

PART IV

Political Contexts

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CHAPTER 20

*The Civil Rights Movement**Will Kaufman*

When Sean Wilentz watched Bob Dylan perform in Minneapolis on the night of Barack Obama's election in 2008, he noted how "the stubbornly reticent Dylan broke with habit" and spoke directly to his audience, telling them that, although he had "lived in a world of darkness," the election of America's first black president made it look like "things are gonna change now." Wilentz himself wasn't too sure, either about Dylan's prediction or, in fact, his sincerity: "Though I understood the symbolism and the emotive force, I was more skeptical at the time, and could imagine that Dylan was being ironic or at least ambiguous. But without betraying any kind of certainty let alone commitment, he sounded sincere and even excited."¹ The lack of certainty over Dylan's "commitment" to the civil rights movement (or to anything else, for that matter) is one of the defining aspects of the critical response to his work. At the grimmest end of the spectrum is Wayne Hampton, who has characterized the electric, post-folk Dylan in particular as "steeped in paranoid cynicism about politics, both radical and conventional," with "a highly pessimistic – even nihilistic – disposition toward the possibilities of social change Bob Dylan gave us the cult of chaos and non-involvement."²

Dylan himself didn't help to clarify things by telling Joan Baez – as she later related to one of Dylan's earliest biographers, Anthony Scaduto – "I knew people would buy that kind of shit, right? I never was into that stuff."³ Yet other close friends and associates of Dylan assured the same biographer otherwise. Dylan's producer John Hammond was adamant: "Bobby really wanted to change things."⁴ His fellow songwriter Phil Ochs also rejected the charge of cynical opportunism: "He definitely meant the

¹ Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 326.

² Wayne Hampton, *Guerrilla Minstrels: John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), p. 214.

³ Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan* (London: Abacus, 1972), p. 120. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

protest . . . and he meant every word he wrote. He was just going on to bigger things when he started denying it, that's all."⁵

In light of such contradictory impressions, any attempt to assess Dylan's place in the struggle for civil rights in America is freighted with the problem – but also, possibly, with the solution – of distinguishing between the man himself and the cultural work that his songs have performed and might still perform. Relying on Dylan's own utterances may indeed lead us nowhere, as Dave Van Ronk warned: “[H]is thinking is so convoluted that he simply does not know how to level, because he's always thinking of the effect that he's having on whoever he's talking to.”⁶ Still, Van Ronk was confident in telling Scaduto: “He was no opportunist. He really believed it all. I was there It's entirely possible he fell into the *Broadside* bag knowing what those songs could do [for his career], but he believed. He meant it.”⁷

The “*Broadside* bag” was the repository of Dylan's earliest civil rights anthems – indeed, the bulk of them. As Jeff Place and Ronald D. Cohen describe it, *Broadside* was the “modest topical song magazine” that went on to stimulate “a national movement”: “The first issue of *Broadside*, subtitled ‘A handful of songs about our times,’ appeared in February 1962; the run was 300 copies and the price 35 cents.”⁸ Dylan's association with *Broadside* began with the very first issue and its publication of his “Talking John Birch Society Blues.”

Dylan's initial approaches to *Broadside* in 1962 were roughly coterminous with his introduction to two major civil rights organizations, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or “Snick”). It has been generally assumed that Dylan came to the civil rights movement through his first major romantic liaison in New York, Susan (“Suze”) Rotolo, who was a CORE activist along with her sister and her mother. Rotolo herself downplayed her early influence on Dylan, telling Victoria Balfour in an interview that his interest in civil rights was simply down to “the climate of the times.”⁹ Still, it was the Rotolo women who encouraged Dylan to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dave Van Ronk with Elijah Wald, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street: A Memoir* (New York: Da Capo, 2006), p. 159.

⁷ Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, pp. 120–121.

⁸ Jeff Place and Ronald D. Cohen, *The Best of Broadside, 1962–1988: Anthems of the American Underground from the Pages of Broadside Magazine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2000), np.

