

# The History of Protest Music

## Class 3:

### The Vietnam War

Jim Dunphy

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# Troop levels in Vietnam

1963	16300
1964	23300
1965	184300
1966	385300
1967	485600
1968	536100
1969	475200
1970	334600
1971	156800
1972	24200



**Pete Seeger**

# Pete Seeger

- Hopefully a familiar face by now
- Was no longer blacklisted by the mid 1960's but hard to find work outside of college campuses
- ABC's refusal to have him on *Hootenanny* led to a boycott by other artists

# Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXnJVkEX8O4>

# Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

- The Smothers Brothers TV show premiered in February 1967
- Had guests such as Joan Baez, Janis Ian and the Doors not on other variety program
- However, Pete Seeger singing Waist Deep in the Big Muddy was the most controversial of the guests.



# Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

- The song takes place in WWII, not Vietnam
- A Captain orders his troops into the river, without knowing the depth
- The sergeant tells him to turn back, but “the big fool said to push on”
- Finally, the Captain drowns, and the sergeant orders the men out of the river to safety

# Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

- Was seen by many (particularly by CBS) as a parable for LBJ and the Vietnam War
- Without making the parallel, Seeger notes:

*But every time I read the papers*

*That old feeling comes on;*

*We're waist deep in the Big Muddy*

*And the big fool says to push on.*



# Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

- CBS censored the song in the September 1967 broadcast
- After support from the Smothers Brothers, Seeger came back as a guest in February 1968 and sang the full song
- The Smothers Brothers continued to fight CBS until the show was canceled in April 1969, despite the announcement it was picked up for the 1969-1970 season



# **Country Joe and the Fish**

Joe McDonald  
b. January 1, 1942

# Country Joe McDonald

- Born in DC and grew up in CA
- Served a three year tour in the Navy
- Founded Country Joe and the Fish as a duo in 1965
- Began playing in Berkeley and soaked up the anti war and counter culture there

# Country Joe McDonald

- By 1967, was a full band
- Transitioned from folk to psychedelic rock
- In addition to playing at the Fillmore West in SF, most famously played at Woodstock
- In addition to the *I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag*, led the crowd in the F Cheer, which became one of the highlights of the *Woodstock* movie

# I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XZ07UWhk8s>

# I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag

- Recorded in 1967
- Ended up in a lawsuit as to whether the melody was taken from a 1926 jazz song



# **I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag**

- McDonald later stated he wrote the song in 30 minutes
- The song places the blame for the war on politicians, generals and industrialists
- The soldiers are only pawns, with no input
- Emphasis on sardonic GI humor



**Crosby, Stills Nash and Young**



# Crosby, Stills Nash and Young

- One of the first of the “supergroups”  
(Cream probably the first)
- David Crosby                      The Byrds
- Steven Stills                      Buffalo Springfield
- Graham Nash                      The Hollies
- Neil Young                      Buffalo Springfield

# Crosby, Stills Nash and Young

- Formed at a party at the house of Nash's girlfriend Joni Mitchell
- Originally just CSN, then Stills (to his regret) convinced the group to invite Young

# Crosby, Stills Nash and Young

- First live performance was on August 16, 1969
- Two days later, debuted *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes* at Woodstock
- Song was a tribute to Stills' girlfriend Judy Collins (detect a pattern?)

# Crosby, Stills Nash and Young

- Group imploded on tour in 1970, and pursued solo and duet (Crosby/Nash, Stills/Young) projects
- Continue to come together as a group (usually without Young) for tours, right up to the present
- However, a recent feud between Nash and Crosby makes future tours in doubt

# Ohio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2UBQX7fwBQ>

# Ohio

- On Thursday, April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced US troops were entering Cambodia
- Demonstrations took place at a number of colleges, including Kent State, over the weekend



# Ohio

- By Sunday, May 3, the Governor of OH was in Kent and he had called up the Ohio National Guard
- There was a protest scheduled for May 4, and even though officially canceled, 2,000 people attended
- Three companies of the OH NG were sent to the campus

# Ohio

- At noon, the crowd was ordered to disperse, but did not do so
- First shots rang out at 12:24, and eventually 67 rounds were fired
- 4 students killed, 9 wounded



# 4 Dead in Ohio

- Top row: Alison Krause, William Schroeder (ROTC Student)
- Bottom row: Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer



Alison Krause



William Schroeder



Jeffrey Miller



Sandra Scheuer

# Ohio

- Young wrote the song after seeing the pictures in *Life* Magazine,
- Written, recorded and released by May 21, 1970, less than three weeks after the shootings
- Released despite *Teach Your Children* was on the charts

# Ohio

- The first line, *tin soldiers*, refers to the OH NG, many of whom enlisted to avoid service in VN
- *Nixon's coming* makes it appear Nixon gave the orders to the NG, but it was actually OH Governor Rhodes
- However, Nixon's decision to enter Cambodia led, at least indirectly, to the deaths
- Played at Kent State in 1997 at a commemoration of the incident



**John Lennon/Yoko Ono**

# John Lennon

- Born in 1940 in Liverpool
- His original band was the Quarrymen
- While not original members, Paul McCartney and George Harrison were band members
- Changed the name to the Beatles in 1960
- Led the British invasion and dominated pop charts for years

# John Lennon

- Lennon's comment that the Beatles were bigger than Jesus led to a stop of touring
- Met Yoko Ono in 1966, and his growing relationship with her and business issues led to the breakup of the Beatles in 1969
- Had a solo career with the Plastic Ono Band

# John Lennon

- Moved to NY in 1971, and his growing anti war sentiment led to Nixon trying to deport him
- After the birth of his second son, Sean, took a five year hiatus from performing
- Had just begun recording (*Double Fantasy*) when he was shot and killed outside the Dakota apartments in NYC in December 1980

# Give Peace a Chance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkZC7sqImaM>



# Give Peace a Chance

- Recorded during a “bed in” while in Montreal in 1969
- Among the other artists on the song are Tommy Smothers, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, and Petula Clark.



# Give Peace a Chance

- It was originally written before the Beatles breakup, so although written by Lennon, was officially credited to Lennon-MacCartney
- The percussion is not drums, but people banging on doors, tables and the like.

# Give Peace a Chance

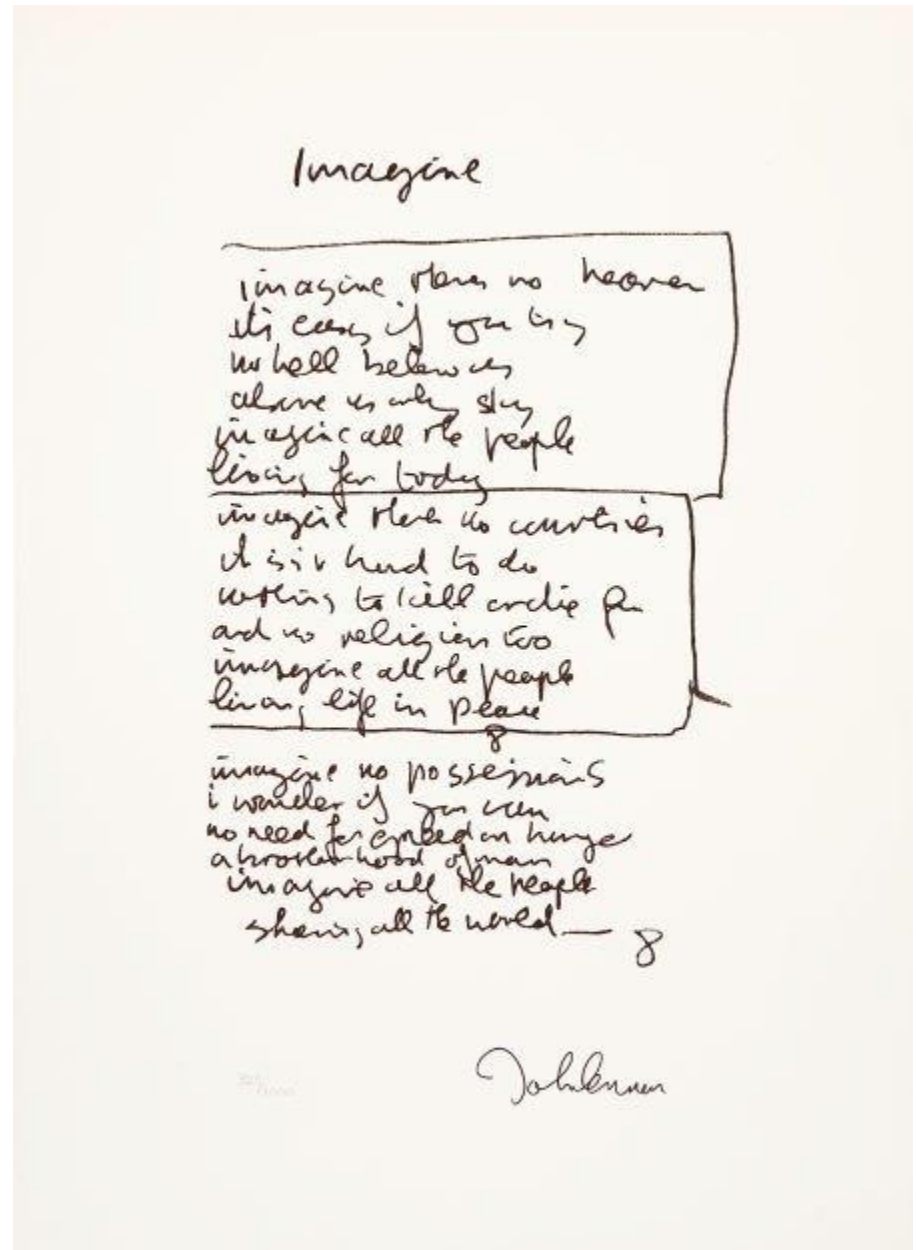
- Is in a way the flip side of *Revolution* where the Beatles reject all types of isms
- Within 6 months of its release it was being sung in the October 1969 moratoriums.

