

Douglas Simkin

Project report

BCM390, “Media, war and peace”

Autumn session, 2013

University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390_13outline.pdf

Douglas Simkin prepared (1) an information pack in the form of slide show (see link on next page) and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project, below.

- The link to this document is from http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html.

BCM390 Dialogue
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The project can be found online at

http://prezi.com/1rf2jwsn1g4z/present/?auth_key=rxik7f0&follow=5zpdcyrfem8

or

<http://prezi.com/1rf2jwsn1g4z/bcm390-project-vietnam-war-protest-music/>

or at

<http://www.2shared.com/file/uoGFJth4/untitled-prezi-1rf2jwsn1g4z.html>

(This second link is an online dropbox, through which the actual presentation has been uploaded as a safeguard.)

To control the presentation, click the left and right arrows to go forwards and backwards.

References: (From Presentation)

Australian War Memorial 2013, Australian casualties in the Vietnam War, 1962–72, accessed 09/06/2013, <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/vietnam/statistics.asp>

Cousins, A 2007, 'Can protest music influence social change?', weblog post, Inside Time, 19 November, accessed 07/06/2013, <http://www.insidetime.org/articleview.asp?a=87>

Field Battery 2013, General Statistics Vietnam War, accessed 10/06/2013, <http://www.103fieldbatteryraa.net/documents/74.html>

Mondak, J 1988, 'Protest music as political persuasion, Popular Music and Society, vol.12, no.3, pp25-38.

Princeton 2013, Protest Song, accessed 09/06/2013, http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Protest_song.html

Rikard, D 2004, Patriotism, Propoganda, Parody and Protest: The Music of Three American Wars, (in) War, Literature and The Arts: An International Journal of the Huma, vol.16, no.1, pp129-144.

Rodnitzky, J 1999, The Sixties between the Microgrooves: Using Folk and Protest Music to Understand American History, 1963-1973, (in) Popular Music and Society, vol.23, no.4, pp105-122.

Statistic Brain 2013, Vietnam War Statistics, accessed 10/06/2013
<http://www.statisticbrain.com/vietnam-war-statistics/>

Image References: (From Presentation)

Image 1

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/vietnam-map.gif>

image 2

http://64796893.nhd.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/4/1/10415126/929015602_orig.jpg

Image 3

http://jfkplusfifty.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/domino_theory.jpg

Image 4

<http://www.dangerouscreation.com/2012/11/why-the-world-must-unite-to-fight-against-americas-imperialism/us-imperialism-latuff-latin-america-racism/>

Image 5

<http://blogs.citypages.com/blotter/martin-luther-king2.jpg>

Image 6

<http://spencer.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/25th/kc46b.jpg>

Image 7

http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_ln3g75aagg1qjv7jjo1_500.jpg

Image 8

<http://flipthemediamedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/youtube-logo2.jpeg>

Footnotes: (From Presentation)

1. American statistics were primarily used in this section as the statistical and numerical information for other allied nations is not readily available.
2. Not an intended generalisation, more a noticeable theme of the 1960's. Also relevant to the culture of music.
3. I created this system myself, as I was struggling to get my head around the theory of protest music. It would appear that there actually is no concrete theory available, so I tried to make something that had 4 elements on which you could judge whether or not a song was indeed a piece of protest music.
4. I tried to relate these songs back to my framework mentioned in footnote number 3.
5. There are hundreds of examples on YouTube where there is consistent debate between users over the relevance of these politically charged songs today, compared to

when they were first written. From the videos I searched, the ones involving Vietnam as a theme often contained heated arguments as to whether Vietnam was a just or unjust war.

Key Players:

Myself (**ME**)

Protest Musician (**PM**)

PM: As a young person growing up in a world free from this kind of musical influence, I am really interested as to how you came about picking this topic for your short. What made you choose it?

ME: There were a few things that put me on the track to choosing protest music as the topic for my info pack. Firstly, I love the music from that era, I always grew up with my parents blaring Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones, and I thought my appreciation for this music would become evident in the eventual project.

PM: Was there any other reason?

ME: There was actually. I have always been fascinated with the power of music in Vietnam. I remember when I first saw the scene from the film *Apocalypse Now*, when the helicopters fly in and drop napalm to the tune of *Ride of the Valkyries*. That changed my life (laughs). I had also believed, from pop culture I guess, that music was an inherent part of Vietnam. That's pretty much why I chose it.

PM: This is a really broad topic. I know when I was writing music at the time, there were hundreds of new songs coming out each day. How did you find the right materials, without getting bogged down?

ME: This was probably one of the hardest parts of the pack I think. While there is certainly a plethora of music to discuss, the theory to back it up is relatively slim. I found 3 or 4 appropriate articles that came in handy, but the rest of it I mostly had to come up with myself, which was challenging. I often found that there were a few times where I had no idea where it was going (laughs). But yeah, most of the sources came from the library site, although I did use a few websites to get the basic statistics about the war in Vietnam.

