

1966

The Crack in the Consensus

Michael Orth

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq>

Recommended Citation

Orth, Michael. "The Crack in the Consensus." *New Mexico Quarterly* 36, 1 (1966). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol36/iss1/10>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Quarterly* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

The Crack in the Consensus

Political Propaganda in American Popular Music

BY MICHAEL ORTH

IN 1950 the intellectual historian Henry May published an article entitled "The End of American Radicalism," which he ended by saying "perhaps in a short time the title of this article will be ridiculous."¹ It has taken fifteen years, but with the appearance of unrest and student demonstrations on college campuses across America, the spread of Civil Rights activism to northern cities, and the rise of the Radical Right, it is evident that whatever the past situation, all Americans are not now in agreement with the national society and its values. There are signs of a new crack in the American consensus in a place few have thought worth examining up to now, and yet in a place which I think important for the future of American society. Based on a study of some recent changes in popular music, I can see evidence of an increasing level of political and social awareness in the songs among very young teenagers—those of junior high and high school age. I think this shift in musical taste may turn out to be one of the most exciting and in some ways most hopeful signs of life in mass culture in America since the end of the Second World War.

The new waves forming in the bland lake of popular music became clearly evident first in the summer of 1965, when a new sound began to appear on the nation's rock'n roll stations. Two distinct streams of popular music joined to produce a new form of music, which, after several false starts, was given the name "folk-rock" and started off on a career of its own. The new folk-rock was basically modern rock'n roll with a message—with lyrics which dealt with public concerns rather than with private problems. The big beat and the driving power of rock music were coupled with the message of social and political activism which had developed in commercial folk music, and suddenly a new radicalism began to speak to millions of teenagers.

This has more importance in our culture than might be true in

some others. It is commonly noted that since World War II our consumer-oriented economy has given an utterly new importance to the tastes and desires of the adolescent, and has made him aware of his social class. He has, in fact, been given a certain degree of class solidarity, if not in the Marxian economic sense, then at least in the psychological sense of a group or gang identification. In leisure-time activities in general, and in style-setting and the entertainment business in particular, the influence of teenagers is paramount. Detroit's automobile designers carefully follow custom and hot-rod shows; American housewives self-consciously clump down the aisles of local supermarkets in a-go-go boots. The teen image made "action people" the catch phrase of 1965 advertising. The teenagers of the world now constitute a near majority of the population, and in America they control, along with the television dial, a large part of our consumer dollar. Teenagers are becoming aware of their power also, and are beginning to consciously direct it to their own ends.

The gradual evolution of the class of teenagers through the "silent generation" of the Nineteen Fifties culminated in the early Nineteen Sixties in the invasion of the ruling establishment itself by teenage styles and influence. Teenage dances, music, and clothing styles appeared at presidential parties and in ultrafashionable discotheques and a-go-gos. Teen culture was in.

The new status of adolescents has not thus far concerned those near the centers of public power: teenagers are outside of politics. The lack of concern for or understanding of public affairs on the part of teenagers in the past does not seem strange—most students of social reform movements recognize that a sense of common class-identity and a certain degree of economic and political power must precede the ability or the desire for political action. The development of that class identity and power awareness among teenagers may be reflected in the present stirrings of the political instinct in the breast of the shambling beast of the mass-music market.

Most of the music produced by the recording industry for the teenage market has dealt with the love problems of the adolescent, but there has also been, ever since the rise of mass-produced pop music, a persistent current of protest and revolt against the views of the establishment. Many, in fact most, of the performers and composers of pop music, whether it is rock'n roll, country and western, or jazz, have come from such socially suppressed groups as Negroes, and poor urban

whites. Most pop songs, except for the slickly commercial versions produced by tame artists for the big recording companies, still bear the heavy stamp of the Negro and the twang of the Southern mountaineer in their pronunciation and phrasing.

The message such lyrics carry has been in the past primarily hedonistic and private; public life has been foreign and hostile to the singers and writers of popular songs, just as it has been to their listeners. There have been many songs lamenting the injustices of the adult world, and a steady minority, particularly in country and western music, which used religion as a central theme, but in general any sort of public commentary has been entirely foreign to the popular music world.