# Imagine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVg2EJvvIF8>

# Imagine

- Strong political message in a much softer melody
- Lennon thought that the words would be more acceptable in a less harsh song
- He later wrote "Put your political message across with a little honey"



# Imagine

- Lennon got the idea for the song from a book by Yoko entitled *Grapefruit*
- Lines from the book included "Imagine the sky crying..." "Imagine you're a cloud."
- Reached #3 on the charts when initially released in 1971, but then reached #1 after Lennon's death

# Imagine

- The lines which were the most controversial remain “Imagine there’s no heaven” and “No religion, too”
- Many of the cover artists have asked to have those lines removed, and Yoko has refused
- *Rolling Stone* Magazine had the song #3 of the top 500 songs of all time. (First two were?)



**John Fogerty/Creedence Clearwater Revival**

**John Fogerty far right**



# John Fogerty

- Fogerty was a member, with his brother Tom, of a forgotten band, the Golliwogs, in the early and mid 1960's
- Joined the Army Reserve after receiving a draft notice and was assigned to Ft. Bragg, Ft. Lee and Ft. Knox before being discharged in 1967
- Renamed the band Creedence Clearwater Revival after discharge from the USAR

# John Fogerty

- Began a string of hits, many of which were covered by other artists
- Included *Proud Mary*, *Bad Moon Rising* and *Lodi*
- Performed at Woodstock
- Group broke up in the early 1970's over control and artistic issues and Fogerty has continued to pursue a solo career

# Fortunate Son

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyzUIEW-Q5E>

# Fortunate Son

- Fogerty later wrote that the song was inspired by seeing David Eisenhower and Julie Nixon, and thinking that David was avoiding service because of his name
- Ironically, David later served in the USNR, like Fogerty did in the USAR



# Fortunate Son

- Fogerty said he wrote the song in 20 minutes
- Against the war in VN, but not against the soldiers
- “Rich man’s war; poor man’s fight”

# Fortunate Son

- Like Springsteen's *Born in the USA*, incorrectly interpreted as a patriotic song

- Used in a jeans commercial – used the lines

*Some folks are born, made to wave the flag,  
Ooh, that red, white and blue*

- But didn't use the next lines:

*And when the band plays "Hail to the Chief"  
Ooh, they're pointin' the cannon at you*

# Fortunate Son

- Subsequent to VN, many politicians and opinion makers who avoided service either
  - Falsified their service records (ie Bruce Caputo of NY)
  - Came out strongly in favor of military action – long after their eligibility for service (aka Chickenhawks)



