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The Black Voice in the Vietnam War: the African Americans' Awakening.

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ABSTRACT

The Vietnam War was greatly resisted not only by the American population, but also, specifically, by African Americans. The black community, conditioned by the racially-biased treatment they received in their home country, finally awakened from their stagnation. The Communist propaganda of the Vietnamese depicting African Americans' subjugation to the American government's iniquitous policies empowered the strength of the civil unrest back home. In this context, far from being a mere form of entertainment, music started to be used as a political weapon. Songs like Starr's "War" or The Impressions' "Don't Cry My Love," composed in the 1960s, constituted a firm declaration against the Vietnam War. In addition, they reveal some relevant elements of the African American perspective on this armed conflict.

Key Words: Vietnam War, African Americans, protest song, propaganda, racism, awakening.

La Guerra de Vietnam provocó un gran rechazo no solo entre la población americana, sino también, específicamente, entre los afroamericanos. La comunidad negra, condicionada por el trato basado en prejuicios raciales que recibía en su país, acabó despertando de su letargo. La emisión de propaganda comunista en Vietnam representando la sumisión de los afroamericanos a las políticas inicuas de su gobierno, fortaleció la relevancia de los disturbios civiles. En este contexto, la música, lejos de ser un mero entretenimiento, empezó a usarse como arma política. Canciones compuestas en la década de los 60 como "War" de Edwin Starr o "Don't Cry My Love" de *The Impressions*, constituyen una firme declaración en contra de la Guerra de Vietnam. Pero además, revelan algunas connotaciones que reflejan la experiencia y perspectiva desde la que los afroamericanos contemplaban este conflicto armado.

Palabras clave: Guerra de Vietnam, Afroamericanos, canción protesta, propaganda, racismo, despertar.

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1. Introduction

The Anti-Vietnam War Movement was not just a mere protest on which the American youth embarked. It was the decisive flourishing of the African Americans' fight to overcome the discriminatory policies they had been suffering on American soil for decades. After unceasing suffering throughout their history, finally the mirror in which the black community had been forced to see its own reflection started to turn into crystals. When the Vietnam War began, the American government justified its intervention there as a defense of South Vietnamese democracy and freedom from North Vietnamese Communism. This would mark a wakeup call not only for African Americans but also for the whole of American society. The black community could not avoid wondering why they should fight for other country's freedom while they did not enjoy this right in their own country. However, more occurrences were required for the deciding burst. Racial tensions in America, which spread to the battlefront, were emphasized with the broadcast of Communist propaganda in Vietnam aimed at this community. The My Lai Massacre, the Tet Offensive and the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 were determining facts for this uprising. From then, African Americans did not need more reasons to make themselves heard more than ever. The most emblematic soul voices were responsible for putting the soundtrack to this antiwar context and black struggle.

Which role do songs play in this study? On the basis that music goes beyond mere entertainment, the relevance of elucidating the black version of the Vietnam War through songs will constitute the focus of the analysis. For that purpose, their history as well as the broadcast of Communist propaganda will be considered as the triggering reasons for African Americans' awakening in this particular decade.

Following Kothari's (2-3) taxonomy of analytical systems, a qualitative approach to this issue, based on the interpretation of propaganda and songs, will be carried out. Therefore, we are dealing with an analytical research, grounded on already existing material, in which a critical study of the situation will give rise to a portrait of African Americans' perspective on the Vietnam War.

The corpus of analysis is constituted, as stated above, by some Communist propaganda and a few selected songs. For the selection of the former, and taking into consideration that there are scarce sources available, a specific criterion has been followed. As will be seen in the body, four posters with different formats have been chosen so that different ways of exposing related messages addressed to African Americans could be contrasted. A picture of a black protester in a demonstration holding an anti-racist placard; an animation cell in which the irony of black soldiers fighting in Vietnam is made evident; a comparison of two images showing the African Americans' similarly underprivileged conditions in both, Vietnam and America; and a text denouncing racist American policies. Regarding the latter aspect, the songs "War," "Stop the War Now," "Ball of Confusion" and "Don't Cry My Love" share a set of characteristics that make of them the main subject of study. All of them are contextualized in the years of the Vietnam War and were sung by African American singers. Besides, they contain some interesting black connotations and belong to the black music genre par excellence, soul.

An inspiring source for the development of this research is Werner's *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* (2006), which approaches songs as meaningful objects of study that hold descriptions of the state of the world as well as complaints about this world. "Art and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement," a thesis written by Jane G. Gonzales (2013), is another significant secondary work. Hence, comparable to other existing works, this research differs from the rest in that its attention focuses on the black awakening as a consequence of the Vietnam War and on its representation throughout music.

2. Historical Context

Political instability and lack of unity have played a leading role in the history of Vietnam. China had the control over this territory in its early days, instilling Chinese cultural and religious practices and adapting them to the Vietnamese circumstances. Their independence became a reality in 939 CE. Although at the beginning the newly gained independence brought prosperity to the area (Vietnam extended its borders from that time until circa 1700), it also resulted in disagreements and clashes at other levels. After numerous internal conflicts due to the lack of political and social cohesion provoked by its territorial expansion, Vietnam was divided into two sections as a consequence of the Civil War of 1613. The subsequent two hundred years in this country were defined by political turmoil until the early 19th century, when the leader of the southern family imposed a weak unity and instituted the Nguyen dynasty. At the end of this century, the presence of France in this place started to be gradually imposed. Although this world power had primarily economic interests in Vietnam, they justified their actions - which could be contextualized in the French Imperialism - as a "civilizing mission" (Atwood Lawrence 8-11).

As a consequence of all these facts, a fervid Vietnamese nationalism, as well as a Communist tendency, emerged to shape this country's 20th century politics. In 1941, during World War II, the French Vichy regime relinquished its control over the French Indochina and military bases to Japan, against which a nationalist resistance coalition known as the Viet Minh, League for the Independence of Vietnam, fought with the support of the United States and the Soviet Union. When Japan surrendered in 1945, the coalition took control of the country and a Declaration of Independence was issued. Nevertheless, after some unsuccessful negotiations the French Navy bombed Haiphong in 1946, triggering the beginning of the Indochina War (1946 - 1954), which occurred at the same time as the Cold War. Even though the Roosevelt administration supported the Vietnamese anti-colonial fight, after the death of this American president, Harry S. Truman's gain of control caused the relationships between the United States and Vietnam to get intricate. The American involvement in Vietnam during the years of the First Indochina War took an opposite turn, since their main aim was to defeat Communism for fear of the so-called Domino Theory effect. That means that the confrontation between Communist Northern Vietnam and democratic Southern Vietnam could lead to the definitive imposition of Communism in the whole of Indochina and serve as a role model for countries seeking to ensure

their national independence. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was created amidst these circumstances as a political organization with the intention of reunifying Vietnam around a central Communist party (Gonzales 7-13).