This introverted and apolitical stance of pop music has prevented the teen takeover of pop music from seeming important to adults. The typical hero-singers of the adolescents have not in the past really been in revolution against their society, but have been rather demanding a better place in it. For example, when Elvis Presley, one of the founders of the whole market, made his first big success he spent most of his money buying luxury goods, among them a whole fleet of Cadillacs. He did not question the values of his society, he simply wanted more of the good things it offered.² Whether the new style folk-rock singers will resist the blandishments of fleets of Cadillacs "with rhinestones on the spokes," as one contemporary song puts it, remains for the future to show.³

Despite the evident hostility of mass culture to political activity or comment, the traditional channels of musical-political interest did not close during the age of mass culture. In fact, mass communications and mass education led to a greatly expanded interest in politically and socially significant songs, but only in certain limited parts of the pop market, centered especially in the folk-music revival of the Nineteen Fifties and Sixties. Many of the popular folk songs in the last few years were revivals of genuine folk material, like the innumerable version of *John Henry*, in which case the proletarian viewpoint and social protest often remained intact. Even if the song was a modern imitation of the folk genre, as many of the most commercially successful songs were, a message was often included, perhaps in imitation of folk-protest themes.

In addition to this basic ideological content, the folk movement in its later stages threw up numerous singers who used the idiom of the folk song for definitely political purposes—one of the obvious ex-

amples is the controversial Chad Mitchell Trio's version of *Barry's Boys*, which was broadcast frequently during the last presidential election.

The folk revival, perking along below the surface of mass culture with only an occasional excursion out of the college-age world into real pop culture, created a number of very competent performers, as well as a considerable entertainment industry, selling some potentially hot political merchandise. By 1963 there were signs that the folk revival had run its course, but several politically concerned and active performers were not content with their diminished roles.

These activists were not generally recognized as significant. In 1964 the public attitude toward folk protest was summed up by a critic who described Bob Dylan, the most conspicuous of the young folk radicals, as a performer who "wears a silly hat and sings out-of-tune songs that Mean."⁴ This turned out to be an underestimate, because the ideological basis of folk music had engaged the older radicalism of Pete Seeger from the Nineteen Thirties with the new radicalism of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and performers sought a new platform as the interest in folk music began to die out.

By 1965 the other major element in folk-rock had also reached an interesting stage of development. Rock'n roll, a name which has become by conquest a synonym for popular music, has a fairly complex history behind it, including in the last few years a strong intrusion of British rock music into the American market.⁵ The British popular music industry had been conquered by the American invasion of Bill Haley and the Comets in the early 1950's, followed by second- and third-wave American rock singers. English teenagers recognized rock music as their own, and British singers quickly began to compose and sing their own versions of rock'n roll. Contemporary British groups like The Animals, The Rolling Stones, and pre-eminently the Beatles, have reinfused American rock music with the lower-class drive and interest that the large recording companies had been laboriously breeding out of the native American pop. The new music was brutal and original, and carried with it some tinges of British laboring-class social protest.

The attitude of the Beatles toward society might serve as a sort of summary of the social ideas of British rock groups. They seem to believe, basically, in the postwar English working-class attitude expressed in the saying "Screw you Jack, I'm all right," but they have gone a step beyond their working-class models. An incident from the Beatles'

movie, *Hard Day's Night*, might point up the difference. In the movie one of the Beatles is approached by an English war veteran who says with hostility: "You know, we fought at El Alamein to give you the chance we didn't get." The Beatle answer: "Bet you're sorry you won, too, aren't you?"

The Beatles have, says one of their apologists, "the tart skepticism of adult values" typical of their teenage audience.⁶ Despite the vapid-ity of the phrase, there is truth in it. At press conferences, for example, they are notoriously impatient of inane questions; asked once by a reporter how money had changed him, Paul McCartney answered: "It's made me richer." They are not unaware that their flippant attitude could be construed as a criticism of the values of their society, but they really don't seem to care. At another press conference, asked "do you plan to record any anti-war songs?" John Lennon said, with magnificent indirection: "All our songs are anti-war."

The musicians whom the Beatles admire are, significantly, almost all unknown to Americans, although they are all American Negro singers: Louisiana Red, Tampa Red, John Lee Hooker, and Howling Wolf. To this formidable list of influences must now be added Bob Dylan, leader of the protest-song movement, and friend and some-time composer for the Beatles. American radicals are not slow to see the protest implicit in the Beatles' songs; they have been used by Civil Rights workers as anthems to be sung in Southern jails, and the student rioters at Berkeley reportedly used a Beatle number as one of their theme songs.⁷ More recently, poetic radicals of the beat school have formed folk-rock groups to spread their own form of message, with the influence of the Beatles and Bob Dylan evident.⁸

