

**BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN SONGS:  
A VIEW THROUGH THE VIETNAM WAR**



**Course:** 2021-2022

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this extended essay to all the victims that unfortunately did not come back home or suffered the consequences of the Vietnam War. In particular, to the Vietnam Veterans, who performed in the war, either being drafted or volunteering. They have been an important motor of this project.

## APPRECIATION

My sincere appreciation to my tutor, who has stayed by my side throughout the whole process and accepted without hesitation being the tutor and also has shown her excitement towards this project.

My thanks to my parents, who have been supporting and encouraging me since the beginning.

## ABSTRACT

### ENGLISH

The outcome and consequences the Vietnam War left on American society, economics, politics, etc. have been devastating. In this research project I will try to answer the following question: *To what extent does Bruce Springsteen's stance in the songs "Born in the U.S.A." "Galveston Bay" and "The Wall" reflect attitudes to the Vietnam War in US society?"* The methodology will consist in a close analysis of each song with the aim of making connections with the Vietnam War inner conflicts, consequences and facts. This analysis will be also compared to the U.S. society opinion. For the possible research, I have learnt about the Vietnam War and the singer's implication with it.

### CASTELLANO

El resultado y las consecuencias que la guerra de Vietnam generó en la sociedad estadounidense, la economía, la política, etc. han sido devastadores. En este ensayo estudiaré en qué medida las actitudes de la sociedad de EE.UU. sobre la guerra de Vietnam están ilustradas en las letras de *"Born in the U.S.A.", "Galveston Bay" y "The Wall"*, canciones de Bruce Springsteen. La metodología consiste en un análisis de cada canción para hacer conexiones entre los conflictos internos de la guerra de Vietnam, consecuencias y hechos. Además, este análisis también será comparado con la opinión de la sociedad Americana. Para la posible realización del trabajo, me he informado acerca de la guerra de Vietnam y la conexión con el cantante.

## CATALÀ

El resultat i les conseqüències que la guerra del Vietnam va generar a la societat nord-americana, l'economia, la política, etc. han estat devastadors. Així, en aquest assaig estudiaré en quina mesura les actituds de la societat dels EUA sobre la guerra del Vietnam estan il·lustrades a les lletres de "Born in the USA", "Galveston Bay" i "The Wall", cançons de Bruce Springsteen. El mètode consisteix en una anàlisi de cada cançó per establir connexions entre els conflictes interns, les conseqüències i els fets de la guerra del Vietnam. A més, aquest anàlisis es compararà amb l'opinió de la societat Americana. Per a la possible redacció, he investigat sobre la guerra del Vietnam i la connexió del cantant amb aquesta.

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

When the lockdown came up, I was about to study the Cold War in my history class and, unfortunately, I did not have the chance to learn about it. That is why it has become an issue of concern for me and I am very interested to learn. Also, thanks to my Language A classes, I found out that analyzing texts is something that engaged me and thus, I thought it could be a great idea if I combine the two of them. As the topic was a bit too broad, I decided to narrow it down to a specific part of the war: the Vietnam War, an inner conflict. Also, the texts that I wanted to analyze were songs.

One of the singers that has found inspiration with the conflict is Bruce Springsteen. "Born in the U.S.A." (1984) was the first song I chose. Since I was very young my father would play music he used to listen to and this song has always amazed me with the powerful chorus and the idea of America. Furthermore, this song is what gave me the idea for the essay. I chose the two remaining, "Galveston Bay" (1995) and "The Wall" (2014), because I tried to find one song for each decade, thus supporting the idea that the Vietnam war echoes through generations. This extended essay will be focusing on to what extent Bruce Springsteen' stance on the Vietnam War reflects attitudes that the US society had towards the Vietnam War.

The best approach to answer this research question seems to be through a close examination of three songs chosen in different moments of the singer' career. The lyrics will be the primary source as well as Springsteen's speeches about the selected songs. Finally, to learn about the American opinion I will use opinion polls and pieces of journalism. Moreover, interviews with Vietnam veterans and the

documentary movie *Ken Burns & Lynn Novick: The Vietnam War* will allow me to learn about the history of the issue.

My personal goals in this research are the following:

- To inform myself about Bruce Springsteen's connection with the issue.
- To learn about both the conflict and U.S involvement so I can understand the social consequences.
- To show the misunderstanding that is attributed to a particular song ("Born in the U.S.A").
- To gain a better understanding about the work done by the Vietnam Veterans.
- To enjoy analyzing songs and discovering hidden meanings and connections.