**Motown and the Anti War Movement**

**Hitsville, USA**





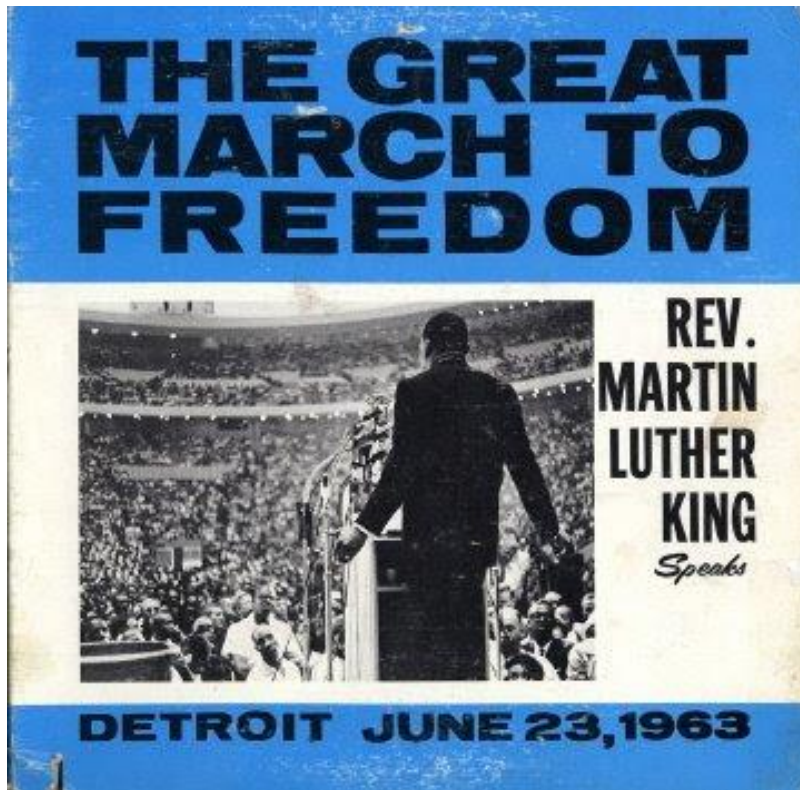
Barry Gordy

Gordy had multiple labels in Motown, but initially he didn't want to have protests in music