Of course, songs of social significance are no new thing in the world. Even in our own country, although the general trend in popular culture and particularly in mass culture has been to minimize political comment, there have been many songs of protest. For example, *A New Song*, sung by an organization called The Sons of Liberty, represented the radical Whig elements in Revolutionary America, and Tory songsters were equally active, as is shown by the many political dialogues carried on by rival pamphlet ballads. However, except for election ballads and an occasional protest like *Jefferson and Liberty*, which was a bitter and popular musical attack on the Alien and Sedition laws, nineteenth-century America generally refused to interest itself in songs of public significance, with two great exceptions: slavery

and the Civil War. Both of these issues stirred up sufficient feeling to support popular songs on both sides of the debate. However, except for these two issues, the era of the romantic ballad had little place for musical expression of popular resentment. Not until the depression of the Nineteen Thirties did a significant number of really popular songs deal with political or social protest. Depression-spawned songs like *Brother Can You Spare A Dime*, *Blue Monday*, and *Times Are Getting Hard* reflected a certain amount of the resentment felt by a public whose faith in progress and capitalism had been eroded.⁹

All of the protest songs of the past, however, existed in a radically different atmosphere from those of the current folk-rock popularity. They were designed and sung primarily for adults, and usually for fairly small groups; only the development of mass communications and mass markets during the Nineteen Fifties could prepare for such a mass phenomenon as folk-rock. There were certain signs that such songs were possible in the mass market. In 1962 Lavinia Ralston's *Little Boxes*, sung in the folk style by that old social critic Pete Seeger, rose to the top of the popularity charts and injected a note of positive social criticism into what had been a profoundly unreal form, the pop ballad. A few other successful pop songs, such as Jimmy Dean's *Dear Ivan*, which was a call for a person-to-person peace offensive at the level of the individual citizen, showed periodic attempts by song writers to find new themes for exploitation, but the general failure of most such efforts convinced the rulers of the pop music industry that their public lacked even the most general interest in public affairs.¹⁰

AND THEN IT HAPPENED. Early in 1965 folk singer Bob Dylan cut several records of his own "songs that Mean" supported by a rock background. They sold. Later, in the summer of 1965, Joan Baez stood up at a California folk-music festival and dedicated a song "To President Johnson and his marvelous foreign policy," and then broke into a rock'n roll hit called "Stop! In the Name of Love."¹¹ The response of the beard-and-sandal set was instantaneous and outraged; cries of "sellout" came from former Dylan and Baez devotees—but nevertheless the new style caught fire among a far different audience.

Dylan and Baez had deliberately begun a trend; both announced that they intended to continue to sing in the rock style. The new form reached popularity, however, much faster than anyone expected, and in a song that startled the music industry.¹² This was the biggest sur-

prise popular song hit of 1965, Barry McGuire's *Eve of Destruction*.

Just how *Eve of Destruction* came to be written, and just who decided to risk five thousand dollars that cutting and basic promotion of a typical 45 rpm pop record costs, I do not know. What is clear is that the song came directly from the folk idiom, and was the product of a teenager, nineteen-year-old song-writer P. F. Sloan. Barry McGuire, whose brutal, gravelly voice gives much of the punch to Sloan's lyrics, had been for several years the bass for the New Christy Minstrels, a folk group whose political background had already annoyed many conservatives. McGuire had no doubts about his new mission; his hair was conventionally (for a rock singer) shoulder length, and his manner was appropriately hip, but his powerful delivery and appearance made it seem that the hair and the clothes were only part of a stance; he said, "I wait all day to get up on that stage and sing that song. I want people to think about those things," and he seemed to mean it,¹³ although his later return to conventional themes makes the validity of his involvement with radical protest questionable.

The effect of *Eve of Destruction* was considerable. The music was a blend of rock rhythm and drive and folk melody and simplicity. The lyrics attacked most of the usual targets of the Radical Left. The effect of the driving beat and McGuire's frighteningly powerful voice, and the emotional impact of echo chambers and electronic heightening, made this song a very powerful piece of musical propaganda. The signature of Bob Dylan was clear in the whining harmonica and the off-key delivery, and the monochromatic rock beat, chorded simply on electric guitar and rhythm section, made the kinship to rock'n roll obvious; what was new was the commercially effective combination.

The specific "message" pounded out by *Eve of Destruction* was a simplified summary of contemporary radical youth protest. It was pacifist, anti-Viet Nam war, anti-bomb, and anti-religion. No doubt some other "antis" were present by implication. There were no specific calls to action, but protest was plentiful. The lyrics, apart from the powerful musical setting, go like this:

EVE OF DESTRUCTION*

The Eastern world it is exploding
 Violence flaring, bullets loading
 You're old enough to kill, but not for voting.
 You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're toting?
 And even the Jordan River has bodies floating.