⁹ Susan Rotolo, “Bob Dylan” (interview with Victoria Balfour), in *The Dylan Companion*, ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (New York: Da Capo, 2001), p. 76.

perform for a number of CORE benefits during his first two years in New York. Robert Shelton reports that Dylan quickly became disenchanted with the organization, telling a small Minneapolis audience as early as August 1962 that “CORE is a white organization for Negro people.”¹⁰ SNCC, on the other hand, captured Dylan’s admiration and enthusiasm at the outset, largely due to their frontline organizing in the Jim Crow south. A leading SNCC activist, Bernice Johnson Reagon – one of the celebrated Freedom Singers and, later, a founder of the a cappella women’s group Sweet Honey in the Rock – recalled that, even after Dylan had begun to withdraw from conspicuous civil rights activism around 1964 (to the predictable cry of “sell out” from many in the folk-protest movement), the black activists in SNCC were largely non-judgmental. She told Shelton:

Some whites moved with us out of some special sort of love of blacks, while others were just loaded with guilt. Dylan wasn’t the same. When he simply drifted away from the movement, it was the whites in Snick who were resentful. The blacks in Snick didn’t think like that, or say that. We only heard the phrase “sellout” from whites, not from the blacks.¹¹

If SNCC’s black members were willing to give Dylan more of a pass than their white colleagues, it might partially be due to the respectful distance he chose to maintain between himself and any assumed black voice, in both a political and a musical sense. His deep knowledge and utilization of African American blues is, of course, a matter of record, beginning with his youthful determination to discover all that he could about black music. It was Dylan’s first encounters with the songs of Lead Belly and Odetta – *not* Woody Guthrie – that drew him out of early rock ‘n’ roll and into folk music. Performing and recording associations with John Lee Hooker, Harry Belafonte, Big Joe Williams, and Victoria Spivey marked his first two years in New York. But Dylan never fell into the trap that had snared so many other white performers of black music – attempting to *be* black, at least in voice. As Spivey recalled for Scaduto:

I told Bobby that Big Joe was gonna record for me and he said, “Moms, you want a little white boy on one of your records?” Bobby, you know, had no color denomination to him at all, everybody was people, not color, so I said, “What do you mean? You’re just one of my sons,” and he said, “You should

¹⁰ Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, revised and updated by Elizabeth Thomson and Patrick Humphries (London: Omnibus, 2011), p. 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

have a white boy on some of your records," and I said, "You got some around?" and he said, "Yeah, me." So I told him we'd get together.¹²

None of this is to say that Dylan's early persona was never steeped in imitation or denial. His attempted mimicry of the "Okie bard" Woody Guthrie extended famously not only to his voice and repertoire, but also – to the horror of Guthrie's family – to his bodily tics and contortions, the outward signs of Guthrie's fatal Huntington's disease. There was also Dylan's apparent early need to deny his own Jewishness, not only in high school – where Echo Helstrom was warned by a friend, "Don't ever ask him that" after she had innocently asked, "Bobby, are you Jewish?" – but also at the University of Minnesota – where a girlfriend recalled, "Even after he knew that I knew he was Bob Zimmerman from up on the Range, he was not being Jewish. He was saying his mother wasn't."¹³

The point to be made here is that, however much imitation and ethnic denial may have been a part of Dylan's presentational strategies, they apparently did not extend to his engagements with African American culture, people, or voice. Indeed, as David Hajdu notes, Dylan came to feel "especially uncomfortable as a white man in the civil rights movement; he could never understand the black experience, he said, and his own sympathies extended beyond race." Hajdu quotes Dylan's exasperated outburst in an interview shortly following his appearance at the August 1963 March on Washington, where Martin Luther King, Jr., had delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech:

What's a Negro? I don't know what a Negro is. What's a Negro – a black person? How black? What's a Negro? A person living in a two-room shack with 12 kids? A lot of white people live in a two-room shack with 12 kids. Does this make them Negro? What's a Negro – someone with African blood? A lot of white people have African blood. What's a Negro?¹⁴

Dylan's reluctance to identify with, or to presume to explain, black American experience is understandable, given some of the critical responses to his presence and performance at the March on Washington. As the African American comedian and activist Dick Gregory asked Hajdu: "What was a white boy like Bob Dylan there for? Or – who else? Joan Baez? To support the cause? Wonderful – support the cause. March. Stand behind us – but not in front of us." (To which Harry Belafonte responded:

¹² Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, p. 96. ¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Farina and Richard Farina* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), pp. 201–202.