# Motown labels

## - Spoken word

Martin Luther King

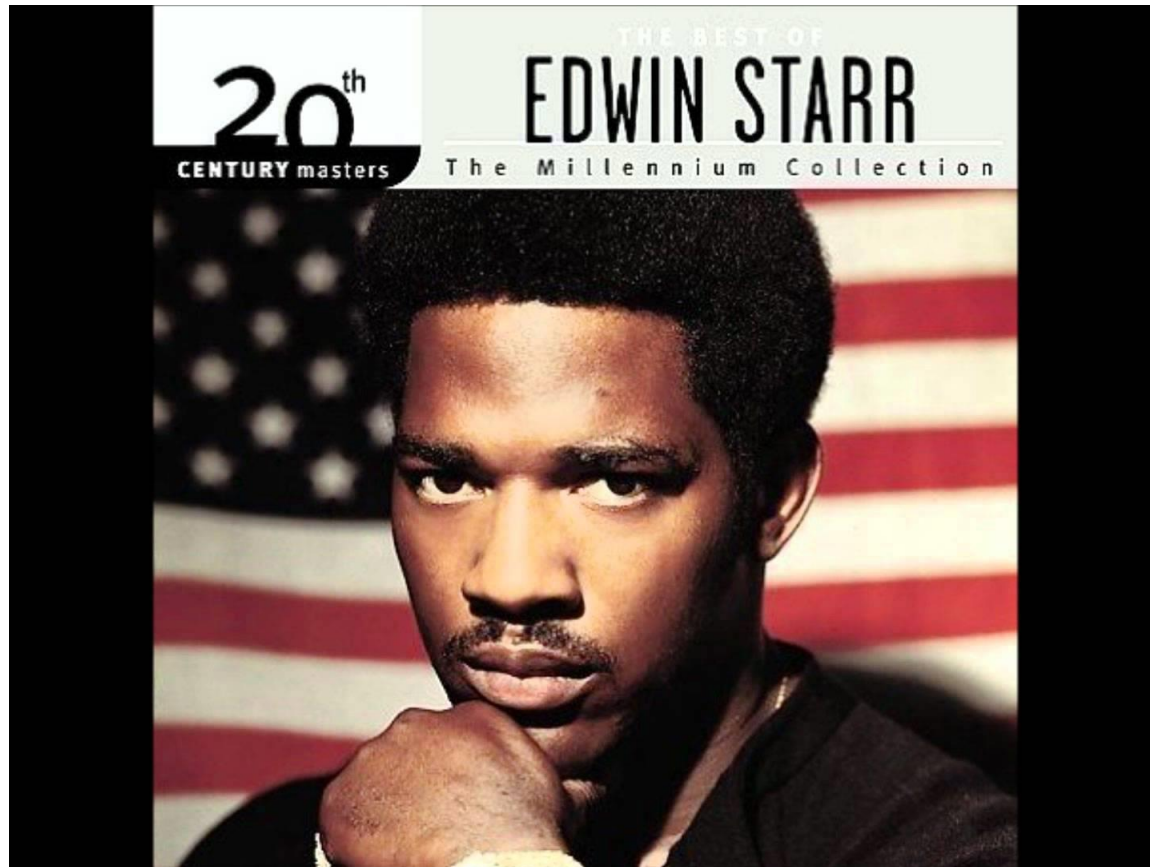


Vietnam



# Changes

- By the late 1960's protest music had filtered into Motown
- Examples include *Ball of Confusion* by the Temptations
- Marvin Gaye's *What's Going on* (as discussed) was a turning point



## **Edwin Starr**

January 21, 1942 – April 2, 2003

# Edwin Starr

- Born in Nashville TN
- Formed a doo wop group, The Future Tones, after moving to Detroit
- Recorded on the RicTic label until that label was bought by Motown
- Biggest hit before *War* was *25 Miles* which peaked at #6 on both the pop and R&B charts

# Edwin Starr

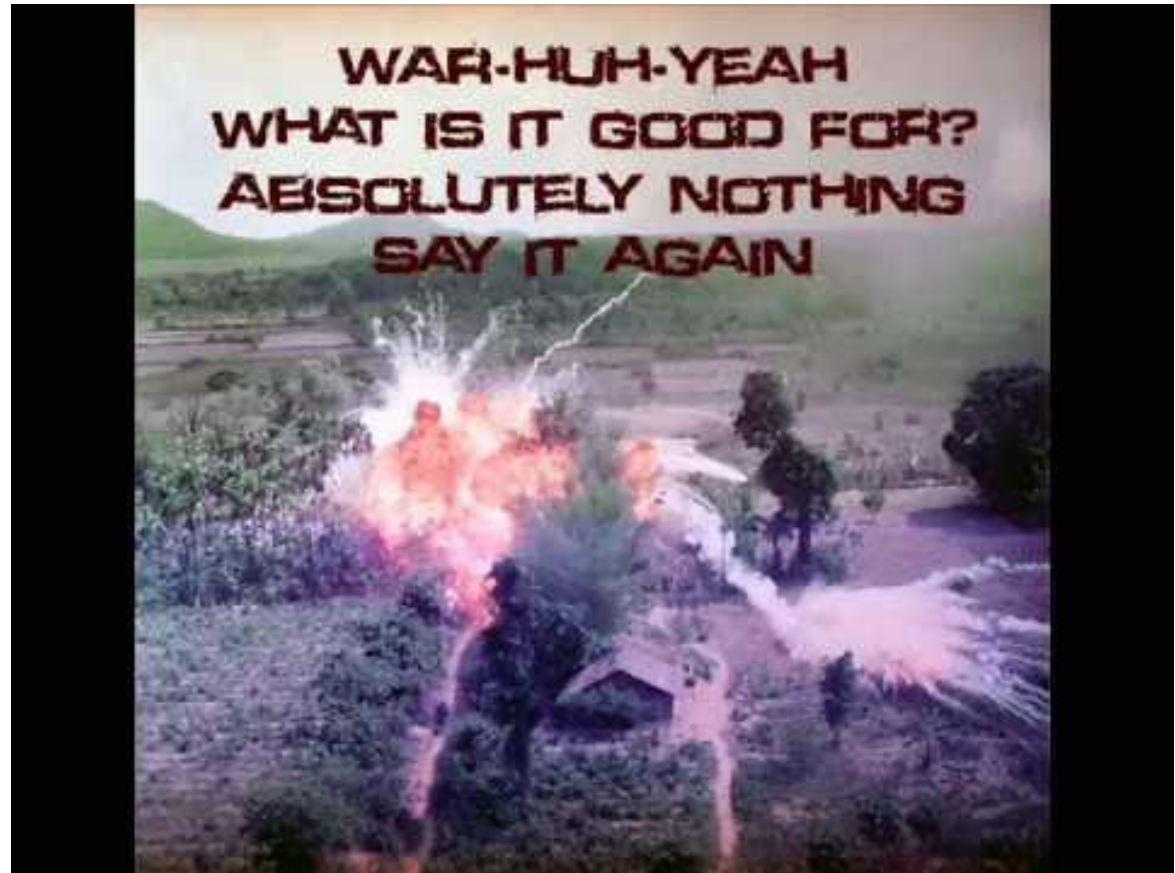
- After *War* and a number of other protest songs, Starr moved to England
- While he had some local success there, nowhere near his Motown success
- Continued to play club dates up until his death in 2003