Chorus

But you tell me over and over and over again, my friend,
Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Don't you understand what I'm trying to say?
Can't you feel the fears I'm feeling today?
If the button is pushed there's no running away.
There'll be no one to save with the whole world in a grave.
Take a look around you boy, it's bound to scare you boy.

Chorus

Yeh, my blood is so mad, it feels like coagulating.
I'm sitting here just contemplating.
I can't twist the truth, it knows no regulation.
Handful of senators don't pass legislation,
And marches alone can't bring integration,
When human respect is disintegrating.
This whole crazy world is just too frustrating.

Chorus

Think of all the hate there is in Red China,
Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama.
You may leave here for four days in space,
But when you return it's the same old place.
The pounding of the drums, the grinding disgrace.
You can bury your dead, but don't leave a trace.
Hate's your next door neighbor, but don't forget to say grace.

Chorus¹⁴

Eve of Destruction appeared late in the summer of 1965. It received the treatment usual for popular songs, except that its overt ideological content frightened many stations into ignoring it at first. By the middle of August it had reached the charts and had begun to work its way up. On the twenty-sixth of August it was twenty-seventh in the nation, by the next week it was ninth, and by the following week third; by September 25 it was Number One, the most popular song in the nation.

*Copyright 1965, Trousdale Music Publishers, Inc., B.M.I.

A general regional pattern appeared in its popularity, a pattern which has held true for other protest songs as well: the big markets on the coasts, New York and Los Angeles, raised the song to the top of the charts sooner, and kept it longer, than Midwestern or Southern markets. Chicago popularity ratings remained almost as high as New York's and Southern California's, showing the general approval given to protest songs in large metropolitan areas.¹⁵

The pop-music business is geared to react quickly to trends, and Barry McGuire's surprise hit was soon imitated. It is interesting from the political point of view, however, that McGuire's radical viewpoint was not only imitated, but also answered by conservative spokesmen. In fact, a group calling itself The Spokesmen showed on the charts on 18 September, before *Eve of Destruction* had reached its maximum popularity, with an answer song called *The Dawn of Correction*.

The Dawn of Correction was not as successful as *Eve of Destruction*, never rising into the sacrosanct top ten, but it did sell hundreds of thousands of records, proving that the pop-music audience was ready to accept political controversy in its music. The Spokesmen lacked the power McGuire brought to his song, but they had just as many electronic beeps and hoots and just as much verve as he did. Their *Dawn of Correction* was very similar to McGuire's record in form, with the same Big Beat sound and the same limited harmonics and harsh vocalization. Even some of the lyrics were parallel, including the key phrase "over and over again."¹⁶ The Spokesmen claimed that the world was *not* on the eve of destruction, but rather was all right in essential matters. They were anti-communist, pro-Viet Nam policy, pro-nuclear deterrent, satisfied with the success of the integration movement, and tired of all this radical agitation. Science, freedom, the Peace Corps, and the United Nations were making a better world. Stop all this noise.¹⁷

The Spokesmen were not alone in trying to answer McGuire's complaint, although they were the most successful; a folk group called The Back Porch Majority also tried a rebuttal, emphasizing hope for the future, the value of effort, the lesson of history (e.g. Valley Forge), and ending with reliance on "a simple prayer."¹⁸ This piece, called *A Song of Hope*, was not nationally successful, perhaps partly because it was done in the commercial folk idiom and hence not given air time on rock'n roll stations, and perhaps because the song was less moderate in ideology than *Dawn of Correction*.

The success of *Eve of Destruction* means that millions of teenagers

chose to buy a record of obvious and hard-line political opinion. The largest market for pop records is made up of girls between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, as well as a good number of boys in the same age group.¹⁹ Many of the listeners to rock'n roll stations are in their twenties and older, but the teenagers are the ones who buy the records and play the juke boxes and thus determine what records will be popular. I do not believe that most of the teenage buyers really thought about the ideological content of the records they bought, at least not in any very clear way, but nevertheless the songs of radical political protest had more appeal than any of the other records then current. Somebody liked what they heard. Teenagers are always ready to complain about their own difficulties, and I suppose it is not strange that protests about public problems should appeal to them also. Still, since *Eve of Destruction* proved to be not an isolated record but the beginning of a trend, it seems clear that the message of radical activism common in the Civil Rights movement and in Berkeley-style college protest has a great appeal also to the culturally submerged millions of teenagers.

