

Hanley

Honors English III / Period 6

01 March 2010

I ain't Marching Anymore

The Vietnam War era was a turbulent time for the United States. All sorts of people, especially young Americans who were affected by the draft, protested the war and other social ills for almost its entire course. These people formed groups to advance their agenda, ^{cut; comma} and began ^{rules} to organize campaigns around their beliefs. At the forefront of this new movement was a set of singers and songwriters, such as Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, and Phil Ochs. Their songs examined the fabric of American society, its government, and its morals, and often found us wanting. The song, "I ain't Marching Anymore" by Phil Ochs is of this type, but with a twist. "I ain't Marching Anymore" not only successfully portrays the United States as a warlike nation fighting in immoral and pointless conflicts, but through the metaphorical use of a young soldier extends this indictment backwards in time to the beginning of America, all while maintaining that there is a chance for America to change. ^{insightful}

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"I ain't Marching Anymore" has a protagonist in the form of a young man dealing with the horrors of war. He fights wars everywhere in American history, in Europe, Asia, and even here at home. Despite the differences in the time and place of the wars Ochs sings about, the entire song is in the first person. The powerful metaphor of a universal soldier who has seen ^{good} every battle the United States has ever fought helps Ochs reveal the pattern these clashes form. ^{point}

Unlike other protest songs, which often deal solely with a single time period or event, "I ain't Marchin' Anymore" concerns itself with the occurrences of a much broader span of time.

Each verse besides the last concerns itself with one or more wars from American history. The first verse begins with a reference to the War of 1812: "Oh I marched to the battle of New Orleans / At the end of the early British war" (1-2). The next verses cover the Indian wars, the Mexican American War, the Civil War, World War One, and the atomic bombing of Japan during World War Two. Ochs runs down this list of conflicts in order to show that the United States is a warlike nation. Moreover, his portrayal of this bloodshed is not a glorious one. The battles he names are either morally questionable, horrendously bloody, or merely futile.

The best examples of ethically bankrupt conflicts from his list are the Indian wars and the Mexican-American War. The former was part of, "an unbroken string of genocide campaigns against the native peoples of the Americas" (Stannard 194) focused on acquiring their land. After these wars concluded, American Indians, whose territory once spanned the entire continent "found themselves crammed together on tiny reservations" (Kennedy et al. 601). These wars by the United States against a hopelessly outmatched opponent cannot be called moral or just.

Similarly, the true *causis belli* for the American war against Mexico was the acquisition of territory. What originally started as an border dispute over Texas ended with the younger nation losing what is today nearly the entire American southwest ("Mexican War") to the northern aggressors. Ochs viewed neither of the outcomes of these wars as fair. Both of these land grabs were greedy wars, not just ones.

The final amoral hostility Ochs names in the song is the atomic bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (24-25). These uses of nuclear weapons in aggression were in moral controversy before they even occurred. A number of scientists from the Manhattan Project objected to the use of their creation on Japan or civilian targets, especially without intense

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negotiation attempts beforehand (Szilard). Their letter to that effect was ignored. These attacks stand as an aberration in history; "Fat Man" and "Little Boy" are the only atom bombs to ever be used on civilian targets.

Other wars in the song are futile ones. For example, the opening verse references the Battle of New Orleans and the War of 1812. When war was originally declared by the United States in 1812, the expectation was that it would be able to capture Canada (Kennedy et al. 237). Instead the war ended in a draw. The battle sung about by Ochs resulted in over two thousand deaths but was fought two weeks after the peace treaty had been signed (236). These deaths were pointless.

Worse than a single battle, World War One as a whole can be interpreted as an exercise in futility. What was called "the war to end all wars" ended with 53,000 American combat deaths, yet failed to bring peace to Europe (Kennedy et al. 709). Less than twenty-five years after fighting the Great War, the United States found itself in another global conflict with the same nations. The advent of the Second World War rendered the sacrifices of the first moot. It was a pointless and futile clash.

During each chorus Ochs asks us, "Now look at all we've won with the saber and the gun / Tell me is it worth it all" (13-14). His song has shown that the United States has fought needless, immoral, and bloody wars. The conclusion Ochs wants us to reach is "no." While we may have reaped a material bounty from some of our conflicts, it is quite clear that he views the events he relates in the song as embarrassing or harmful to the American nation. If the lives and moral standing of the American nation had not been sacrificed in these conflicts, he believes we would be better off.

is to resist the "Military-Industrial" complex of business and war that Eisenhower warned of,
 learn from the disgraceful conflicts of our history, and lay down arms. Whether one uses
 "peace," "love," or "reason" as justification, he believes it is time to let ^{cut} [the] America's young
 soldiers have a rest from the battles, because they "ain't marchin' anymore."

Unfortunately his hope is not seen through. Instead of a new era of peace, the United
 States ^{-verb tense?} finds itself ensnared in the Vietnam War. This war does not end until 1975, a decade after
 "I ain't Marching Anymore" was published. This song did not manage to change America's
 warlike nature, but it does provide a powerful message for peace.