In 1964 an American patrol ship, which sailed in international waters, was shelled by torpedo boats belonging to the North Vietnamese navy in what is known as the USS Maddox incident. Its resolution, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, then, came as a suitable justification for Lyndon B. Johnson's administration to wage war on Vietnam without official declaration. As if actions were not enough, this president made clear the American position on the Vietnam War in his Inaugural Address in 1965 saying: "Terrific dangers and troubles that we once called 'foreign' now constantly live among us. If American lives must end, and American treasure be spilled [...] then that is the price that change has demanded of conviction and of our enduring covenant" (Kissinger 15). Although U.S. involvement in this war started around 1964 and lasted until 1973, the Vietnam War can be considered to have taken place between 1955 and 1975, counting on the support of more countries such as China for the Communist bloc and South Korea, for the anti-Communist one (Kissinger 15-38).

After the American Civil War (1861-1865), slavery was finally abolished. This unprecedented event should have meant a considerable amelioration of the slaves' situation, giving them the opportunity to be regarded as citizens who had the right to vote notwithstanding the color of their skin. However, it did not happen this way for the reason that many states, in most cases from the south, adopted proactive measures like poll taxes to limit, or even remove, African Americans' suffrage (Turner-Sadler 69-75).

Considering that their integration in society was rather insufficient and that discrimination was still a prevailing social issue, black Americans started to progressively organize themselves against the system. Their awareness raising resulted in an increasing sense of unity and entitlement which led to the creation of The Black Power Movement. This movement can be rooted in the 1920s, when black pride was nurtured by Marcus Garvey, setting off the origins of African Nationalism. "We must canonize our own martyrs, and elevate to positions of fame and honor black men and women who have made their distinct contributions to our racial history," Garvey proclaimed (Carrick 79). The creation of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the subsequent publication of *Negro World*, the most popular black newspaper at these times, comprise two of his greatest achievements (Carrick 79).

Black nationalism continued to strengthen its power in the 1930s by dint of a much more influential movement, the Lost-Found Nation of Islam or Black Muslims. Wali Farad Muhammad was the founder of this religious organization which differed noticeably from the Islam known until that date. Their doctrine, based not so much on truth as on a fictitious interpretation and explanation of black history drew crowds of people who decided to enroll in this organization. In the 1950s Malcolm X was assumed as one of the most emblematic icons of the movement. He gave highly inspiring speeches talking about civil rights and racial equality as illustrated in the following statement: "I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those that make the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation" (Carrick 80). African Americans are identified as the segment of society that was struggling not only for its community's civil rights but also for the equality of society as a whole;

while the American government would constitute the discordant section, proclaiming feigned freedom without exception although ensuring it just to a few.

Abruptly violent actions against the black community at this time started to mobilize the Civil Rights movement in opposition to the inequitable treatment that African Americans received. The assassination of Emmett Till in 1955 was a really significant triggering reason for this movement to spread. This fourteen-year-old boy was murdered by two white men because he had called a white woman "babe," which was interpreted as if he were trying to flirt with her. Hence, in 1957, the U.S Congress instituted a Civil Rights Committee with the purpose of delving into racial discrimination. But facing the lack of efficient results from this commission and the ceaseless attacks suffered by black Americans, social unrest expanded leading to mass demonstrations. The first March developed in Washington (1963) can be highlighted as an example of the demonstrations of social unrest. The Lincoln Memorial was surrounded by the almost 250,000 participants of the march that culminated with Martin Luther King's world renowned speech "I have a dream" in support of Civil Rights, and more specifically, in support of equality (Wright 4-6).

President Lyndon B. Johnson became a defender of Kennedy's civil rights bill when this president was assassinated. In fact, in his first oration in the Congress he said, "No memorial or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which we fought so long. We have talked enough in this country about equal rights [...] It's time now to write the next subsection in the books of law" (Carrick 44). Some months later, in July 2, this same president passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 after being enacted by the House of Representatives and the Senate. It prohibited racial and sexual job discrimination as well as discrimination in public places. Despite the immediate reception of this act considered as the definitive liberation of the black community, it did not curtail racism. The cause of this failure was that African Americans were supposed to adopt a nonviolent position in conflictive situations in which they ended up shot, wounded or jailed. The shot fired at James Meredith in 1966 altered the order of events, giving rise to a turning point in African Americans' mentality, deciding to neglect the nonviolent doctrine and to search for their identity by force instead. Meredith, the first black American registering for college, was injured by a racist sniper at the beginning of a pilgrimage against fear on which he embarked alone.

Leaders and members of non-conforming organizations such as The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) resumed the march in Meredith's honor. When pilgrims reached Greenwood, the leader of The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) expressed a rallying cry saying "Black Power! Black Power!" (Carrick 78).

Inspired by the works of Frantz Fanon, who studied the destruction that colonial systems provoke, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton created The Black Panther Party in 1966. It gathered Malcolm X's principles of self-defense inasmuch as African Americans felt that police were intimidating them with steady increase rather than protecting them. They drew up a program containing ten outlined points that summarized the black community's requests on the basis that humans have been created equal and that, therefore, all of them are entitled to some unalienable rights. This organized group carried out numerous social services, yet their violent nature and their rhetoric based on "offing the pigs" led the white media to spread this party's bad reputation. Finally, it turned into a front to swindle and frighten even their black fellows (Carrick 86-88).

Watts, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, thoroughly mirrors the denigrating situation that black people were experiencing in America at that time. They were forced to stay in the ghetto because their setting in black districts was confined. So, they lived in poor conditions while paying high rates for their housing. Mortgages were not approved in black neighborhoods on the pretext that they were too densely packed and tumultuous to suppose an efficient investment. Besides, most of these people could not get to a job due to inadequate public transport. These conditions explain the multiple riots of which this neighborhood, as well as others like Detroit, was the scene during the 60s. A personification of this justified reaction was the Watts crowd of African Americans that in 1965, chanting "Burn! Baby, Burn!", set fire to their streets, businesses and homes (Carrick 82-84). The despair led African Americans to think that the Vietnam War that was being fought at these times was a good opportunity to escape from their situation and show their courage and commitment to America. This fact is evidenced in a A.E. Woodley's testimony compiled in Terry's work *Bloods* (6): "I thought the only way I could make it out of the ghetto was to be the best soldier I possibly could". However, the war that was initially understood by African Americans as an opportunity to get a good job, eventually became a turning point in their history.