The precise degree of radicalism present in *Eve of Destruction* and its numerous imitators may be questioned—certainly, by the standards of Paul Goodman or LeRoi Jones, folk-rock protest is moderate at most—but when seen against the puerile background of most popular music and the sheltered experience of most young adolescents, Barry McGuire was very far out indeed. Folk-rock does not simply appeal to a limited group of intellectuals and professional radicals as do more traditional forms of social protest. It affects tens of millions of previously apolitical teenagers; that is its importance.

Eve of Destruction was banned by many radio stations; in fact, twenty of the top fifty markets did not play it at all, even when it became the Number One song on the hit parade. Many minor radio stations in small markets took their cue from the large markets and banned the song.²⁰ This is not particularly surprising; it is fairly common for stations to refuse air time to songs that are overtly sexual; it is easy to see why a program director in many American cities might hesitate before playing *Eve of Destruction*. What is surprising is that despite the ban by forty per cent of the nation's radio stations, despite the fact that most disc jockeys gave as little publicity as they could to the record, *Eve of Destruction* rose rapidly to the top of the popularity chart, and remained high from the end of August until the beginning of November.

And so Barry McGuire had himself a hit, and pop music had a new form: folk-rock. On the *Ed Sullivan Show* for Halloween night, 1965, Barry McGuire appeared and sang; he was introduced as “the greatest of the new folk-rock singers.” His song was equally famous; on the television show, *This Hour Has Seven Days*, Herman Kahn, a representative of the Pentagon, was interviewed. He rated the chance of nuclear war “relatively low” for this decade; folk singer Dinah Christie followed him on the show with a powerful performance of *Eve of Destruction*.²¹ McGuire was obviously not alone in seeing his song as a propaganda piece.

So MUCH for the first really successful folk-rock record. The example was not ignored; folk-rock was suddenly a big business. It's *What's Happening*. The companies that make good quality electric guitars of the sort demanded by would-be rockers were changed from a quiet byway of the American musical instrument business into the hottest and most profitable part of the industry.²² Bob Dylan reached the top of the popular music field by drawing a capacity crowd in New York's Carnegie Hall.²³ The teenage television market was well aware of the popularity of folk-rock too. On October 11, 1965 *Hullabaloo*, the most popular teenage music program, presented several of Dylan's songs, after credit lining him as “the greatest composer of folk-rock writing today.” Even more obviously political than Dylan's songs was the final selection: an a cappella version of the pacifist anthem *Blowing in the Wind*. The new style had its effect on the performers in the business too; rock groups shuffled their members to fit themselves for the new sound popularized by Dylan and his whining harmonica.²⁴

The appearance of more and more folk-rock and protest songs on the charts in the months of September and October was another, and much more exact, measure of their popularity. At the beginning of 1965 an occasional song with political or social comment appeared, but none of them made any particular impact. However, by July the number of protest songs in the top one hundred had gone up to two or three each week, and by the beginning of August there were five protest songs on the charts. As I pointed out above, *Eve of Destruction* first appeared in the middle of August, with five other protest numbers already among the top one hundred. The total number of protest and folk-rock songs continued to grow, until by the end of September, eleven of the top one hundred were songs of protest. In early October the number went to thirteen, and later to fifteen, but

the percentage settled at about ten per cent for the month of October where it continued for the remainder of the year.

Many of the folk-rock pieces were really songs of individual protest, not political or social in any narrow sense, but rather general complaints against the culture in which the adolescent lived, or at least thought he did. The most obvious examples of this genre were the numerous lyrics dealing in one way or another with the difficulties of having long hair. This seems a simple enough problem, but considering the current fashion for boys and girls to wear their hair at least shoulder length, and the natural distrust of most adults of any such dangerous merging of sexual roles, many boys and a good many girls found themselves with real troubles at home and at school. The problem was not of course new. One of the duties of the heads of Oxford colleges during the seventeenth century was to publicly shear any student who let his hair grow long in the courtly fashion.²⁵ The contemporary phase of this old controversy between fashion and propriety was dealt with in songs like Jody Miller's *Home of the Brave*, which asked plaintively how America could be called the "home of the brave and the land of the free" when Johnny wasn't allowed to wear his hair long.²⁶ The basic complaint was personal and adolescent, but folk-rock emphasized this specific problem by making it a general protest against enforced conformity to cultural norms.