The essay will present an introduction to the Vietnam War, Bruce Springsteen's connection to the conflict and a research in the US society position as expressed in journalism, opinion polls, and interviews with veterans, such as Larry D. Parker, or Bob Muller.

The main point of this essay is on the view on the war as expressed in Springsteen's compositions and in comparison with the public opinion. Therefore, no section has been included to describe or analyze the war.

# 1. WAR CONTEXT

Although it did not happen in the U.S.A., during the Cold War (1947–1991), the Vietnam War was an inner conflict developed in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia that lasted nearly twenty years and caused an enormous impact on the American society: *“It made us cynical and distrustful of our institutions, especially of government. For many people, it eroded the notion, once nearly universal, that part of being an American was serving your country”*.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT AND PUBLIC OPINION

Opposition to the American involvement in the war started in the mid-1960s in the form of demonstrations, strikes, marches. Students also became extremely involved. By 1968, well-known cities and universities had become the locations chosen to hold protests<sup>2</sup>. However, it is common knowledge that years before, folk singer Pete Seeger, among others, participated in an activist concert to protest against the war. Soon the war became the source of anti-war and protest songs. The songs were not limited to the period of the war, indeed that extended for many years, even today we can find references to the Vietnam war in songs such as “This Ain’t Nothing” (2008) by Craig Morgan or “Summer Of ‘68” (2003) by The Charlie Daniels Band . As the Americans' disapproval with the war became stronger and the increasing number of soldiers who lost their lives in combat grew, a new movement was born in the U.S, the so-called *anti-war movement*.

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<sup>1</sup> Marlantes, K. (2017, January 7). *Opinion | Vietnam: The War That Killed Trust*. The New York Times. Retrieved January 4, 2022, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/07/opinion/sunday/vietnam-the-war-that-killed-trust.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Changing views of the war in the USA - The Vietnam War - National 5 History Revision*. (n.d.). BBC. Retrieved January 4, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zv7bkqt/revision/5>



U.S. citizens manifested their disagreement with the poor effort from the government. American public opinion about the war and draft was not supportive and thus, the government tried to do something to change the dynamics and artists found in protest songs a powerful means to voice and project their ideology. The aim was to raise awareness about what was happening and radio helped them disperse widely. Rock, soul, and folk were the most popular music genres.

## 2. THE VIETNAM WAR AND THE USA

The Vietnam War, officially known as The Second Indochina War, began on the 1st of November 1955 and finished with the fall of Saigon on the 30th of April 1975. The war arose from the First Indochina War (1946-1954), where the Viet Minh, an alliance between the Indo-Chinese Communist Party and nationalist groups, fought to achieve independence from France. North Vietnam, the communist bloc (supported by the Soviet Union and China) and South Vietnam, the anti-communist bloc (allied with the United States and South Korea), whose aim was to avoid Vietnam being under a communist government, were the principal forces present in the conflict. In 1973, after the United States had signed the Paris Peace Accords, only the two Vietnamese powers remained fighting. On 2 July 1976, the war ended with the Vietnam reunification of the country. As we can see, the conflict extended through two decades.

### 2.1 U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR

Regarding the role the United States adopted as the war moved forward, the Selective Service System<sup>3</sup> established a draft in which the youth was the most likely to perform in the war. The agency requested the males who had reached the legal age to enlist themselves into the Service. This was what fueled the anti-war movement. It is also what turned the Vietnam war into an American issue: suddenly American men could be sent to fight in Vietnam.

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<sup>3</sup> founded on May 18, 1917 by the U.S. congress

The war is still considered as a period of embarrassment hardly discussed which caused harmful traumas for thousands of people. Additionally, the treatment Vietnam veterans received from the American society was atrocious, even the United States government used them for policy objectives yet *“discarded them without thanks when they returned home”*<sup>4</sup>.