“Joan and Bob demonstrated with their participation that freedom and justice are universal concerns of import to responsible people of all colors Were they taking advantage of the movement? Or was the movement taking advantage of them?”¹⁵) By all accounts Dylan would have recoiled at the suggestion that he was standing “in front” of African Americans in the civil rights struggle, or that he could presume to speak for them, either politically or musically. It is perhaps for this reason, as Michael Gray notes, that by 1963 Dylan had become highly circumspect over when or where he would choose to perform the blues:

When Dylan performed specifically to black audiences, as in Greenwood, Mississippi in 1963 and at a women’s penitentiary in New Jersey during the Rolling Thunder Review of 1975, he didn’t hesitate to sing about racial politics but chose to do so via his white “protest” songs – “Only a Pawn in Their Game” and “Hurricane” respectively – rather than via blues songs.¹⁶

Dylan’s circumspection in assuming an identification with blackness is apparent in his earliest *Broadside* anthems. The distance between himself and the subjects of his songs manifests itself in a variety of ways: he affects the persona of a historian, a reporter, a casual observer, or an ironic commentator – but never a black victim of white racism himself. Thus, in his first major civil rights composition, “The Ballad of Emmett Till” (1962) – shortly retitled “The Death of Emmett Till,” which Joan Baez maintained had turned her into “a political folksinger”¹⁷ – Dylan reaches back seven years, to the notorious lynching in 1955 of a 14-year-old black child in Mississippi. In addition to the temporal distance, there is the spatial distance between the observed and the observer. Alden Lynn Nielsen points out that in his recounting of the lynching and the travesty of justice that followed (with the acquittal of both of the killers), Dylan “does not presume to speak on behalf of black suffering, displacing black people from their own narrative, as still occurs in travesties like *Mississippi Burning* and very nearly occurs in *Amistad*.” Rather, Nielsen writes, “Dylan’s song is written from the point of view of an implicated witness.”¹⁸

Dylan may have felt that he had good reason to refer to “The Death of Emmett Till” only two years after its composition as “a bullshit song.” But his oft-quoted dismissal – brutal and disingenuous as it was – contains

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 183.

¹⁶ Michael Gray, *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 272.

¹⁷ Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street*, p. 147.

¹⁸ Alden Lynn Nielsen, “Crow Jane Approximately: Bob Dylan’s Black Masque,” in *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan’s Road from Minnesota to the World*, ed. Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 188.

a simple nugget of truth about his wayward relationship to civil rights activism: “But when I wrote it, it wasn’t a bullshit song to me.” Indeed, at the time, as he told the folklorist Izzy Young, he thought it “the best thing I’ve ever written.”¹⁹ The song certainly has its structural problems, not least some noteworthy errors concerning “the facts of the case” – as Clinton Heylin notes, “a pattern he would repeat in two more Southern murder ballads: ‘Only a Pawn in Their Game’ and ‘The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.’”²⁰ This issue of factual error comes up frequently in Dylan criticism; but similar charges could be made against Woody Guthrie – and it gets to the heart of the cultural work that a song is capable of performing in spite of such errors. Hence “The Death of Emmett Till,” which Howard Sounes notes is “the first original Dylan composition that could be called a protest song – a song speaking out against injustice”²¹ – at least as important an objective as getting “the facts of the case” right. Nonetheless, even when granting such indulgence, Wilentz, for one, observes, “Dylan had never been consistently good at writing narrative songs out of the newspaper headlines”; consequently, “The Death of Emmett Till” appeared “forced and formulaic,” concluding with “platitudes.”²²

Maybe so. But Dylan was, at only twenty-one, on a pretty steep learning curve. By the time he came to his next explicit civil rights anthem, “Oxford Town,” toward the end of 1962, he had already written “Blowin’ in the Wind,” through which the cultural work was more a matter of influence than of enlightenment or explanation. In spite of the song’s political vagueness, “Blowin’ in the Wind” did the work – among other things – of lighting a flame beneath the black songwriter Sam Cooke, who marveled aloud about “a white boy writing a song like that.”²³ Dylan’s song, for all its “equivocation,”²⁴ led directly to Cooke writing his own signature anthem, “A Change Is Gonna Come.” (Cooke told a friend that folksingers like Dylan “may not sound as good, but the people believe them more.”²⁵) Whether or not Cooke was aware that Dylan had drawn partly on the black spiritual “No More Auction Block” for the musical setting of “Blowin’ in

¹⁹ Clinton Heylin, *Revolution in the Air: The Songs of Bob Dylan, Vol. 1: 1957–73* (London: Constable, 2010), pp. 87–88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

²¹ Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan* (London: Doubleday, 2001), p. 109.

²² Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America*, p. 152.

²³ Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 27.

²⁴ Robert Christgau, “Tarantula,” in *Dylan Companion*, ed. Thomson and Gutman, p. 140.

²⁵ Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 2000), p. 44.

the Wind,” he could apparently enter into a dialogue with it. As Jack Hamilton argues, “‘A Change Is Gonna Come’ can be heard as an emphatic response to the questions of ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’: ‘A Change Is Gonna Come’ asks no questions and instead is a series of declarative statements . . . [It] corrects the indeterminate ambiguity invoked by the ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ refrain, declaring that, in fact, a change *is* going to come.”²⁶

A distinct change *did* come in Dylan’s own writing with the appearance of “Oxford Town” in *Broadside* in December 1962, a mere two months after the black student James Meredith had enrolled in the segregated University of Mississippi, backed up by the federalized National Guard and 500 federal marshals, in the midst of campus riots that had left two dead. Gone were any “platitudes,” preaching, or hints of white-guilt breast-beating; in their place was the bewilderment – slightly comedic, at that – of a visiting narrator caught up in the midst of a raging storm. Meredith isn’t mentioned by name, nor are the university or the state’s segregationist governor, Ross Barnett. Dylan’s calculated distance extended to an interview with the Chicago radio host Studs Terkel, to whom he said, “Yeah, it deals with the Meredith case . . . but then again it doesn’t.”²⁷

Elijah Wald reminds us that, in such civil rights songs as “The Death of Emmett Till” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” both of which are aimed at conveying outrage over miscarriages of justice following racist killings, Dylan “was not writing ‘We Shall Not Be Moved’ or ‘We Shall Overcome.’ He was writing about individuals, and often difficult, complex individuals”²⁸ – whether they were victims or killers. But relatively early on, in such songs as “Who Killed Davey Moore?” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game” (both 1963), Dylan turns his sights on institutional or systemic racism, where individuals take a back seat to the structures that enable, encourage, and entrench racist practices. “Who Killed Davey Moore?” recounts, in the coy fashion of the old English ballad “Who Killed Cock Robin?,” the death of the black boxer in March 1963. With the boxing ring being one of the few arenas in which a black man could excel in a racist society such as the USA in the mid-twentieth century, Dylan places “money at the center of boxing’s ethical morass,” as Mike Marquese argues.²⁹ With his focus on system and structure rather than on

²⁶ Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight*, p. 52.

²⁷ Studs Terkel, *And They All Sang* (London: Granta, 2005), p. 211.

²⁸ Elijah Wald, *Dylan Goes Electric! Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night that Split the Sixties* (New York: Dey Street, 2015), p. 107.

²⁹ Mike Marquese, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), p. 78.

individuals, there was a grain of truth to Dylan's dismissive introduction to the song in his Town Hall concert in 1963: "This is a song about a boxer. It's got nothing to do with boxing; it's just a song about a boxer really. And, uh, it's not even having to do with a boxer, really."³⁰

In similar fashion, Dylan implied that the murdered civil rights activist Medgar Evers, as well as Byron De La Beckwith, his cowardly assassin, were – in a sense – both smaller than the system (the "game") that had pitted them against each other. In "Only a Pawn in Their Game," Evers is not without his earned stature; but nonetheless, in terms of agency, both he and his killer are positioned as chess pieces by a larger, unseen hand. It may be surprising that Dylan's song should have received such a warm reception from civil rights activists (white and black) as it appears to have done at his performance in Greenwood, Mississippi, in July 1963. NAACP and SNCC activist Howard Romaine recalled Dylan's performance as "an awakening prophetic cry which penetrated to the core," leading him, along with other workers, directly to the "Mississippi Freedom Summer, where we heard [the African American activist] Margaret Burnham singing the words as we came in."³¹ For any of its questionable assertions of Beckwith's diminished responsibility (he was "only a pawn," after all), the song did more than inspire activism on the ground: it also articulated the concept of "institutional racism" four years before Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton coined the term.³²

For those who had been following the developing poetics of Dylan's civil rights songs, it should have come as no surprise when he confessed to Nat Hentoff in his *Playboy* interview of 1966, "I do believe in equality, but I also believe in distance."³³ Indeed, he had told Hentoff in a *New Yorker* interview two years previously: "I'm not part of no Movement. If I was, I wouldn't be able to do anything else but in 'the Movement.' I just can't have people sit around and make rules for me. I do a lot of things no Movement would allow."³⁴ This is not to say that his songs wouldn't continue impacting upon the civil rights movement (fractured as it was to become), doing their cultural work in spite of any denial, or indeed any

³⁰ Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America*, p. 95.