Most of the spate of protest songs, however, were more overtly public than *Home of the Brave*. They were also almost entirely liberal in their political sentiments. The conservatives did attempt to answer, but so far as I know none of their answers were popularly successful.

Pacifism is a strong theme in the folk-rock flood, although the most successful songs on this subject are rather closer to folk music than to the rest of folk-rock. The oldest of these is *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*, a Civil War song reworked by that liberal warhorse Pete Seeger, made popular in the folk style by Peter, Paul, and Mary, and then translated into a folk-rock version by Johnny Rivers, a country and western singer. This song attacked war from the standpoint of individual action, as most folk-rock protests do, by asking "when will they ever learn" not to go to war.²⁷ The next song to appear on the charts in the pacifist camp was Glen Campbell's version of *The Universal Soldier*. This was also a folk piece, composed originally by well known folk singer, Buffy St. Marie, but Campbell's heavily rhythmic attack on the song reached a wider audience. "The Universal Soldier" was Everyman, and the protest was again against individual

participation in war; the final message was: "Brother can't you see, this is not the way we put an end to war?"²⁸

The romance of Glen Campbell with *The Universal Soldier* provides a good example of how folk-rock got started, and where it is likely to go. Campbell is a country boy from Albuquerque, New Mexico, who, until the success of *The Universal Soldier*, had not made it big. His recording company thought he had possibilities and was pushing him very hard toward stardom. He, or his managers, picked up *The Universal Soldier* in the summer of 1965 as a trend song, bound to become popular if given the right treatment. Campbell himself had no obvious political interests; he just wanted badly to make a hit record.²⁹ He made one. Then he began to sound as if he wished he hadn't. The uproar over the political side of his song seems to have horrified him—the last thing a commercially ambitious pop singer wants is to become politically controversial. On October 26 he staunchly supported the conservative position partially by saying that he thought draft card burners "should be hung." "If you don't have enough guts to fight for your country, you're not a man," he said, and went on to promise that any other protest songs he made would be "red-blooded American" types.³⁰ This is all rather delightful from a singer who a few weeks before was soulfully breathing "Yes, he's the Universal Soldier, and he really is to blame." It also shows that folk-rock songs which openly present radical views may have short shrift and quick burial in the sensitive pop music market.

Another pacifist song which reached the top ten was a number by the master himself, Bob Dylan. This was *It Ain't Me Babe*, which was given the rock treatment by a group called The Turtles.³¹ It was superficially a sort of love lyric, but when Dylan wrote "You say you're looking for someone who's never weak but always strong/ To protect you and defend you whether you are right or wrong," and then shouted "It ain't me babe," the loose reference of the pronoun leaves support for those who call *It Ain't Me Babe* the draft-card-burner's anthem. More recently, a group called The Byrds took Pete Seeger's musical setting for the text of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes (which, incidentally, was a favorite text of JFK's),³² *Turn! Turn! Turn!* and began to climb up the charts with it. Neither the *carpe diem* prophet of Ecclesiastes nor Pete Seeger was in much doubt about the values of peace and the folly of military and nationalistic pretensions.

The contemporary interest in Civil Rights was also reflected in

folk-rock, but again the impetus came from the political left, not from the Negro singers themselves. In fact, there are no Negro folk-rock singers as far as I know. This lack could very well be simply a reflection of the general dearth of male Negro singers in the pop market, because, except for a few old-timers like Chubby Checkers and Ray Charles, Negro males do not even enter into the business.³³ They have their own stations, and their own music, rhythm and blues, and so far their themes have remained the traditional ones of love and personal problems. Another explanation for the lack of Negro musical protest may well be that there are simply not many radical Negroes, except in the limited field of Civil Rights.

What Color Is A Man, sung by Bobby Vinton, is an example of the comment commercial folk-rock makes about Civil Rights. This song was a revival of 1964's coloring-book song fad, combined with the new folk-rock style. It presented a strong plea for racial tolerance for Negroes and Indians by urging a child not to "color him red, Son,/ Someone may steal his land," and to avoid black because "if you color him black, Son,/ He may never be free."³⁴ More typical, perhaps, of this sort of song was *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, another of Bob Dylan's compositions, which included in its long list of complaints against society some against racial discrimination by police and employment officials.³⁵