In the film *Ken Burns & Lynn Novick: The Vietnam War*, Karl Marlantes, a marine, explained he and his spouse had known a young couple for many years; however, it was after twelve years they mentioned the war for the first time. In the words of the marine: *“It’s only been very recently that, I think, that, you know, the baby boomers are finally starting to say, “What happened? What happened?.”*<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 U.S. PUBLIC OPINION

Based on a Gallup Poll made by *The New York Times* in 1965, US society by majority - 61% - disagreed when asked if sending troops to fight in the war was a mistake, against the 24% who were in favour - the remaining percent abstained -. Therefore making a contrast when the survey was repeated in 1969 and the results had changed drastically: 56% didn’t support the idea of having sent soldiers. Indeed the poll was made annually during the years in between and by comparing the percentages obtained it could be observed a notable growth in favor of the “yes”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marsh, D. (1991). *Glory Days*. Random House Publishing Group. (page 83)

<sup>5</sup> Watch Documentaries (2017). *1. Déjà Vu (1858-1961) (vídeo)*. The Vietnam War (2017) Watch Free Documentaries Online. Accessed 07 16, 2021, from <https://watchdocumentaries.com/the-vietnam-war/>

<sup>6</sup> *Most in a Poll Term Vietnam a Mistake*. (1970, June 28). The New York Times. Accessed January 8, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/28/archives/most-in-a-poll-term-vietnam-a-mistake.html>

After the war ended, *CBS News* formulated another poll about the U.S. involvement in the war. By observing the percentages below, it could be noted that the number of American citizens opposed to the war continued increasing within a period of ten years. Nevertheless, the percentage has been decreasing since 1995; opposed to the abstention, which has surpassed the number of people supporting the participation in the combat in the last survey conducted in 2018. The image below shows the variation of the percentages throughout the years:

	Now	4/2000	5/1995	2/1992	2/1985
Did the right thing	22%	24%	19%	18%	19%
Should have stayed out	51	60	72	70	73
Don't know	27	16	9	12	9

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<sup>7</sup> CBS News. (2018, January 28). *CBS News Poll: U.S. involvement in Vietnam*. CBS News. Retrieved September 1, 2021, from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cbs-news-poll-u-s-involvement-in-vietnam/>

### 3. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen, better known as Bruce Springsteen, is a renowned American singer, songwriter and rock guitarist born on 23 September 1949. With twenty albums on the market, he has sold one hundred and fifty million albums worldwide. His compositions mostly narrate aspects of the American society's difficulties, values and behavior upon the ideals of the country ("Nebraska"). Others are based on fictional characters or present the idea of Springsteen empathizing and getting into the skin of people who have faced life challenges ("Ramrod", "Atlantic City"). Politics and "*the American Dream*<sup>8</sup>" have also inspired him.

Springsteen was against the war and tried not to be chosen to fight. "*The whole draft thing, it was just a pure street thing. You didn't want to go. You didn't want to go because you'd seen other people go and not come back*".<sup>9</sup> Bart Hanes, the drummer in his first band, the Castiles, was one of the Americans that didn't make it back home.

His connection with the Vietnam War started with the memory of Bart in his mind and the feeling of concern about everything the soldiers had to do in combat. Springsteen decided he wanted to help. Jon Landau<sup>10</sup> and Joe Klein<sup>11</sup> helped him find an organization, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Springsteen got the chance to

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<sup>8</sup> in American culture the ideals that people should follow in order to succeed and live with life and decency ( Marsh, D. (1991). *Glory Days*. Random House Publishing Group.) (page 127)

<sup>9</sup> Marsh, D. (1991). *Glory Days*. Random House Publishing Group. (pages 81-82)

<sup>10</sup> Jon Landau was Bruce' manager and producer

<sup>11</sup> Joe Klein is an American political commentator and Landau's colleague in the *Rolling Stone*' magazine

meet Bob Muller, the VVA president and on September 20, 1981, the artist performed in Los Angeles and gave all the benefits to the organization. He also visited a center where Vietnam veterans were recovering from war wounds. It had a huge impact on him. Since then he has participated in lots of veterans causes and helped raise considerable amounts of money. For 12 years he has headlined the annual benefit show of Bob Woodruff Foundation: "Stand Up for Heroes".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Chow, A. R. (2019, June 13). Bruce Springsteen Wants You to Support US Veterans. *Time Magazine*. <https://time.com/5606245/bruce-springsteen-military-veterans/>

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF THE SONGS

Springsteen released "Born in the U.S.A." on the 4th of June 1984 and so far it has become one of his most popular songs. Since then, people have wondered and speculated about its meaning. Many people have argued that this song is an observance of American life, President Ronald Regan even mentioned it in one of his speeches. However, this song is extensively misunderstood. "Born in the U.S.A." describes how a Vietnam veteran returns home.

