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## Bob Dylan at the March on Washington: Prophet of the Bourgeoisie

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### ABSTRACT

Bob Dylan's performance at the 1963 March on Washington is often interpreted as reflective of the same kind of commitment to social justice manifested by other leading participants at the March. However, I argue that whereas other leading participants at the March tended to organize their appeals around the expectation of a "militant progressivism" fully committed to fighting injustice, Dylan's role at the March is distinct because it addresses the standpoint of the "bourgeois progressive" who is only partially committed to rectifying injustice. Rather than satirize or simply reject the bourgeois progressive, Dylan calls for bourgeois self-awareness and, concomitantly, anti-triumphalism.

### KEYWORDS

Bob Dylan; March on Washington; bourgeois / bourgeoisie; liberal democracy; justice; Martin Luther King

In describing Bob Dylan in his role at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom as a prophet of the bourgeoisie I do not mean to say that he is a defender of capitalism over and against socialism or that he is a voice of reaction over and against social progressivism, but rather that the three songs of his performed at the March address much more the perspective of the *bourgeois progressive* (who is only partially committed to rectifying injustice and whose relative privilege stems in part from the persistence of injustice) than the perspective of the *militant progressive* (who is fully committed to the fight against injustice) or the *victim* (who is primarily a sufferer of injustice and who may or may not also be a militant). Social justice movements in a liberal-democratic society, including and especially the American civil rights movement, depend on bringing together all three constituencies (see King, "Trumpet of Conscience" 640–47), but this does not mean that the ethical responsibilities are identical for each. In particular, the bourgeois progressive is a singularly ambiguous figure, at once a benefactor and opposer of unfairness and oppression – and, likewise, at once taking *some* action to rectify social injustice but at the same time doing substantially less than could or ought to be done. Dylan's songs at the March address this figure and help bring it to self-consciousness.

In defining the bourgeois progressive in terms of a partially complicit relationship to injustice, I intend not to undermine a more traditional definition of the bourgeois as a morally ambiguous socioeconomic category – i.e., as someone who, though formally committed to free and equal citizenship, nonetheless lives off of capital while others

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must rely entirely on their labor; employs the labor of others but does not necessarily sell his or her own labor; holds an economic privilege that is either not fully merited or unfairly allowed to generate extra-economic advantages (such as in political and educational opportunity) within a liberal democracy; and thus, in general, is someone who prospers within and from an insufficiently just liberal-democratic order<sup>1</sup> – but rather to address this socioeconomic category in the moments of its political activism. After all, critics of the bourgeois are too quick when they imagine that such individuals, as such, have no interest in progressive politics.<sup>2</sup> It is truer to note, with Marx, that bourgeois society is simultaneously progressive in its anti-feudal impact yet also profoundly defective in its failure to bring about a more genuinely emancipatory condition of freedom and equality for all. The bourgeois progressive embodies this double movement at the characterological level, at once committed to eradicating injustice and yet at the same time, due to the non-militancy of this commitment and the position of comfort and privilege enjoyed within and from an insufficiently just liberal-democratic society, complicit with injustice as well. Neither primarily a victim of an unjust liberal-democratic order (but rather someone who has primarily prospered within it), nor someone who is consistently demanding and persistent in seeking to rectify injustice, the bourgeois progressive favors emancipatory change, but also values his or her own individual security, comfort, and advantage in such a fashion that this commitment to change is still watered-down and ambiguous.

One way to address the ambiguities of bourgeois progressivism is simply to reject the bourgeois progressive as hypocritical or bankrupt in the name of the morally superior perspective of the militant activist who is unambiguously committed to fighting against the economic injustice, racism, and militarism that persists within liberal democracies. Within the world of 1960s protest music, something like this approach is suggested in Phil Ochs's ironic 1966 song, "Love me, I'm a Liberal." Dylan is a prophet of the bourgeoisie, and not simply its critic, because what he most calls for – as I shall demonstrate in analysis of his contribution to the March – is not the negation of the bourgeois approach to social justice but *honesty* from the bourgeois about the nature of their social activism and the liberal-democratic societies they inhabit.

In a context of gross and widespread injustice, mere honesty from the bourgeois progressive might seem like too tepid of a goal, but for three different reasons bringing the bourgeois progressive to a state of self-awareness is in fact meaningful. First, insofar as we lack today Marx's confidence in the ultimate transcendence of bourgeois society – insofar as bourgeois culture, politics, and economics remain hegemonic in the West – then the bourgeois progressive, willing to make only partial efforts to achieve incremental social transformation, will continue to be, however imperfect, a vital contributor to social change and, thus, someone whose self-awareness matters. Second, the bourgeois are notoriously mendacious, in denial not only about the divergence between mere juridical equality and a more genuine free and equal citizenship but also about their own status as bourgeois. If Lukács is correct that bourgeois denial and self-deception regarding their status as bourgeois is a condition for the very functioning of bourgeois society (66), then honest self-awareness would itself be a step, however modest, toward more emancipatory social change. This leads to the third point: self-aware bourgeois progressives are better able to participate in social justice movements. Even if they fail to do all they might to