# War – What is Good For?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01-2pNCZiNk>

# War – What is it good for?

- First recorded by the Temptations on their album *Psychedelic Shack*
- Barry Gordy did not want the Temptations, one of Motown's biggest acts, to release a song that might be controversial
- Accordingly, released by Starr, lower on the Motown food chain





# War – What is it Good For?

- While directed to the VN war, did not mention that war but instead made a larger statement
- Unlike the Temptations version, Starr's version was louder, and shouted out the chorus
- When released by Starr in June 1970, reached #1 on the *Billboard* charts and stayed there for three weeks

# War – What is it Good For?

- Biggest selling protest song of all time
- Was nominated for a Grammy for Song of the Year
- After releasing a few more similar songs, Starr's career began to decline
- He died at age 61 of a heart attack in 2003

# War – What is it Good For?

And for those fans of *Seinfeld*, no, *War, What is it Good For?* was not the original title of *War and Peace*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqS1Ty79mOE>



**Freda Payne**

b. September 19, 1942

# Freda Payne

- Born in Detroit, and while not a member of the Motown stable, recorded songs written by in house song writers
- Moved to NY at age 21, and appeared on Broadway and on TV
- Returned to Detroit in 1969, signing with the record label Invictus

# Freda Payne

- Her first mega hit was *Band of Gold*, written by Motown songsmiths Brian and Eddie Holland
- *Bring the Boys Home* followed up, and also was a hit
- She continued to record R&B and disco, also appeared in a number of movies, and hosted her own talk show

# Bring the Boys Home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x98dLVA2f1Q>

# Bring the Boys Home

- Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag, the song looks at war through different perspectives – not only the soldiers but also the loved ones at home
- Use of the term “boys” instead of “men” highlights the youth of the soldiers in VN





# Bring the Boys Home

- Once again, no reference to VN (song mentions a “senseless war”)
- Bringing the boys home means both the living and the dead –

*Can't you see 'em march across the sky, all the soldiers  
that have died*

*Tryin' to get home-can't you see them tryin' to get  
home?*

# Bring the Boys Home

- Last verse highlights the problems at home, and how the “boys” should be home solving those problems instead of at war
- While the song was a big hit in the US, it was banned by Armed Forces Radio

# Other songs

Arlo Guthrie

Alice's Restaurant

Buffalo Springfield

For What It's Worth

Glen Campbell

Galveston

Plastic Ono Band

War is over (Happy  
Christmas)

# Other songs

Phil Ochs

I Ain't Marching  
Anymore

Monkees

Last Train to  
Clarksville

Eric Burden

Sky Pilot

# Other songs

## Vietnam Veterans

Bruce Springsteen

Born in the USA

Billy Joel

Goodnight  
Saigon

Charlie Daniels

Still in Saigon

# Special Mention

- Eric Burdon and the Animals:

*We Gotta Get out of this Place*

- Written and sung originally as getting out of a poverty stricken city was adopted by Vietnam soldiers
- Bridged the gap between country, soul and rock and universally the soldiers favorite
- Thus, a protest song, not for protestors

# Special Mention

From the movie *Hamburger Hill*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJVpihgwE18>