"Galveston Bay" was released in 1995 and it is included in the "The Ghost of Tom Joad" album. This song gives the name to a bay located on the upper coast of Texas and in the western Gulf of Mexico. In the song it is described as "***the promised land***": lots of Vietnamese migrate from their country to find in the United States a better life.

The last song chosen is "The Wall", released in 2014 and featured in High Hopes' album. As the name suggests, it remembers the place where the names of Vietnam veterans, who lost their lives in combat, are engraved. This special wall is called the *Vietnam Veteran Memorial*<sup>13</sup>.

After analyzing the songs I believe that the recurrent themes that worry Springsteen are the work done by politicians (including the draft), the treatment of veterans and the social impact of the war.

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<sup>13</sup> contains an endless list of U.S. soldiers who fought in Vietnam. It is located in Washington D.C.

## 4.1 POLITICS

References to politics and the frequent use of patriotism by politicians appear in Springsteen's songs. In *Born in the U.S.A.* the chorus is "***Born in the U.S.A., I was born in the U.S.A.*** " which, together with the rhythm, is extensively conceived as a sense of patriotism towards the country. Indeed, President Ronald Reagan used this song for his political campaign without knowing it was a protest song about the life of militaries and not a proud song of having been born in America. In his own words: "*America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts. It rests in the message of hope in songs of a man so many young Americans admire, New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen.*"<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Springsteen argued he drew inspiration from Hanes resulting in him creating a rebellion song.

In terms of language, the use of "***they***", instead of the passive voice, and his figure in representation of the other drafted adults (first person singular), "***So they put a rifle in my hand***", emphasizes how they were being forced to go to Vietnam. In addition, it creates a distance between the politicians and the citizens which entails the appearance of a tense atmosphere that develops in the firmly affirmative of going to war, racism and ignorance. Fortunately, he could not go due to the fact that he was recovering from an accident.

This criticism of patriotism is also expressed by Vietnam veterans. When veteran Parker was drafted to serve in Vietnam, he thought that helping the US Army felt the right choice as the other males of his family had also been recruited for ancient

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<sup>14</sup> *Ronald Reagan - Bruce Springsteen (19.09.1984)*. (2012, November 20). YouTube. Retrieved January 6, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8BRWNaOdlc>



conflicts: *“My family history led me to believe that to do otherwise was evidence of cowardice”*.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, *“The Wall”* shows another connection with politics. In this song, Robert McNamara is mentioned, a politician that was in charge of sending people to the war during the Vietnam conflict. Springsteen sings: ***“Now the man who put you here he feeds his family in rich halls” and “Now the limousines rush down Pennsylvania Avenue”***. Both verses reflect Bruce Springsteen’s thoughts towards the politicians who selected Bart Hanes and Walter Chichon<sup>16</sup>; they will still enjoy their wealth and will continue with their own lives. The verse ***“I read Robert McNamara says he’s sorry”*** could refer to the politician’s apology after finding out about Bart’s death; although Springsteen can not accept it: ***“And apology and forgiveness got no place here at all / At the wall”***. Indeed, the repetition of this statement throughout the song helps to give more emphasis about the singer’s stance towards the politics and draft, which was not positive.

Determination and decision over the American citizens’ life were the most powerful traits that characterized the government at that period of time. This perception seems to match that of many veterans. For instance, Parker expresses that *“Yet the same people (mostly old, mostly white, mostly men, mostly Christian, mostly heterosexual) continue to be elected and sent to Washington to make decisions about topics they appear to have a poor understanding of.”*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Parker, L. D. (2019, November 11). *Larry D. Parker: On Veterans Day, a Vietnam vet regrets fighting for an America that’s become an intolerant bully*. NBC News. Accessed December 20, 2021, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/veterans-day-vietnam-vet-regrets-fighting-america-s-become-intolerant-ncna107957>

<sup>16</sup> Springsteen’s friend

<sup>17</sup> Parker, L. D. (2019, November 11). *Larry D. Parker: On Veterans Day, a Vietnam vet regrets fighting for an America that’s become an intolerant bully*. NBC News. Accessed December 20, 2021,

## 4.2 HOW VETERANS WERE TREATED

The treatment Vietnam veterans received is the topic that concerned Bruce Springsteen the most. In "Born in The USA" we find it in the simile in the first strophe: ***"You end up like a dog that's been beat too much"***. Here, a soldier is compared with a dog and later the singer expresses how the number of wounds the fight left to the individuals will be marked; not only physically, on the skin, but also in the memory, mentally: ***"you spend half your life just to cover up"***.

