

## Bob Dylan's Music and the Civil Rights Movement, 1962-1964

The first sentence makes a general statement about Dylan's reputation.

The title shows the focus on one part of Dylan's career and work.

Bob Dylan is one of the most important American musicians of all time. He became widely known during the 1960s when young people of the counter culture were challenging the social order. Among them Dylan became known as "the voice of his generation." Dylan's early songs were acoustic folk music, and they dealt with social and political issues of the day. Influenced by folk artists Woodie Guthrie and Pete Seeger, Dylan wrote songs about nuclear war, racial discrimination, poverty and other social problems. However, the Civil Rights Movement--the social and political movement to end discrimination against African Americans--was a focus of much of Dylan's early songwriting. These songs called attention to racism and injustice, and inspired Americans in the Civil Rights Movement.

The thesis statement focuses on themes in Dylan's music.

Bob Dylan has a long and varied career in popular music, but his early protest songs and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement helped establish both his reputation and his hope for social change. He was born Robert Allen Zimmerman into a Jewish family in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. He briefly attended the University of Minnesota in 1959, but in 1961 he moved to New York City where he became part of the lively folk music scene in Greenwich Village. In 1962, Dylan signed a recording contract and released his first album of folk songs. Inspired by his girlfriend Suze Rotolo, he began writing protest songs and supporting groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in NYC. The next year he released *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, which contained a number of songs about racial problems in the US. In August of 1963 he appeared at the historic Freedom March on Washington, D.C., where he performed the protest songs "When the Ship Comes In" and "Only a Pawn in their Game." These activities were followed by a tour of the South to help promote voter registration. In 1964 he released a new album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, which contained more songs protesting racism and inspiring change. In this way, Dylan's political activities added to his reputation.

Brief career background plus focus on political activities.

The songs of Dylan's early career, especially in *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963) and *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964), offer strong criticism of racism in the U.S. Dylan's first protest song was "The Death of Emmitt Till," which tells of the murder of a young black man from Chicago on a visit to Mississippi and the acquittal of his white killers. In the song, Dylan speaks out against this "crime that's so unjust" and calls on Americans to "make this great land of ours a greater place to live." "Oxford Town," from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, tells the story of a young black man who, in September 1962, tried to attend university. In this song Dylan sings, "He comes to the door, / He couldn't get in / All because of the color of his skin." "Only a Pawn in their Game," from *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, is about the murder of Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers. In this song, Dylan tells how politicians in the South manipulate whites into hatred and violence. Perhaps, the most famous of Dylan's songs of this time is "Blowin' in the Wind," which, according to many Americans of the time, became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. It was widely performed by other artists. In this song, Dylan asks, "How many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free?" Thus Dylan's early songs contain powerful messages about racial discrimination in the U.S.

This paragraph deals with songs and messages

The early career of Bob Dylan showed his support for the Civil Rights Movement through his songwriting and his political activities. The songs that Dylan released between 1962 and 1964 helped to establish him as a spokesman for justice and social change. For a number of reasons, however, Dylan started to move away from politics and protest after 1964, although he never stopped writing songs about social and political issues. Influenced by new artists such as the Beatles and wanting to maintain his artistic freedom, Dylan started to blend folk with electric pop and blues. Nevertheless, Dylan's protest songs, especially those songs that dealt with racial discrimination, are an important contribution to American culture and society.

Summary and thesis statement

Importance of these songs.

## OUTLINE

Topic / Title: Bob Dylan's Music and the Civil Rights Movement, 1962-1964

Thesis Statement:

The Civil Rights Movement--the social and political movement to end discrimination against African Americans--was a focus of much of Bob Dylan's early songwriting. These songs called attention to racism and injustice, and inspired Americans in the Civil Rights Movement.

### I. Body Paragraph 1

Topic Sentence: Bob Dylan has a long and varied career in popular music, but his early protest songs and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement helped establish both his reputation and his hope for social change.

Supporting Points:

- A. Birth and education
- B. Move to New York, Greenwich Village
- C. 1962: Recording contract and first album
- D. Influence of Suze Rotolo: Political involvement (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and writing of protest songs
- E. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*: (1963): Songs about racial discrimination
- G. August, 1963: performance at Freedom March on Washington, D.C.
- H. Tour of the South to support voter registration campaign
- F. *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964): Racial injustice and social change

### II. Body Paragraph 2

Topic Sentence: The songs of Dylan's early career, especially in *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, offer strong criticism of racism in the U.S.

Supporting Points:

- A. "The Death of Emmitt Till" (1962)
  - 1. Murder of a young black man and acquittal of white killers
  - 2. A "crime that's so unjust"
  - 3. Americans should "make this great land of ours a greater place to live"
- B. "Oxford Town" from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963)
  - 1. About a young black man who tries to attend university
  - 2. "He comes to the door, / He couldn't get in / All because of the color of his skin."
- C. "Only a Pawn in their Game" from *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964)
  - 1. About the murder of Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers
  - 2. How politicians in the South manipulate whites into hatred and violence
- D. "Blowin' in the Wind" (1964)
  - 1. An anthem of the Civil Rights Movement
  - 2. Widely performed by other artists
  - 3. "How many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free?"

### Bibliography

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