3.2. Vietnamese Communist Propaganda

All through wartime, psychological propaganda as well as political posters were regularly aimed at those on which the impact could be greater. Effectively poignant messages sought to weaken and divide the enemy populations and military forces. In the case of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese propaganda was addressed to a especially frail section of American society rooted in an initial slave culture, African Americans. Although near a hundred years had elapsed since the abolition of slavery, racial inequality still constituted a social scourge. Evidence of explicit racism are the aforementioned assassination of Emmett Till in 1955, the shot that James Meredith received in his pilgrimage against fear and the assassination of the most representative black figure at these times, Martin Luther King. Thousands of African Americans' lives had the burden of daily injustices and contempt. In order to inform public opinion and reach the black community, the National Liberation Front (NLF), associated to the Communist side, issued leaflets dealing with race as a warlike propaganda, given out to both, the battle front and the American citizens. The analysis of some of the formal and semantic elements contained in these leaflets will serve to explore the means by which the antiwar Communist bloc emerged as a major factor for the black Americans' awakening.

Figure 1

In this leaflet we can make out a black man in a mass demonstration holding a placard which says "Black Men Should Not Fight in Vietnam for Racist U.S.A." This leaflet, for which a photograph taken in a real protest was used as the visual front, focuses the reasoning for war on race. The issue here is that the American army recruited black men so as to honor and protect their country, however they were not even provided the opportunity to feel as real citizens in the country for which they were, in many cases, forced to fight in Vietnam. Communist Vietnam wanted black soldiers and civilians to reflect on the fact that they were considered as citizens to take part of the war, while their civil rights were in most cases restricted, as seen in the first section description of the insulting housing policies to which they were subdued. Therefore, as required in the sixth point of the Black Panthers' program, the black community and the antiwar section of the population in general began to make an appeal to the American government to suppress the African American involvement in the Vietnam War (Ogbar 85).

At its back it is possible to read a ditty that was considered as an ode to white superiority and command. This ode was forcefully heard in the mass protests counter to restrictive housing policies based on race when white racists appeared in large numbers to boycott this kind of pacific demonstrations. Not satisfied with the singings, they also carried placards saying "Nigger Go Home", "White Power", as opposed to The Black Power Movement, and "Go Back to the Zoo" (Ogbar 148). As for the content of the ditty, it may allude to the freedom Alabama troopers enjoyed in this state in exchange for African Americans' stronger restrictions. In the leaflet, the ditty is headed by an instigator question in capital letters which suggested this community to think of the iniquity they suffered, leading to a violation of their human dignity (Friedman).

EVER HEARD THIS LITTLE DITTY?
I wish I were an Alabama trooper,
that is what I would truly like to be.
I wish I was an Alabama trooper,
cause then I could kill the niggers legally.

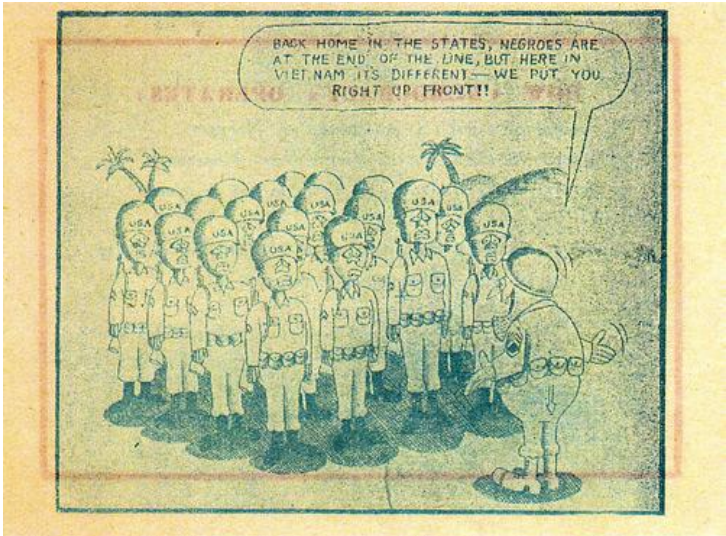


Figure 2

In this second leaflet, *Figure 2*, we can see a staff sergeant talking to a troop of scared black soldiers with a certain scornful tone as follows: "Back home in the States, negroes are at the end of the line, but here in Vietnam is different - we put you right up front!!" This statement makes reference to a widespread myth that claimed that many more minority groups' lives were being lost in the Vietnam War in comparison with white casualties. According to the statistical data provided by the National Archives in a race classification for deaths in the Vietnam War, 7.243 were African American or black soldiers while white soldiers supposed a total number of 49.830 deaths. The front side of the leaflet, then, reinforces the different treatment African Americans would receive when they were "needed", as in the war, in contrast to their disenfranchisement back in America (Friedman).

Regarding its back, now, it is possible to go over some fallacious statistics contradicting the aforesaid data provided by the National Archives. These statistics are headed by a title in capital letters which says "How democracy operates". While it is assumed that the power of democracy is vested in the people, what Vietnamese propaganda was trying to highlight is that the democracy that the American government promoted was vested just in the white people, taking advantage of the black community and other social minorities. The message it expresses is quite blunt, as it addresses African Americans using the pronoun "you" and the closing imperative claim "Go home!" As will be seen below, black soldiers were encouraged to go back

to the States at that moment, since the fact that they were reading the leaflet meant they were still alive (Friedman).

HOW DEMOCRACY OPERATES
11 percent of the U.S. population are Negroes.
30 percent of the G.I.s in Vietnam are Negroes.
40% of G.I. deaths in Vietnam are Negroes.
If you're reading this, you're one of the 30 percent.
Stay out of the 40 percent column!
GO HOME!