PM: How did you choose the musical examples you showed in your presentation?

ME: That wasn't too hard. That Peter Seeger song is a classic, and really demonstrated my point about context. If you just heard it on its own, with no idea of the time it was written, you would take it on face value of a man leading his men across a river, failing, and the whole thing being a disaster. However in the context of Vietnam....it's a

completely different story. The other three songs are all favorites of mine. I thought the Redgum song was particularly important, considering it deals with the war from an Australian perspective, one that I feel is often forgotten.

PM: I like the fact you already have an appreciation for the music of the time. Would you feel that hindered you in any way? You didn't possibly jump in the deep end with your project because you already have an understanding of the topic?

ME: (Laughs), well I thought that could be a bit of an issue, hence why I decided to give a bit of background information on the Vietnam War at the start of the presentation. The main reason I did that was to try and illustrate that public opinion definitely wasn't in the favor of the governments who were sending thousands of young men to their deaths. You can probably see that a few times in the project I mention the importance of context, and I really do think it's vital in order to understand an issue as complex as this.

PM: Did you try this out on anyone beforehand? Someone who had no real knowledge of the topic?

ME: I sure did. I thought this would be really important in getting good feedback on ways I could potentially improve the presentation. I showed the presentation to a few friends who had no real idea about either the war or protest music and they responded really well. At first a few of them struggled to comprehend the theory side of things, and it was upon their recommendations that I tried to create some kind of simple groundwork to go off with the '4 Elements of Protest Music'. After I added this, they said it was a lot easier for them to watch the Vietnam War music videos and understand them from the view of protest music, not just a song.

PM: You mentioned earlier that you struggled with the theory a bit. Why was this, and how do you think it affected the outcome of the project? Were there any strengths or weaknesses of viewing the Vietnam War through the 'Protest Music' lens?

ME: That's a good question actually. When I was researching the theory of protest music, I didn't find a clearly defined list of what made a song a protest song and set it apart from just any other piece of music. This would be a definite weakness, as there is not that much information readily available on the topic and I really had to draw my own conclusions. That said, this definitely helped further my own understanding of the framework, as I had to look into the basic elements that constituted a protest song. Protest music can be broken into two elements. Protest & Music, and when I looked at things on this very simple level, it became much easier to understand.

PM: Would you say that relating the theory effectively to the case study was a difficulty?

ME: Definitely. As I said earlier, it was one of the major challenges of the assignment. Based on the feedback I got from others who viewed it, I feel as though I still gave it a pretty good shot in the final edit of the presentation.

PM: How effective was Protest Music as a lens for viewing the Vietnam War? What made you choose that over say, 'Non violent action' or even 'lying'?

ME: I think that it was a very effective frame, as it incorporates a whole heap of social issues to do with the war that I had never really taken into account previous to this project. Even the people on which I tested the presentation said that they had never thought of the importance of analyzing Vietnam through the words of a protest song, which I found interesting considering how large of a part that music played in both the war itself, and 1960's America as a whole.

PM: Was there anything in your research you found that was unexpected?

ME: There certainly was. I had often assumed that there had been a serious decline in forms of protest music since the 1960's and 7-'s, however I was proved very wrong in this regard. I found a 2009 article by Glen Doherty from the University of Massachusetts¹ in which he explains how protest music is just as relevant now as it was then. This was very unexpected because I had assumed that after the Vietnam War had ended, the art of protest music had ended with it.

PM: Was there anything else that you found interesting in your research?

ME: The thing I found most interesting about this whole topic was the information presented by Mondak (1988)² on the possible shortcomings of music as a form of protest. I had never really considered this angle before, and the information he presented about the cognitive processes used in understanding song were really good material. I had never thought that it could be analyzed on such a psychological level before, nor appreciated the complexities of understanding music in general. I guess it makes sense that for the song to be effective it needs to be recognized and understood, that's just something that I had always taken for granted.

PM: If you were to further your interest in this field, where would you look to next?

ME: I have always had a very keen interest on American bluesmen, and I would probably try and tie in the African American music of the deep south with the more folky music used during the Vietnam War period. Looking for links and influences in music is always fun, and can also tell you a lot about the cultural relevance of the issue being discussed.

¹ Doherty, G 2009, 'The role of the protest singer/songwriter in antiwar movements in America: Vietnam vs. Afghanistan & Iraq' EdD thesis, University of Massachusetts, Boston, accessed 10/062013, Dissertations & Thesis's (ProQuest) database.

² Mondak, J 1988, 'Protest music as political persuasion', *Popular Music and Society*, vol.12, no.3, pp25-38.