Another form of racial protest was directed to, although again not usually sung by, Negroes themselves. The Animals' version of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* is an example; it was a lament about the hopelessness of slum life and the futility of the middle-class tradition of work and effort, and a demand for a "better life for me and you."³⁶ The precise nature of that better life was romantically left unspecified. As with many rock songs, the lyrics were sung with a deep Negro accent, and various grunts and squeals, like those common in rhythm-and-blues music, were thrown in whenever nothing much else was going on. There were many songs which protested, as *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* did, by presenting a situation which was not overtly social or political in orientation, but which to most listeners among the groups addressed had a special significance. Several academic students of popular songs, including David Riesman, have noticed this "double entendre" effect in pop music in the past, and many of the protest songs of the present "mean more than they say" as one radio station program director put it.³⁷

THE RIGHT HAS NOT OF COURSE BEEN SILENT beneath these waves of protest from the new unwashed of the left. There have been numerous attempts to reaffirm traditional values, but only a few of them have had even partial success. I have already mentioned two songs which sought specifically to answer Barry McGuire's *Eve of Destruction*. Another tune, and one that had a certain satirical bite and considerable folksy power, was Buddy Cagle's *We the People*, also called *The Great Society*. This song satirized the leftist concept of love as a basis for society, the consumer-oriented economy, and the welfare state, as well as several other tenets of Johnsonian democracy.³⁸ A more recent attempt with some promise was Elton Britt's revival of the World War II pop hit *There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere*. Despite these offerings of the right, however, no "answer" song came close to changing the generally leftist sound of folk-rock until in early 1966 Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler's *Ballad of the Green Beret* proved attractive to teenagers.

The paladins of the right did not let the defeat of their musical champions dull their response to the folk-rock message. There were general outcries against folk-rock as another manifestation of destructive radical delinquency, and more solid protests in the form of industry bans, like the partial ban on *Eve of Destruction*. Intellectual leaders were not silent; Rabbi Rubenstein, spiritual leader of a Pittsburgh congregation, preached his Yom Kippur sermon on October 5 against Barry McGuire and Bob Dylan and their defeatist attitudes.³⁹

Other protests were not so academic. By the beginning of October a wave of protest against the protest was evident. Disc jockeys in some cities were finding the wave of protest lyrics so unpleasant that they were boycotting many of the new breed of songs. One deejay said: "There are dozens of these records that you don't hear simply because we don't choose to play them." Another deejay was equally unhappy, but more personal. "I hope this stuff ends soon," he said. "I want the good old rock'n roll back again—the real fun that pop music should be."⁴⁰ There was evidence of specific action by broadcasters on local levels too; a radio-station owner in one small New Mexico town announced that he would ban records that were "unpatriotic." His action, he said, was taken because the songs gave support to anti-war demonstrations.⁴¹

No doubt dozens of other more or less individual objections of this sort were registered by station managers and disc jockeys. The record industry is certain to listen carefully to the desires of their retail out-

lets, and industry opposition, directed as it seemingly is at opinion of any kind, right or left, succeeded to a certain extent in halting the natural inclination of the pop music market to exploit a new field. Many other songs protesting one thing or another appeared on the charts of national popularity during the fall of 1965 and more are being added as I write these words, but the more overtly political or radical songs have been diminished in number. However, folk-rock protest remains, as a little time spent listening to any popular radio station will verify.

This shift from private to public themes in popular music may seem unfortunate to some, but I think those few observers who have commented on popular music in the past would be glad to see the change. Colin MacInnes, for example, observed in 1958 that teenagers were not hostile to the establishment, but simply "blithely indifferent" toward it; he saw the "happy mindlessness" of popular music as "the raw material for crypto-fascisms of the worst kinds."⁴² I think he would be happy with the folk-rock movement.

So the American Consensus does not seem as monolithic and impregnable as it once did. If the commercial and narcissistic world of popular music as it has developed in our mass society can undertake a political debate, then it seems possible that the current unrest and protest evident in folk-rock is a real, if rather vague, reflection of some social and political interest on the part of American teenagers. If some vestige of a real concern has broken through the bland surface of modern mass culture, then the musical tastes of the dissatisfied teenager of 1965 may show that the narrow crack represented by folk-rock was only the first sign of a real tension in the structure of the American Consensus.

NOTES

1. Henry F. May, "The End of American Radicalism," *American Quarterly*, II (Winter 1950), 291-302.
2. Jeremy Lerner, "What Do They Get from Rock and Roll?" *Atlantic*, CCXIV (Aug. 1964), 44.
3. "Kansas City Star" presents this ultimate glory "in the Supermarket parking lot."
4. Bruce Jackson, "Sanitary Signifying and Proliferating Ivy: Observations of the City-Billy at Work and Play," *Listen*, I (Mar.-Apr. 1964), 5.