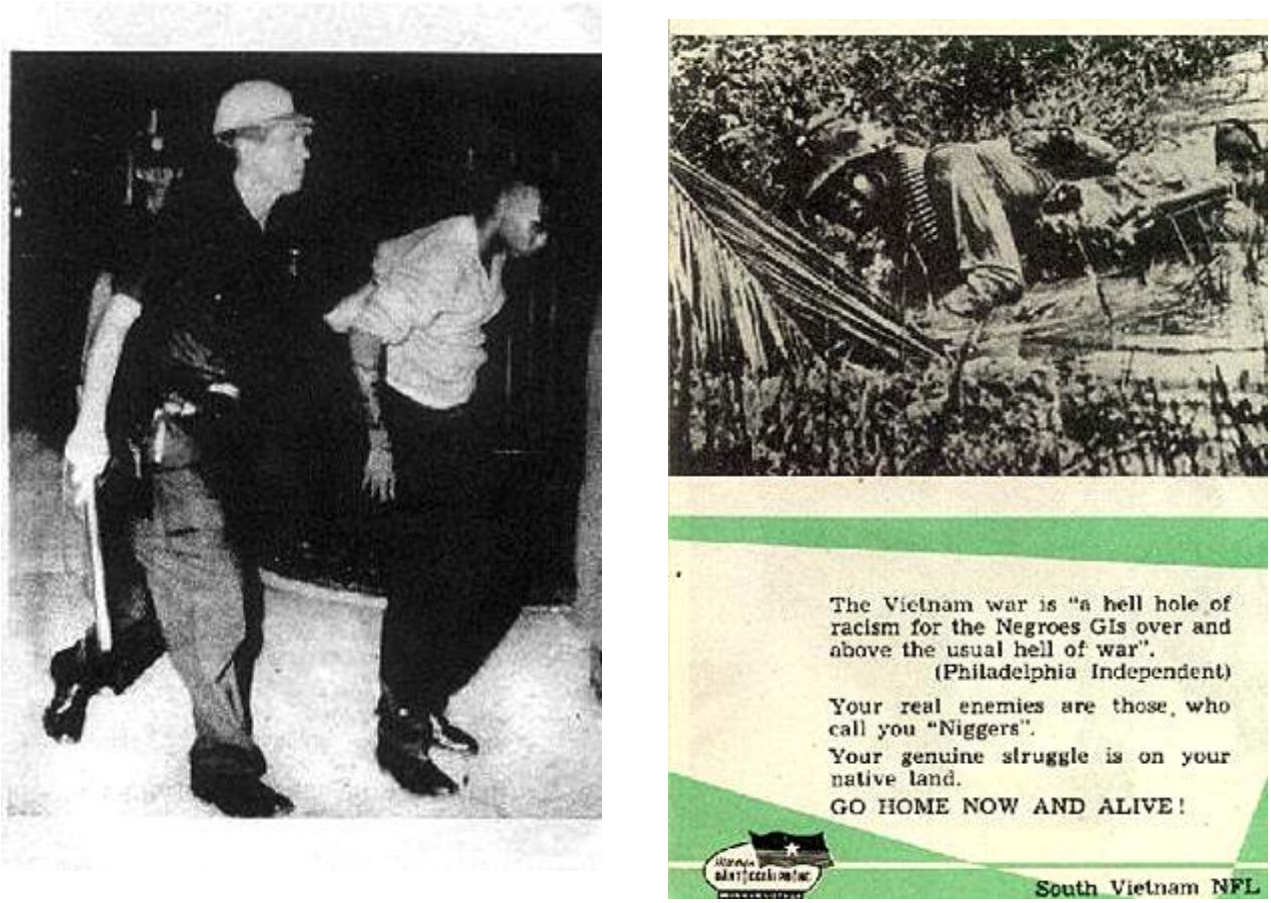
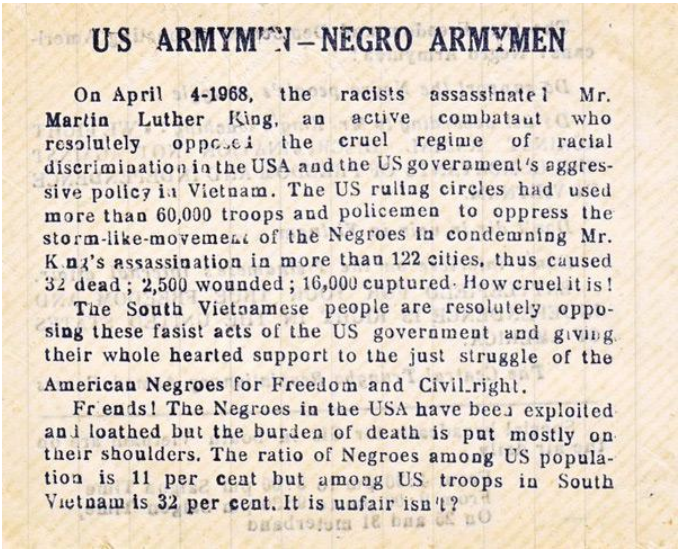


Figure 3

In *Figure 3*, we can contemplate two images. First, the one on the left side depicts a white police officer arresting a black citizen. This man was probably protesting in a mass demonstration in the United States, forasmuch as the National Liberation Front often used photographs of antiwar protestors. This was a recurrent theme to strike a nerve in their African American audience and promote their political motivations. Once more, the race card is played as a propaganda subject by means of this conspicuous visual representation of racism in America (Friedman).

The second image, which corresponds to the back side of the leaflet, depicts a black soldier hidden on a marsh at the same time he is on the alert. The contrast between the two photographs shows the only two possible ways out African Americans had at this time, fighting for their rights in a racist system or fighting in a war for the assumed Vietnamese liberation. In addition to this persuasive visual impact, the second image is followed by a convincing text. The first sentence, "The Vietnam war is a hell hole of racism for the Negroes GIs over and above the

usual hell of war" recalls the countless damages that wars provoked, which were accentuated in the case of black soldiers. As will be explored in the next section, the racist struggle was not only experienced by African Americans in the United States, but also in the battlefield, where the racial tensions of the urban ghetto of Watts, among others, had been echoed and black soldiers had called for unity among them by calling themselves "Bloods" (Terry xiv). Along the same lines, the sentence "Your genuine struggle is on your native land" appears in this text too. The line "Your real enemies are those who call you *Niggers*" alludes to Muhammad Ali's renowned statement when he refused to serve in the army saying "Ain't no Vietcong ever called me nigger" as one of the reasons that justified his decision (Whitakers 5). Finally, the text ends with an imperative in capital letters comparable to the one of the previous leaflet "Go home now and alive!" (Friedman).



US ARMYMEN – NEGRO ARMYMEN

On April 4-1968, the racists assassinated Mr. Martin Luther King, an active combatant who resolutely opposed the cruel regime of racial discrimination in the USA and the US government's aggressive policy in Vietnam. The US ruling circles had used more than 60,000 troops and policemen to oppress the storm-like-movement of the Negroes in condemning Mr. King's assassination in more than 122 cities, thus caused 32 dead; 2,500 wounded; 16,000 captured. How cruel it is!

The South Vietnamese people are resolutely opposing these fasist acts of the US government and giving their whole hearted support to the just struggle of the American Negroes for Freedom and Civil right.

Friends! The Negroes in the USA have been exploited and loathed but the burden of death is put mostly on their shoulders. The ratio of Negroes among US population is 11 per cent but among US troops in South Vietnam is 32 per cent. It is unfair isn't?

Figure 4

The fourth and last figure is a leaflet containing a text aimed at the US army, especially at those blacks who belonged to it. Its opening sentence recalls Martin Luther King's date of death followed by a description of his role as a fierce opponent to the Vietnam War and a defender of human civil rights and racial equality. Although at the beginning this orator was not sure if he wanted to face the consequences that talking about the Vietnam War in public could imply, finally he gave a speech known as "Beyond Vietnam" in 1967. In this talk he presented the moral reasons that led him to reject this war, saying “I could never again raise my voice against the

violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today - my own government [...] I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America" (Gonzales 25). So, he considered that, to vanquish violence and oppression in the United States, a first step could be curtailing them on an international level. Later on in the leaflet, there is a reference to the severe persecution and oppression the Black Power Movement participants raising against King's assassination were suffering, which is described by the National Liberation Front as "cruel". In the next two paragraphs Communist Vietnam's opposition to the war and to the scarce freedom African Americans enjoyed at home and in the battlefield is described through statistical information about death rates. In the form of a question, there is an evident allusion to the unfairness characterizing the American government in terms of racial policies, "It is unfair isn't?" (Friedman).