Springsteen also sings about how the Vietnam veterans struggled with the consequences of the Vietnam War in society. The first two verses of the fourth strophe explain how arduous it was for countless veteran soldiers to come back from Vietnam:

***"Come back home to the refinery  
Hiring man says, "Son if it was up to me"  
Went down to see my V.A. man  
He said, "Son, don't you understand"***

The desperation reaches a crescendo some verses below where Springsteen captures the frustration and despair of Veteran soldiers in the verse ***"I've got nowhere to run and nowhere to go"***. A similar opinion is expressed by Parker when he recalls *"When I returned, no one seemed interested in my perspective or wanted to know much about what veterans like me had been through"*. His words reflect the carelessness of the veterans. Dave Marsh, in his book *Glory Days*, also

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from <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/veterans-day-vietnam-vet-regrets-fighting-america-s-become-intolerant-ncna107957>

explores this idea when he claims that the government took advantage of the situation and used the veterans for political purposes.<sup>18</sup>

“The Wall” is the title of the song he composed to pay tribute to Walter and Raymond Chichon **“This poem that I wrote for you”**, two brothers who formed part of a music group, “The Motifs”, in Springsteen's hometown. In this song, the **“you”** is not addressed to the listener but to the musicians.

During a concert he performed in Charlotte<sup>19</sup>, he explained that both brothers were his mentors and tutors in music. As the name suggests, it remembers the memorial wall that portraits the endless list of Vietnam veterans who lost their lives in combat: the *Vietnam Veteran Memorial*<sup>20</sup>. Springsteen visited it in December 1997 and saw Walter's name written in it. **“The black stone”** could be a metaphor referencing this memorial. Losing his drummer and friend was incredibly appalling for him as he expresses it with the hyperbole **“Hard tears”** in a hard tone.

This need that Springsteen has to pay homage to the veterans would show his belief that the veterans deserve much more attention than they have had.

The injustice of the draft system is another issue that causes Springsteen concern. Springsteen has been inspired with firsthand experiences of closer people to talk about the draft. Bart Hanes, the drummer of Springsteen's first band, who lost his life while fighting in combat, is mentioned in two songs. In “Born in the USA” he sings:

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<sup>18</sup> Marsh, D. (1991). *Glory Days*. Random House Publishing Group. (page 83)

<sup>19</sup> Springsteen, B. (2014, May 14). *Bruce Springsteen- "The Wall" (Charlotte, NC 04/19/14)*. YouTube. Accessed August 22, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3m0BXVKPu0>

<sup>20</sup> It is located in Washington D.C.

***“Had a brother at Khe Sahn”***. The Battle of Khe Sanh was one of the bloodiest and longest battles during the Vietnam War. In “The Wall”, Springsteen remembers the day the musician told him he was going to Vietnam in a sarcastic and content tone because he did not know where it was: ***“I remember you in your Marine uniform laughing” / “Laughing at your ship out party”***.

Moreover, there are verses that show the contrast between the unfair justice and the ignorance and innocence of the young males that were drafted. Springsteen highlights the ruthlessness of the system by contrasting the struggles of the veterans with the worry-free lives of politicians: ***“Now the men who put you here eat with their families in rich dining halls”***. Finally, Springsteen also emphasizes the injustice of the system by mentioning all those broken dreams that young soldiers never were able to fulfill for instance: ***“He had a woman he loved in Saigon / I got a picture of him in her arms now”***.

As we can see, the verses that deal with veterans are very personal, which suggests that the singer really empathizes with them. Springsteen also has reflected about it in some concerts such as the one he offered at Los Angeles Sports Arena in 1988: *“You guys! you guys out there that are eighteen and nineteen years old — it happened once and it can happen again”*. *“So, I guess all I’m sayin’ is, You gotta go down there and you gotta look. [...] there’s a lotta guys here tonight who have to leave it and live it everyday.”*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Marsh, D. (1991). *Glory Days*. Random House Publishing Group. (page 89)

### 4.3 SOCIAL IMPACT

The behaviour and coexistence between both American and Vietnamese also appear in his songs. "Galveston Bay" portrays the conflict caused by the influx of Vietnamese refugees in Seabrook: ***"And bought a shrimp boat with his cousin", "Steer out through the channel and cast his nets into the water"***.

