Vietnam: America’s First Rock-And-Roll War Essay, Research Paper

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The Vietnam War could not compare to any other war the United States had seen

before. The average age of soldiers was 19, and some figures gather that 90 percent were

all under the age of 23. This was also the first war in which the GIs listened to antiwar

and protest songs while fighting in the conflict. In previous wars, the music had always

been supportive, more or less hiding the truth of what was really going on. With Vietnam

it actually told the soldiers and their families what was really happening: murdering

innocent people for a lost or unknown reason. Like may people back home, many GIs

brought their taste of music into the front lines. Rock was the most popular type of music

at that time.

World War II was different from the Vietnam War in that the forties witnessed a

unified mission of fighting fascism and Nazism. In the latter stages of the Vietnam War,

there was no such unity of purpose. Music has always provided need relief during

wartime, but in W.W.II, and Korea there was not the separation in musical preference

between enlisted men and officers that occurred during the Vietnam War. Soldiers often

complained that Armed Forces Vietnam Radio broadcasts were geared to officers, with

light classical music scattered among what the soldiers called ?lame, tennybopperish, polka

party, or bubble-gum music.? One soldier, who spoke anonymously in Rolling Stone,

called Armed Forces Radio the ?world?s \*censored\*tiest, small-town, Midwest,

old-women-right-wing, plastic, useless, propagandizing, bummer, unturned-on, controlled,

low-fidelity, non-stereo type of music ever.? According to an interview in Rolling Stone,

most enlisted men preferred hard rock or psychedelic music; 30 percent enjoyed rhythm

and blues; 10 percent country; 5 percent classical and 10 percent folk. There were many

different types of rock music. However, the most popular was protest music. During the

late 1960s, the rock culture and protest music became known as Anti-Vietnam and

non-violent music. One such protest song ?The Times They are a-Changin? written by

Bob Dylan in 1964, with its lyrics ?gave a warning to authority that America was

experiencing a new consciousness, and that the establishment (government) have to face

the opposition of much of the population, especially in the young.? This helped the flower

children expand not only their minds, but the ideas of sexual liberation, personal liberation,

and the ideas of peace and love. Many of the songs written during this era were written to

imply what life was like in Vietnam. Such songs as ?Purple Haze? by Jimi Hendrix had the

allusion of the purple smoke left on the landing zones. In another song, ?Magical Mystery

Tour? by The Beatles, the lines ?coming to take you away, dying to take you away,? held

special meaning for those Marines at the Khe Sanh, because the government forced them

to go to war, and they were literally ?dying? to be taken away.

Many Asian bands tried to imitate British and American rock groups and perform

such songs as ?San Francisco? (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair), ?Hey

Jude,? ?Simon Says,? ?Gloria,? and ?Black Is Black.? These poor recreations gave the

soldiers a glimmer of home and hope. These types of songs protested against the innocent

slaughter of American men, as well as Vietnamese men who were forced to fight against

one another. The decade of the sixties brought with it the idea of drugs, sex and

rock-and-roll – which was what was really going on not only at home, but on the

battlefield. The black market and prostitution allowed the soldiers some freedom to get

away from the killing.

The music of Vietnam was nothing like anything ever seen before. What was

actually happening out on the field was what the musicians were actually singing about.

But did music really contribute to the ending of the war? Did the concepts of free love

and peace help? Whether the music actually changed minds or not, there is no doubt that

it helped those that were involved in it feel like they actually did something worthwhile.

They were not just sitting home pretending that absolutely nothing was happening; they

were fighting their own battle: a battle against the establishment and those who

mistakenly claimed to know what was right and what was wrong.