After these analyses some conclusions on the powerful effect political and war propaganda had on this conflict can be drawn. Black soldiers started to increasingly identify themselves with the Vietnamese population, based on the firm conviction that this war was the result of the racist policies developed by the American government. African Americans fighting in this war empathized with the Viet Cong cause and in questioning their support to the American forces they found in the United States a common enemy. The demonstrations carried out in the streets of America, the quotation of some of the most inspiring figures of the Black Power Movement and, above all, the widespread racial prejudice constituted crucial aspects that were regularly represented in order to lessen the original black soldiers' desire to fight.

4. Songs Voicing the African American Experience

The cultural spirit of the 1960s could be defined by the zeal and hope with which artists desired to change the world by means of their revolutionary works. This is why, amidst the troubled panorama characterizing this decade, art became a prolific means of protest for those people struggling against the American involvement in the Vietnam War; a section of the population that began to be known as the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. Visual arts as well as protest songs were essential tools to keep global society abreast of the human costs of the war beyond the economic ones. The evident presence of cruelty in that war was also reflected in these artistic works (Gonzales 39).

Latent racial tensions in America were also reflected among soldiers in Vietnam, spreading The Black Power Movement at the front at the same time it got strengthened back home. The My Lai Massacre and the Tet Offensive of 1968 did not only disturb the public order in America, but also aggravated the soldiers' interrelation in the war. To make matters worse, 1968 was also the year Martin Luther King was assassinated. From that moment on, black American soldiers who were serving in the military decided to withstand all kind of white authority. Music in Vietnam used to provoke problems related to racial issues. Moreover, the prevailing white list of songs that was played by the Armed Forces Vietnam Network was a usual matter of complaint among African Americans, who described it as "censorious" and "bland" (Werner 110).

Even though there is no evidence of music composed to directly express the black soldiers' experience in the Vietnam War, a few songs released in America by both white and black artists could be considered to hold implicit connotations related to the African American perspective on it. For the purpose of voicing the black experience in that conflict, which somehow awakened them from their conformist stagnation, four songs will be analyzed in detail. Hence, aside from the antiwar message, the analysis of "War," "Stop the War Now," "Ball of Confusion" and "Don't Cry my Love" will explore the distinctive elements that reflect African Americans' view during the war.

"War" and "Stop the War Now"

Born in 1942, Edwin Starr was recognized as one of the most popular soul vocalists of the 1960s. He was recruited to serve in the military and some years after since his return in 1962, he joined the Anti-Vietnam War Movement singing protest music. The songs "War" and "Stop the War Now," produced by Norman Whitfield in 1970 and 1971 respectively, are contextualized in these circumstances (Huey 2017).

First, the song "War" was incipiently written for The Temptations. However, Motown producers considered this song to be an unnecessary risk for the musical career of this band, whose mass appeal was held in too high esteem to release a single with such a powerful political message. This is why this American record company strategically gave it to Edwin Starr, who was not so popular in those days. Whitfield restyled the message slightly trying to make of it an absolute success and Starr added a personal touch to it (Burnim & Maultsby 285).

This song, which starts with the word "war," takes a totally negative position on that aspect. The second line says "What is it good for?" in the interrogative form in order for it to be answered in the next line with an emphatic statement, "Absolutely nothing". These two lines are repeated in this stanza to stress the aforesaid perspective from which war is represented. The imperative sentence "Say it again, y'all" is used to encourage society to participate in the antiwar movement taking these lines as a call for peace. In the next line there is an appeal for a good God's answer to the question "What is it good for?" And again, the answer is "Absolutely nothing." The fact that not even God is able to provide a reason why war should be justified leads to a desperate imperative closing the stanza, "Listen to me." The reiteration of this set of lines across the entire song as a refrain places an emphasis on the senselessness that continuing the war effort presented.

The speaker himself affirms in the second stanza, by using the first person pronoun "I", that he cannot conceive of war, since it entails an obvious implication: the risk of losing the lives of thousands of soldiers and civilians, both Vietnamese and American. This idea is contained in the following line: "Cause it means destruction of innocent lives."

A more personal reflection is developed in the next stanza, offering a different point of view from which to observe the atrocities of war; mothers, relatives and friends waiting for those soldiers that in most cases did not find a reason why they had to be fighting that battle. The matter here has to do with long waits that sometimes were not satisfied with the returns of these people's son, father or friend, but ruined with a letter reporting his death. As a consequence, hope turns into tears, as illustrated in the line "War means tears." Besides, the image created by the words "thousands of mothers eyes" suggests the disproportionate number of deaths war claimed.

After the refrain, there are some personifications of war, which is identified with a "heartbreaker," a "friend of the undertaker" and an "enemy to all mankind." By means of these metaphors, filled with a deathlike semantic content, an even stronger association between war and death is established. The line "The thought of war blows my mind" constitutes a pun where the figurative meaning of the expression "blowing someone's mind" is employed to make allusion to a war-related image. The line referring to the unrest caused by war "within the younger generation" is a key element for this analysis because it was the youth who started this movement not only against the American participation in the Vietnam War, but also against the black contribution to the American army. This fact is evidenced by the news that a group of young black students received of the killing of one of their classmates in Vietnam, which led to their distribution of leaflets in which "No Mississippi Negroes should be fighting in Vietnam for the white man's freedom" became the catchphrase. The anti-Vietnam War protests carried out in the American campuses in 1967 by students chanting: "Hell, no! We won't go!" or "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh! The Vietcong are going to win!" are another example of that (Carrick 50). The final line of this stanza "Induction then destruction" makes reference to recruitment as the first step to deceive society, which would undoubtedly lead to war, and therefore, to destruction.

The repetition of the refrain leads us to the next stanza, which condenses the adverse impact that the participation in the war could have on soldiers in terms of mental health. Psychological disorders were heightened in black soldiers, who had to deal with daily racial oppression in addition to the crimes they both witnessed and committed during the Vietnam War according to the testimonies compiled in Terry's *Bloods.* These lines are "War has shattered many young man's dreams made him disabled, bitter and mean." To close the stanza, there is a reference to the Latin expression and concept Carpe Diem: "Life is much too short and precious

to fight mighty wars these days." This idea reinforces a subsequent line in the song, "Peace, love and understanding," ideas in which, in accordance to the speaker, life should be based.

"They say we must fight to keep our freedom," found in one of the last stanzas, is another key element for this analysis focused on an African American approach to war. As previously mentioned, while white Americans enjoyed all of their rights as citizens, it has been proved through historical events that black Americans did not. So, the American army was fighting for the liberation of South Vietnam from the Communism of North Vietnam. This meant fighting to avoid the Domino effect which could have brought Communism to the United States and oppress all the population, but were not African Americans already oppressed? This line stands for a critique of American foreign policies. The final lines "Stand up and shout it,/ Nothing" invites the audience to rise their voice against the war adopting a non-conformist attitude towards it.