³¹ Charles Hughes, "Allowed to Be Free: Bob Dylan and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Highway 61 Revisited*, ed. Sheehy and Swiss, p. 50.

³² Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture] and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), *passim*.

³³ "Interview with Nat Hentoff," *Playboy*, March 1966, in Jonathan Cott, ed., *Bob Dylan: The Essential Interviews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), p. 111.

³⁴ Nat Hentoff, "The Crackin', Shakin', Breakin' Sounds," *New Yorker*, October 24, 1964, in Cott, ed., *Essential Interviews*, p. 28.

inscrutable intention, on the part of their composer. In *Seize the Time*, Black Panther founder Bobby Seale recalled how Dylan's musical puzzle, "Ballad of a Thin Man" (1965), had gripped his fellow co-founder Huey P. Newton, as well as Stokely Carmichael:

Huey P. Newton made me recognize the lyrics. Not only the lyrics of the record, but what the lyrics meant in the record. What the lyrics meant in the history of racism that has perpetuated itself in this world. Huey would say: "Listen, listen – man, do you hear what he is saying?"

Seale concluded:

Old Bobby did society a big favor when he made that particular sound. If there's any more he made that I don't understand, I'll just ask Huey P. Newton to interpret them for us and maybe we can get a hell of a lot more out of brother Bobby Dylan, because old Bobby, he did a good job on that set.³⁵

Seale published *Seize the Time* in 1970, the same year that another young black militant, George Jackson, published his collection of prison letters under the title *Soledad Brother*. The following year, Jackson was killed in a shoot-out in San Quentin prison. Within three months, Dylan hastily wrote a ballad in Jackson's honor, which might well be considered the nadir of his writings on race in America. "George Jackson" was roundly condemned by critics such as Wilentz, who deplored the song's lyrical insincerity – particularly its assertion, "They killed a man I really loved."³⁶ (As Peter Doggett observed, "Dylan had only become aware of Jackson a matter of hours before writing the song."³⁷) The song sparked a ludicrous spat between members of the so-called "Rock Liberation Front," which included, on one side, the self-proclaimed "Dylanologist" A.J. Weberman, who had been attacking Dylan for "deserting the movement," and, on the other side, David Peel, Yoko Ono, and John Lennon, who all felt that "George Jackson" was proof of Dylan's commitment to "the movement" that he had in fact "helped create."³⁸

It is difficult to say precisely what cultural work "George Jackson" succeeded in performing, beyond Dylan's rehabilitation for a nearly forgotten, self-important faction in rock music history. The same can be said

³⁵ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991 [1970]), pp. 183, 186–187.

³⁶ Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America*, p. 153.

³⁷ Peter Doggett, *There's a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60s* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2008), p. 459.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

for what is, to date, Dylan's last explicit, targeted engagement (through composition) with civil rights and race in America: his 1975 ode to the wrongly convicted and jailed black boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, co-written with Jacques Levy. Carter's ordeal had begun with the fatal shooting of three people in a Paterson, New Jersey, bar in 1966; it ended long after Dylan's involvement with his case – in 1985, when, following two convictions and appeals, a judge in the US District Court for New Jersey ruled that the prosecutions and convictions had been "predicated on an appeal to racism rather than reason, and concealment rather than disclosure."³⁹ Having been moved by Carter's prison memoir, *The Sixteenth Round* (1973), Dylan lent his energies to a massive campaign to free Carter, a campaign that included not only the writing of the single "Hurricane," but also a lengthy performance tour – the Rolling Thunder Review – that culminated in two high-profile fund-raising concerts at New York's Madison Square Garden and Houston's Astrodome. Predictably, Dylan's motives were put under the microscope. Rock critic Lester Bangs sneered, "Dylan doesn't give a damn about Rubin Carter, and if he spent any more than ten minutes actually working on the composition of 'George Jackson' then Bryan Ferry is a member of The Eagles. Dylan merely used Civil Rights and the rest of the Movement to advance himself in the first place."⁴⁰ With comparable skepticism, the film critic Pauline Kael proposed that Dylan's aim was "to show us that Bob Dylan cares more about Black people than they do themselves."⁴¹