Vietnamese refugees were not, in the slightest, well welcomed in Texas. Their applications for jobs in the sea industry led to growing tension between local fishermen and the new Vietnamese who had made Texas their new home. In 1979, this tension became greater and triggered racism and xenophobia. Springsteen narrates it in these verses:

**"Soon in the bars around the harbor was talk of America for Americans  
Someone said "You want 'em out, you got to burn 'em out"  
And brought in the Texas Klan"**

The tension exploded on August 9, 1979. Springsteen is remembering this violent Friday night that resulted in tragedy in Seadrift, Texas. Billy Joe Aplin was a local fisherman who got involved in an argument with some Vietnamese fishermen. Sau and Chinh Van Nguyen were the names of the suspects who shot the Texan citizen. During that night a great number of Vietnamese boats were burned: ***"Come to burn the Vietnamese boats into the sea" / "In the fire's light, shots rang out"***. In the end, Sau was charged with murder and his brother was arrested. However, the justice decided the altercation was committed in self-defence <sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Iwins, M. (1979, August 9). Killing Sharpens Texas Feud on Vietnamese Fishing. *The New York Times*.

***“Two Texans lay dead on the ground”***

Springsteen touches the themes of racism and hate in other songs too. In “Born in the U.S.A.” there are implicit references such as ***“A foreign land”*** referring to Vietnam, an unknown territory that barely people could locate on a map and also making a contrast with the adjective used to describe America: ***“the promised land”***. He also uses ***“the yellow man”***, where *yellow* remembers to the “yellow peril”<sup>23</sup>, the racist metaphor used to denote the oriental citizens.

Springsteen acknowledges the existence of the racism and hatred caused by the war, but he doesn’t support them. One proof of this is that he finished the song “Galveston Bay” with a message of hope. The point when the song reaches the climax is shown when Billy is carrying a knife while waiting for Le. With the previous verse in mind, when *Billy said “My friend, you’re a dead man”*, it could be interpreted that Billy is going to commit a crime. Nevertheless, Billy reconsiders his action as Le walks past him, and he decides that violence will not solve anything:

***“Le lit a cigarette, the bay was still as glass***

***As he walked by, Billy stuck his knife into his pocket***

***Took a breath and let him pass”***

Springsteen himself in an interview to *Mother Jones magazine* said: *“He decides to let it pass on this night, to leave it alone, for whatever the reason. That’s a miracle*

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<https://www.nytimes.com/1979/08/09/archives/killing-sharpens-texas-feud-on-vietnamese-fishing-edgy-since.html>

<sup>23</sup> The yellow peril was developed in the late 19th century. Chinese worked at lower wages than the local white peoples and thus created a racist backlash.

*that can happen, that does happen. People get to a certain brink, and they make a good choice, instead of a deadly choice*<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup>Corn, D. (n.d.). Bruce Remembers. Retrieved August 20, 2021, from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2009/11/bruce-remembers/>

## 5. CONCLUSION

From all the above, it can be concluded that Springsteen mostly reflects the American citizens' attitudes towards the Vietnam War. Because of the way he sings about the politics of the Vietnam war and its social impact and how he puts veterans on centre stage, we could argue that Springsteen insists on the idea that the war was a mistake.

However, there is an important difference. While the evaluation of the polls and articles evidences that the American opinion has been changing since the very first year, with Americans nowadays being more indecisive, Springsteen has remained true to his principles. If we compare the answers to the polls in the years when each song was released, we can observe that the endorsement of having sent troops increased by 3%, while the opposition decreased by a factor of 20%. By contrast, in 2014 Springsteen sang against the war with "The Wall" with the same conviction and heartfelt tone that he had used in 1984 with "Born in the USA".

It can also be stated that what Springsteen is more concerned with is the consequences of the war on veterans. He draws from personal experience to criticise how they have been neglected by the government. From the different interviews and articles read, we can see that this perception matches the stance that many veterans have maintained. Bob Muller says *"I just took it on blind faith that my*



*government knew a hell of a lot more than I ever could, and that they must be right. My opinion has changed since then...*<sup>25</sup>. Larry D. Parker showed his regret too.

All in all I believe that the three songs chosen serve as a good source for understanding how the Vietnam War impacted on American society, seen from Springsteen's perspective. They have helped me not only to see how many Americans feel about it, but also to learn about real historical events such as the draft system, or the Seadrift violent incidents.