Secondly, "Stop the War Now" is quite similar to the song analyzed previously in terms of the antiwar perspective it offers, metaphorically identifying war with the "world's enemy number one." So, its analysis will go over the most engaging aspects and those that could be related to an African American viewpoint.

There is a recurrent line that is presented several times during the song, "Stop the war now." This verse followed by lines such as "Now, now, now" or "Don't put it off another day" indicates that there was a rush to stop the Vietnam War, since waiting another day could mean losing many more lives as expressed in this line: "Don't throw another life away." The imperatives written in the negative form "Don't put" and "Don't throw" are directed towards the American government and politicians responsible for the stay of the American troops in the battlefront.

When the speaker refers to the audience in general with expressions like "Everybody" or "y'all", imperatives in the positive form are used to strengthen the idea that the more the sense of national unity was spread, the more power would rest in the struggle against the war. According to the speaker, this struggle could be reinforced by means of "Making the sound of peace," "Singing a song" or just "Listening," which demonstrates that the basis of the fight against atrocities had to be focused on reason. The aggressive words "roar" and "thunder" were used to

appeal to society to provide an unceasing active support. We find the repetition of what might be a homage to John Lennon's pacifist hymn "Give peace a chance" produced a year before, with which Starr searched for an increasing collective awareness.

Given the evident resemblance between the message that the two Starr's songs express, some similar topics arise. The bewilderment caused by the need to face the catastrophic consequences of the war illustrated in the following lines "Somebody please tell me, What is war all about,/ And why must I kill against my will,/ I just can't figure it out." The allusion to the soldiers' testimony and opinion about war through "If you asked them to fight again, Huh, what do you think they'd say" is present in "War" too. And third, the observation of war from the perspective of family and relatives "And what does a mother get in return [...] A medal, a grave and a doggone cross."

At last, as for the semantic features that could be considered to reveal representative elements of the African American experience, we can first mention what is likely to be an indirect reference to Muhammad Ali's refusal to be inducted into the military mentioned in the previous subsection. The lines in question are the following ones: "A knock on the door,/ There's a letter from the war,/ Sayin', greetings, we want you,/ If I refuse to fight,/ They say that that ain't right,/ And time you'll have to do." In 1967, Ali was in a military recruitment building with more men being subjected to physical exams and having their first contact with the tasks that recruits were assigned in the U.S. Army. An officer started to summon recruits, who had been ordered to take a step forward, but Ali never budged. Then, another officer clarified the penalty for refusing the draft: a hefty fine and five years' imprisonment. Although at the beginning he demanded to be "exempt as a minister of the religion of Islam" (Whittaker 4), he later on denounced the association between American white supremacy and the intervention of U.S troops in Vietnam. "Should black folks fight a war against yellow folks so that white folks can keep a land they stole from red folks?" (Whitaker 4-5), Ali wondered. These seemingly simple declarations go back to Fanon's critique of colonialism, as a trigger of melting pots where racism arose as a latent issue, which would inspire the creation of The Black Panther Party in 1966 (Carrick 86).

Two more stanzas can elicit an implicit African American reading and understanding. "War casualties pile up each day,/ Cemeteries are overflowing" may not only refer to deaths in general, but also, and more specifically, to the widespread myth about the disproportionate number of black deaths in comparison to white casualties mentioned in section 3. The three times repeated lines "Enough blood's been shed,/ By the wounded and the dead" make allusion to the name that African American soldiers fighting in Vietnam gave to themselves as a symbolic expression of their mutual understanding (Terry xiv).

"Oh, let's make,/ Tomorrow a brighter day,/ Stand up" is the way in which this song closes its desperate call to stop the war, as its own name evidences. Again, as in the previously analyzed song, a positive non-conformist message determined to not lose its hope arises.

"Ball of Confusion"

Originally created in Detroit, the vocal group The Temptations consisted of five variable black members among whom the most distinguished ones were Ron Tyson, David Ruffin, Theo Peoples, Dennis Edwards and Damon Harris. Their songs, permeated by black gospel flavors, reached a mostly African American audience and their influence in soul music could be considered equivalent to The Beatles' influence in pop-rock music (Burnim & Maultsby 258). An example of the inspiring soul they produced is the song, "Ball of Confusion" (1970), which provides a critique of the social situation at this time.

One of the remarkable aspects of the society of those days contemplated in this song is race as the unleashing reason for governments to start the war. This is clearly seen in the first line "People moving out, people moving in. Why, because of the color of their skin." The interrogative particle "why" emphasizes the war's racial nature. Linking with that, there is an allusion to Lex Talionis "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," which can be associated with Martin Luther King's renowned statements on non-violence "If you use the law 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' then you end up with everybody blind and toothless" (Carrick 34). This means a defense of both, the aforestated African Americans' nonviolent attitude facing their daily racial conflicts and the withdrawal of the American troops in Vietnam. Another element that could be understood as a sign of the Black Power is the line "The cities ablaze in the summer

time," defending the Watts riots and silently shouting "Burn! Baby, Burn!" (Carrick 82). In memory of the youngest soldier killed in Vietnam, Dan Bullock, "kids growing up too soon" appears. He was an African American who modified his birth certificate when he was fourteen years old to enlist in the US Army (Turner-Sadler 161).

Two of the several enumerations that can be found in this song have to do with the black community's submission to the racist American system and its consequences. "Segregation, determination, demonstration, integration, aggravation, humiliation, obligation to our nation" perfectly shows their progressive struggle from marginalization to subjugation to the United States through the mandatory recruitment into the army to take part in the Vietnam War. All that was suffered by them going through the humiliation that, in a certain way, allowing these situations implied. "Evolution, revolution, gun control, sound of soul" is another example that reflects the significance of soul music in the expression of the 1960s political contexts, and particularly, in its identification with the black culture. As Kwame Ture, one of the founders of the Black Power Movement defined it, soul "is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society" (Burnim & Maultby 278). Other enumerations contain a more general critique of aspects such as "tax deduction, city inspectors, bill collectors" or "too many bills," which are contrasted to the countercultural Hippie Movement in "Hippies moving to the hills" and the mod clothes defining the youth revolution "mod clothes in demand."

There is a political burden that leans out between this song lines. "Vote for me and I'll set you free" ironically condemns the politicians verbosity on social issues that made evident the gap between legislation or ideals and reality of which African Americans often were the victims. Against this unfairness, the speaker encourages the listener to "rap on" expressing friendly closeness by calling him "brother." This could make allusion to the way in which the members of the black community called each other to emphasize their unity. The sign that many black businessmen hung in their store windows saying "soul brother" to prevent their possible plunder during the previously discussed Watts riots could have been implicitly associated with that "brother" as well (Burnim & Maultsby 278).