5. A convenient source for the history of modern popular music is Larner's "What Do They Get from Rock and Roll," which I have already noted.

6. Nat Hentoff, "The Unextinguishable Beatles," *Disc*, III (Oct. 1965), 22-23, provides most of the Beatleana.

7. Hentoff, 23.

8. Robert Creeley, member of the staff at the University of New Mexico, mentioned this recent development. Kenneth Rexroth's "The Fugs" are an example of one of the poet groups.

9. "Times Are Getting Hard" was revived by a country-and-western singer named Bobby Bare in the fall of 1965 (RCA 47-8509), but the new version failed to interest teenagers, and never made the charts. Most of the information on pre-twentieth-century popular songs comes from David Ewen, *Panorama of American Popular Music* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1957), *passim*.

10. Interview with Don Lincoln, program director KQEO radio, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 21 Oct. 1965.

11. Jackson, part II, 5.

12. *Variety*, for instance, said: "If it was only suspected before, the disk companies now know that anything or anybody, no matter how far out, has a chance. The tremendous click of . . . *Eve of Destruction*, a piece of ideology set to music, has signaled that the teenage disk market wants pop, but not necessarily pap, in the entertainment groove." Herm Schoenfeld, "Fresh Talent Lifts Disk B.O." *Variety*, 13 Oct. 1965, 63.

13. "Protest Songs with a Rock Beat," *Life*, LIX (5 Nov. 1965), 44.

14. *Eve of Destruction* is Dunhill D-4009.

15. Interview with Paul Baines, program director of radio station KOB, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 10 Oct. 1965. *Billboard* magazine provides regional popularity charts which can be used to follow the geographic differences in popularity.

16. The Spokesmen have an LP album of protest songs, mostly right of political center, and all folk-rock in style, but only *Dawn of Correction* made any significant impact. The LP is Decca DL 4712.

17. *Dawn of Correction* on single release is Decca 31844.

18. The Back Porch Majority's *A Song of Hope* is Epic JZSP 111381.

19. Interview with Paul Baines.

20. Interviews with Baines and Lincoln verified that their own stations banned the song because the "Big Markets" did. The extent of the ban is an estimate by Baines.

21. "This Hour Has Seven Days," *Variety*, 13 Oct. 1965, 38.

22. "Boom in Guitars Sparks Buy of British Co." *Variety*, 13 Oct. 1965, 63.
23. "Bob Dylan's Boffo \$12,000 at Carnegie," *Variety*, 6 Oct. 1965, 53.
24. "Group's Disbanding as Big Beat Wanes," *Variety*, 6 Oct. 1965, 58.
25. Wallace Notestein, *The English People on the Eve of Colonization* (New York, 1954), 141.
26. On *Capital* 5483.
27. On *Imperial* 66133.
28. *Capital* 5504.
29. Interview with Don Lincoln.
30. "Protest Disker Hits Draft Vandals," *Variety*, 27 Oct. 1965, 60.
31. On *White Whale* [!] 222.
32. Robert Shelton, "On Records: The Folk-Rock Rage," *New York Times*, 30 Jan. 1966, X-21.
33. Interview with Paul Baines.
34. *Epic* 5-9846.
35. *Columbia* 4-43242.
36. Fascinatingly issued first on an album called *Animal Tracks* by Mickie Most Productions, Reverse Producers Corporation. MGM K13382 is the 45 rpm single version.
37. David Riesman, "Listening to Popular Music," in *Individualism Reconsidered* (Glencoe, Ill., 1965) followed by John Johnstone and Elihu Katz, "Youth and Popular Music," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXII (May 1957), 563. The program director was Baines.
38. *Mercury* 72452.
39. "Rabbi Chides Folkniks on 'Destruction' Fears," *Variety*, 13 Oct. 1965, 63.
40. "Battle of Ideologies Set to Music Meets DeeJay Resistance Movement," *Variety*, 13 Oct. 1965, 63.
41. "Some Records Banned from Clovis Station," *Albuquerque Tribune*, 21 Oct. 1965, E-1.
42. Colin MacInnes, "Popular Songs and Teenagers," *Twentieth Century*, CLXIII (Feb. 1958), 130.

✿ MICHAEL ORTH, an American Studies doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico, served as an officer with the United States Army in Europe from 1959 to 1961. After receiving his Master of Arts degree from San Francisco State College in 1963, he taught at California State College in Chico, California. He has published poetry criticism in the *Walt Whitman Review*, historical pieces in *Civil War History Illustrated*.