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<sup>25</sup> *Bob Muller, A Veteran Speaks--Against the War*. (n.d.). The Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities. Retrieved January 6, 2022, from [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/VVAW\\_Muller.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/VVAW_Muller.html)

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## APPENDIX

### Lyrics of Born in the U.S.A. (1984)

[Verse 1]

Born down in a dead man's town  
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground  
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much  
'Til you spend half your life just coverin' up

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A

[Verse 2]

Got in a little hometown jam  
So they put a rifle in my hand  
Sent me off to a foreign land  
To go and kill the yellow man

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A

[Verse 3]

Come back home to the refinery  
Hiring man says, "Son if it was up to me"  
Went down to see my V.A. man  
He said, "Son, don't you understand"

[Verse 4]

I had a brother at Khe Sanh  
Fighting off the Viet Cong  
They're still there, he's all gone  
He had a woman he loved in Saigon  
I got a picture of him in her arms now

[Verse 5]

Down in the shadow of the penitentiary  
Out by the gas fires of the refinery  
I'm ten years burning down the road  
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go

[Chorus]

Born in the U.S.A  
I was born in the U.S.A. now  
Born in the U.S.A  
I'm a long gone Daddy in the U.S.A. now  
Born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A  
Born in the U.S.A  
I'm a cool rockin' Daddy in the U.S.A. now

### **Lyrics of Galveston Bay (1995)**

[Verse]

For fifteen years, Le Bin Son  
Fought side by side with the Americans  
In the mountains and deltas of Vietnam  
In '75, Saigon fell and he left his command  
And brought his family to the promised land

Seabrook, Texas and the small towns in the Gulf of Mexico  
It was delta country and reminded him of home  
He worked as a machinist, put his money away  
And bought a shrimp boat with his cousin  
And together, they harvested Galveston Bay

In the morning before the sun come up, he'd kiss his sleeping daughter  
Steer out through the channel and cast his nets into the water  
Billy Sutter fought with Charlie Company in the highlands of Quang Tri  
He was wounded in the battle of Chu Lai, shipped home in '68  
There he married and worked the gulf fishing grounds  
In a boat that had been his father's  
In the morning, he'd kiss his sleeping son  
And cast his nets into the water  
Billy sat in front of his TV as the South fell  
And the communists rolled into Saigon  
He and his friends watched as the refugees came

Settled on the same streets and worked the coast they'd grew up on  
Soon in the bars around the harbor was talk of America for Americans  
Someone said "You want 'em out, you got to burn 'em out"  
And brought in the Texas Klan

One humid Texas night, there were three shadows on the harbor  
Come to burn the Vietnamese boats into the sea  
In the fire's light, shots rang out  
Two Texans lay dead on the ground  
Le stood with a pistol in his hand  
A jury acquitted him in self-defense

As before the judge he did stand  
But as Le walked down the courthouse steps  
Billy said "My friend, you're a dead man"

One late summer night, Le stood watch along the waterside  
Billy stood in the shadows, his Ka-Bar knife in his hand  
And the moon slipped behind the clouds  
Le lit a cigarette, the bay was still as glass  
As he walked by, Billy stuck his knife into his pocket  
Took a breath and let him pass  
In the early darkness, Billy rose up  
Went into the kitchen for a drink of water  
Kissed his sleeping wife, headed into the channel  
And cast his nets into the water of Galveston Bay

### **Lyrics of The Wall (2014)**

[Verse 1]  
Cigarettes and a bottle of beer  
This poem that I wrote for you  
This black stone and these hard tears  
Are all I got left now of you  
I remember you in your Marine uniform laughing  
Laughing at your ship out party  
I read Robert McNamara says he's sorry

[Verse 2]  
Your high boots and striped T-shirt  
Ah Billy you looked so bad



Yeah, you and your rock-n-roll band  
You were best thing this shit town ever had

Now the men who put you here eat with their families in rich dining halls  
And apology and forgiveness got no place here at all  
At the wall

[Verse 3]

I'm sorry I missed you last year  
I couldn't find no one to drive me  
If your eyes could cut through that black stone  
Tell me would they recognize me?  
For the living time it must be served, the day goes on  
Cigarettes and a bottle of beer  
Skin on black stone

[Verse 4]

On the ground dog tags and wreaths of flowers  
With ribbons red as the blood  
Red as the blood you spilled in the Central Highlands mud  
Limousines rush down Pennsylvania Avenue  
Rustling the leaves as they fall  
And apology and forgiveness got no place here at all  
Here at the wall