The entangled image of the world as a "ball of confusion" is reiterated in this descriptive as well as protest song. Although Americans tried to flee the despair this confusion brought with

it, they could only feel that "round and around and around" they went, as if they were imprisoned in a vicious circle from which they could not escape "Run, run, run but you sure can't hide." Nonetheless, this was not a matter concerning just America, but the whole world "shouting, 'end the war.'" Finally, there is an appeal to society to claim that the world where they lived was a "ball of confusion," due to bullets shot against the soldiers' will and the government's funding of this unpopular war.

"Don't Cry My Love"

Five black artists constituted the musical group The Impressions, which was created in 1958. Many of this group's 1960s hits, which reveal their gospel influences, became social hymns for the Civil Rights Movement. Among this repertoire we find the meaningful song "Don't Cry My Love" (1968), dealing with the shock that participating in the Vietnam War meant to the speaker; this is why the first person singular is so present in it.

First of all, there is a refrain where a soldier's attempt to console his relatives is the main theme. To this end, the line "Don't cry" is repeated. But, amidst this attempt and assuming the African American origins of the speaker, he also heartens the black community to keep fighting for their rights "spark others to fight,/ For our respect and our long overdue free human right." Nobody should be deprived of his life because, as the song denounces, this is "a shame and a crime". The lines "I can see no reason for us fighting this time" and "Everybody's free here but me" constitute another form of protest against the black participation in the war, supported, as mentioned in section 2, by the sixth point of The Black Panther Party's program. It says "We believe that Black people should not be forced to fight [...] We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like Black people, are being victimized by the White racist government of America" (Carrick 86). Aside from conveying a certainly positive message, the last two lines make clear that this was not an individual struggle but an issue that concerned the whole world, the black liberation, "There will come a time when we'll long to be free; Keep on smiling."

Beyond the obvious semantic relation that can be drawn between these four songs, they are also bounded by some interesting formal and stylistic elements that link them to the musical

style to which they belong: soul. Two main features can be highlighted of this style that became an equivalent to "blackness." The first formal aspect that all these songs have in common is the use of African American vernacular English, which was possibly used because of the singers' origins, but carried, at the same time, a protest implication. Instances of this are "y'all", "ain't" and "ya." The use of call-response structures constitute the second aspect to be analyzed, inasmuch as it is essential for the aesthetic of soul pieces. "What is it good for?," "Somebody please tell me," "Listen to me now," "Let me hear ya" and "Come on now" are some examples of this. These elements in which performers approach the audience lead to musical exchanges between both of them (Burnim & Maultsby 287)

5. Conclusion

The American government's decision to intervene in Vietnam was justified as an attempt to preserve the democracy of South Vietnam over the Communist North Vietnam tendencies. But, what Americans were not told about was that the liberation of a tiny country that most of them could not locate on a map was not as significant as the assurance of the global security in the fight against Communism. Besides, for this goal to be achieved, the Vietnam War had to be won through large bombing campaigns, free fire zones and huge economic expenditures. This means that to avoid the propagation of Communism thanks to the Domino effect, Vietnam had been chosen as the place where to vanquish Communism. Deeper interpretations of the American government's interests in that country would consider this war as an embodiment of liberal hypocrisy and racial exploitation for two main reasons. On the one hand, for the Vietnamese population, who understood this offensive as an attack against them, this war was a resumption of the French-Indo China War. They also believed that it meant a different form of being subjected to a colonial system. On the other hand, this war could not fulfill the principles for which it claimed. While the fight to protect the freedom of the Vietnamese population was the basis of the appeal for the war, such right was not enjoyed by minority groups in the United States. At this stage, African American soldiers' participation in the Vietnam War can be considered a paradox.

The weight of their history based on atrocities such as slavery and on a ceaseless yet ineffective struggle to get their so expected freedom, made of African Americans' powerful uprising a remarkable one in the context of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. Even though at the beginning, black men saw fighting in the war as an opportunity to leave inequality and poverty behind, some evidence reminded them of their harsh reality. The latent racial tensions present in some American neighborhoods like Watts, which were echoed in the battlefront, together with the obvious mistreatment that black soldiers received in Vietnam, fired the black community's sense of unity. The Black Power Movement and the organization of a political party, The Black Panther Party, concerned with the African American interests, constitute two instances of this unity's result. The progressive emergence of inspiring black icons, such as Martin Luther King and Malcom X, heading public protests and speaking out against the development of war and racial inequality was essential for the creation of a collective awareness.

Nevertheless, the uprising gained even more strength in 1968, the year when King was assassinated and the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre occurred. These events proved how far racism and the American government's cruelty could go.

In addition, the Communist Vietnamese broadcast of propaganda aimed at African Americans, in assumption of their poor conditions, achieved its goal, eventually dividing the enemy populations and the military forces. The use of race as a propaganda theme in this context became an intelligent strategy given the black dissatisfaction with their government's policies. "The Vietnam war is a hell hole of racism for the Negroes GIs over and above the usual hell of war" and "Black Should Not Fight in Vietnam for Racist U.S.A." are some of the most revealing sentences describing the experience of black soldiers in Vietnam. The sharpness of the images and texts contained in Vietnamese propaganda led to the African Americans' identification with the enemy, who, just like them, were people with a darker color in their skins fighting for self-determination. So, blacks as Vietnamese were victims of the white colonialist pretensions.

The revolutionary change that took place in the sixties is inconceivable without the presence of melody, rhythm and sound. The use of the universal language of music as a means to protest against the war and the social unfairness crystallized amidst this unstable panorama. Both, white and black singers were concerned with the African American cause, as demonstrated throughout the analysis of four songs. Soul, strongly attached to the black community, did not only mirror the complications of this particular decade; it also gave room to a style encompassing African Americans' protest against the inequitable treatment they received from the American government. "War, huh, yeah,/ What is it good for?/ Absolutely nothing" or "Ball of confusion, Oh, yeah, that's what the world is today" are some of the lines that will echo forever as, apparently, simple pieces of language that once changed the world. Reading these songs between the lines, the most remarkable black connotations that come to light are "They say we must fight to keep our freedom," "Enough blood's been shed," "Because of the color of their skin" and "Everybody is free here but me." Even though few in number, the lines containing this kind of message have a preponderant significance, making public the beginning of the end of the black community's silence by means of art.

