ochs’ “I Ain’t Marching Any More,” John Lennon’s “Give Peace a Chance,” and Country Joe and the Fish’s “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag.”

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 for Literature and Informational Text

Reading 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Reading 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

College and Career Readiness Writing Anchor Standards for Grades 6-12 in English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

Writing 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 6-12

Writing 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

Core Music Standard: Responding

Select: Choose music appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or

performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young – Ohio (1970)
- Edwin Starr – War (1970)
- Graham Nash – Recording Ohio

FEATURED PEOPLE

- Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young
- John Lennon
- Edwin Starr
- Neil Young

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1: Television Households in the United States
- Handout 2: Protest Song Lyrics
- Handout 3: Antiwar Protest Music