Nonetheless, Dylan and his fellow activists raised a great deal of money for Carter – 600,000 dollars (over 2.7 million dollars today). Never mind, as Carter recalled ruefully, that it had all "been swallowed up by lawyers."⁴² The "Night of the Hurricane" concert at Madison Square Garden raised more than money: it helped to raise consciousness. The playwright Sam Shepard recalled the moment when Carter's telephone call from prison was broadcast to the thousands in the arena:

The whole reality of his imprisonment and our freedom comes through loud and clear. "I'm sitting here in jail and I'm thinking that this is truly a revolutionary act when so many people in the outside world can come

³⁹ James S. Hirsch, *Hurricane: The Miraculous Journey of Rubin Carter* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 273.

⁴⁰ Lester Bangs, "Bob Dylan's Dalliance with Mafia Chic," in *Dylan Companion*, ed. Thomson and Gutman, pp. 210–211.

⁴¹ Pauline Kael, "The Calvary Gig," *Dylan Companion*, ed. Thomson and Gutman, p. 228.

⁴² Rubin Carter with Ken Klonsky, *Eye of the Hurricane: My Path from Darkness to Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), p. 122.

together for someone in jail . . . I'm speaking from deep down in the bowels of a New Jersey penitentiary."⁴³

Dylan himself never again performed "Hurricane" live after the Houston Astrodome concert in January 1976, and the song's last high-profile use was as an ignominious musical backdrop to a *Family Guy* episode in which the megalomaniac baby Stewie struts away, boasting "I am who I am."⁴⁴

One final project – the guitarist Steve Van Zandt's Sun City boycott – demonstrates that perhaps Dylan ultimately came to the conclusion that his mere celebrity might do more for the advancement of civil rights than his own songs could do. After all, the year 1985 had proven that just by showing up to sing someone else's lyrics, Dylan could be instrumental in raising 75 million dollars through his contribution to the charity single "We Are the World" (written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie on behalf of "United Support of Artists for Africa" – or "USA for Africa"). The same year had shown that even an offhand, ill-judged utterance of Dylan's could lead to a positive development: onstage at the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia in 1984, "the transcendent BOB DYLAN!" (as Jack Nicholson introduced him) had made the tone-deaf mistake of proposing that "some of the money that's raised for the people in Africa" could be siphoned off to "pay the mortgages on some of the farms . . . the farmers here owe to the banks."⁴⁵ Roundly deplored at the time, Dylan's gaffe led directly to the establishment of Farm Aid, an organization that still thrives to assist struggling farmers in the USA. Van Zandt had been outraged at musicians continuing to play at the lavish Sun City resort in the Bophuthatswana "black homeland" in then-apartheid South Africa, declaring: "To forcibly relocate people is bad enough, but to erect a \$90-million showplace to celebrate their imprisonment is beyond all conscience."⁴⁶ Dylan thus became one of the Artists United Against Apartheid, whose "Sun City" video of 1985 was one of the many projects feeding into the global cultural boycott that helped bring down the apartheid government and usher in black-majority rule with Nelson Mandela at the helm.

Importantly, the "Sun City" video in which Dylan appears blends footage of the South African resistance struggle with that of the civil rights movement in the USA, with the township police batons matching Bull

⁴³ Sam Shepard, *Rolling Thunder Logbook* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 172.

⁴⁴ *Family Guy*, season 6, episode 8: "McStroke." Original broadcast January 13, 2008.

⁴⁵ Sounes, *Down the Highway*, pp. 366–367.

⁴⁶ Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs* (London: Faber, 2010), pp. 501–502.

Connor's water hoses, and with Mandela harkening back to Martin Luther King and the March on Washington where Dylan had performed.⁴⁷ "Sun City" shows that the movement itself had moved on into more global territory, just as Dylan had – supposedly – "moved on" from the movement. However, as Dylan showed, to "move on" is not necessarily to leave. It might mean, rather, to transform, to morph, to change.

⁴⁷ Artists United Against Apartheid, "Sun City," www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Blvf-ZIJNc.