While the black struggle for freedom had been already represented in previous artistic works at this time, the artistic works released by African Americans in the sixties reproduced this subculture's displeasure at the feigned freedom they "enjoyed." The sixties were, then, the decade when black Americans started to significantly question their forebears' presumed inferiority due to the color of their skin. Historical segregation and submission made them reject the white culture's ideals of beauty, celebrating the black standards instead. The so long racially discriminated black skin became something to be proud of. The phrase "Black is beautiful" was a resounding motto for the Civil Rights Activism at this time. This is why, the Vietnam War and its resistance threw off the shackles of the blacks' "segregation, determination [...] humiliation, obligation to *their* nation," sang by The Temptations in "Ball of Confusion" giving rise to the black self-assertion. Thus, as Martin Luther King said, "The bombs in Vietnam *exploded* at home" (Werner 108).

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ANNEXES

"War" (Edwin Starr)

War, huh yeah.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing.
War huh yeah.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing.
Say it again y'all.
War, huh good God.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Listen to me.

War-I despise
Cause it means destruction
Of innocent lives.
War means tear to thousands of mothers eyes
When their sons go off to fight
And lose their lives.

War, huh good God y'all.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Say it again.
War whoa lord.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Listen to me.
It ain't nothin' but a heartbreaker.
Friend only to the undertaker.

Oh war, is an enemy to all mankind.
The thought of war blows my mind.
War has caused unrest in the younger generation.
Induction, then destruction who wants to die?

War, good God y'all.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Say it say it say it.
War uh huh yeah huh.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Listen to me.
It ain't nothin' but a heartbreaker.
Got one friend that's the undertaker.

Oh war has shattered many young man's dreams.

Made him disabled bitter and mean.
Life is much too short and precious to fight mighty wars these days.
War can't give life it can only take it away oooooh.

War, huh good God y'all.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Say it say again.
War whoa lord.
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing. Listen.
It ain't nothin' but a heartbreaker.
Friend only to the undertaker.

Peace love and understanding tell me
Is there no place for them today?
They say we must fight to keep our freedom
But lord knows there's got to be a better way.

"Stop the War Now" (Edwin Starr)

All right, yeah.
Make the sound of peace.
And sing now.

(Stop the war) ow (now).
Everybody
Don't put it off another day
Make your voices roar.

(Stop the war) ow (now)
Just like thunder, y'all.
(Don't put it off) hey, another day
Sing a song now.

(Stop the war) ow (now)
Listen to me, y'all.
(Don't put it off) ow, another day.
Listen to me.

A knock on the door
There's a letter from the war
Sayin', greetings, we want you.
If I refuse to fight
They say that that ain't right
And time you'll have to do.

Somebody please tell me
What is war all about?
And why must I kill against my will?
I just can't figure it out.

Oh, stop the war now
Good God, hear me saying
Don't put it off another day
Everybody saying.

Stop the war now
Now, now, now
Don't put it off another day
All we got to do is listen.

(Give peace a chance)
Don't throw another life away.
Listen to me now.

This is 'bout all the soldiers
That are dead and gone today.
If you asked them to fight again
Huh, what do you think they'd say?

I'm not trying to be funny
I'm just trying to get my point across.
War is world's enemy number one
And it's time that we called it off.

Ow, stop the war, now
Good God, hear me saying
Don't put it off another day
Everybody singing.

(Stop the war) ow
Now, now, now, now
Don't put it off another day
All we got to do is, Lord.

Give peace a chance
And don't, don't throw
Another life away, oh.

War casualties pile up each day.
Cemeteries are overflowing.

The leaders of the world claim victory's near
But the death list keeps right on growing.

And what does a mother get in return
For the life of the son she's lost?
A few measly pennies a month
A medal, a grave and a doggone cross.

I said, stop the war now
Good God, hear me saying
Don't put it off another day
Everybody sing.

Stop the war, now
Now, now, now
Don't put it off another day
Why can't we just.

(Give peace a chance)
Please don't throw another life away
Can't you see
Enough blood's been she'd
By the wounded and the dead.
Enough blood's been she'd
By the wounded and the dead, ohh.
Enough blood's been she'd
By the wounded and the dead, ohh.

(Stop the war) listen (now)
Good God, everybody
(Don't put it off) ow
Not another day now.

(Stop the war) ow
Now, now, now, now
(Don't put it off) ow, another day.
This is a message to the
Leaders of the world.

(Give peace a chance)
Oh, let's make
Tomorrow a brighter day
Stand up.

"Ball of Confusion" (The Temptations)

People moving out, people moving in. Why, because of the color of their skin.
Run, run, run but you sure can't hide. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
Vote for me and I'll set you free. Rap on, brother, rap on.
Well, the only person talking about love thy brother is the...(preacher.)
And it seems nobody's interested in learning but the...(teacher.)
Segregation, determination, demonstration, integration, Aggravation, humiliation, obligation to our nation.
Ball of confusion. Oh yeah, that's what the world is today. Woo, hey, hey.

The sale of pills are at an all time high.
Young folks walking round with their heads in the sky.
The cities ablaze in the summer time.
And oh, the beat goes on.

Evolution, revolution, gun control, sound of soul.
Shooting rockets to the moon, kids growing up too soon.
Politicians say more taxes will solve everything.

And the band played on.
So, round and around and around we go.
Where the world's headed, nobody knows.

Oh, great Googa Mooga, can't you hear me talking to you.
Just a ball of confusion.
Oh yeah, that's what the world is today.
Woo, hey, hey.

Fear in the air, tension everywhere.
Unemployment rising fast, the Beatles new record's a gas.

And the only safe place to live is on an Indian reservation.
And the band played on.
Eve of destruction, tax deduction, city inspectors, bill collectors,
Mod clothes in demand, population out of hand, suicide, too many bills,
Hippies moving to the hills. People all over the world are shouting, 'End the war.'

And the band played on.
Great Googa Mooga, can't you hear me talking to you.
Sayin'... ball of confusion.
That's what the world is today, hey, hey.
Let me hear ya, let me hear ya, let me hear ya.
Sayin'... ball of confusion.
That's what the world is today, hey, hey.

Let me hear ya, let me hear ya, let me hear ya, let me hear ya, let me hear ya.
Sayin'... ball of confusion.

"Don't Cry My Love" (The Impressions)

Don't cry my love, I'll be back.
Don't cry my sister, now that's no way to act.
I'm goin' to war, and find the brother
Bring him home safe, for our worried mother.
Come on now.

Don't cry my love, you just be true.
Keep your mind on things more important to do.
Keep on smiling and spark others to fight
For our respect and our long overdue free human right.

I can see no reason for our fighting this time.
So many have gone and it's a shame and a crime.
So much wrongdoing here I pretend not to see
But it makes me sometimes wonder
Everybody's free here but me.

Well, come on now.
Don't cry my love, I'll be back.
Don't cry my sister, now that's no way to act.
I'm goin' to war to find my long lost brother
Bring him home safe for our worried mother.
Come on now.

Don't cry my love, you just be true.
Keep your mind on things more important to do.
Keep on smiling and spark others to fight
For our respect and our long overdue free human right.

Oh baby, don't worry about me
There will come a time when we'll long to be free
Keep a smiling.