eradicate injustice, they can at least attain a more minimal standard of *decency* – the decency of avoiding triumphal feelings of exultance too incongruous with the persistence of unjust suffering in the world; the decency of remaining profoundly dissatisfied in the face of the world and thus passively open to the changes being advocated by the totally committed; the decency of not imagining any collective social movement could absolve one’s personal responsibility to strengthen what remains within one’s immediate surroundings; and, finally, the decency to admit that, in failing to sufficiently execute this responsibility, one is not fully good. In other words, a self-aware bourgeois progressive is more likely to defer to the moral leadership of the more committed militant – to, in Dylan’s words, “get out of the new [road] if you can’t lend your hand” (“The Times They Are A-Changin’,” *Lyrics* 91). In short, bourgeois progressives who understand themselves as such do not let moments of relative success – when some progress is achieved – turn into a triumphal complacency about themselves, about the liberal-democratic order, or about some alleged providential force working on the side of justice. Such ideas may be appropriate and even necessary for militant progressives and victims of injustice, but they become obnoxious, false, and counter-productive when voiced by bourgeois progressives.

It is because Dylan’s songs at the March cultivate this honesty and its concomitant benefits that I describe him as a prophet of the bourgeoisie. The point is not simply that Dylan represents the standpoint of a bourgeois progressive, both in his socioeconomic status as a wealthy individual only haphazardly committed to fighting injustice and in so many of his lyrics and public commentary which honestly admit his unwillingness to devote himself fully to social activism.<sup>3</sup> Just as much, what I mean to emphasize is that in his role at perhaps the single-most significant social justice event of his lifetime, Dylan’s three songs contain as their primary political function not the call to militancy and the total castigation of an unjust society, but the more modest though still deeply relevant function of inculcating honest self-awareness from bourgeois progressives about their own nature and that of the capitalist liberal-democratic regimes whose values they, more than anyone else, embody.

Elsewhere, especially in the years immediately following the March, Dylan sometimes challenges protest movements and leftist politics themselves, announcing a kind of turning away from the political in the name of individual self-reliance.<sup>4</sup> While this gesture is itself marked by an uncommonly self-conscious and honest bourgeois posture, since it admits itself to be abandoning a full-fledged social responsibility, what is remarkable about Dylan’s contribution to the March on Washington is that it suggests what a *politically engaged* bourgeois consciousness might look like when it is disciplined by a self-awareness of the bourgeois’ own limited commitment to justice and the parallel limitation of the liberal-democratic regime itself.

### **Dylan, King, and the Question of Hopefulness**

Mary Travers, one of the singers of the group Peter, Paul, and Mary, who sang two songs at the March on Washington, later reflected that in looking out at the approximately 250,000 people who attended the March, she had a moment of recognition: “I started to sing, and I had an epiphany, looking out at this quarter of a million people. . .and I truly believed it was possible that human beings could join together to make a positive social change.” The song

she was singing was Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." Her fellow group member Paul Stookey similarly reflected how listening to the words of the song they were playing before the amassed crowd made vivid a sense of social and political achievement: "And then all of a sudden the lyrics are coming out, you know, 'and how many years must people exist before they can be free,' and you're thinking – Wow! This is it, this is the integration of everything we sing and feel strongly at the moment" (Travers and Stookey).

Travers and Stookey thus interpret the March in a spirit of triumphal hopefulness. Such hopefulness, and the triumph it represents, has at least three elements. On the level of political mechanisms, Travers and Stookey's reactions reflect both an abstract faith in the capacity of collective action to make a positive difference in the world and a concrete belief that the protest movement before their eyes was bringing about "positive social change." On the personal level, their reflections indicate that they consider themselves as fully part of this solidaristic effort to achieve social justice. And with respect to the all-important question of whether justice could ultimately be achieved in America, Travers and Stookey signal that the March betokened for them the possibility of the full realization of social justice (or "the integration of everything we sing and feel strongly about"), if not in 1963 then at least in a future moment even more perfected by progressive collective action. Hence, their exultant feelings of "epiphany" and "Wow! This is it."

Such triumphal hopefulness fits easily within the usual way the March has been celebrated. Martin Luther King Jr.'s great speech, which sits at the epicenter of most accounts of the March, itself provided a message that was hopeful in the same three ways suggested by Travers' and Stookey's reactions to their own participation. Praising the "marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community" and the March itself as being "the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation," King's address credited the civil rights movement as bringing "my people" to a point where they "stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice." Although aware of a diversity of perspectives within the movement, King in his speech presents himself as a leader with a total commitment to social justice and addresses most directly listeners with a similarly unambiguous devotion ("you [who] have come here out of excessive trials and tribulation...the veterans of creative suffering"). And on the issue of the full realizability of justice, while not denying the severity of the obstacles ahead, King did not waver in his faith in the ultimate achievement of racial and economic justice for all Americans. Stating that "now is the time to make real the promises of democracy," King portrayed America as a country that, though sick, could overcome injustice and fulfill its stated commitment to liberty and equality of for all ("I Have a Dream" 217–19).

Travers and Stookey, in singing "Blowin' in the Wind" at the March on Washington, felt themselves to be communicating the same hopeful message as King, but the words – Dylan's words – tell a different story. Indeed, what is remarkable about "Blowin' in the Wind," in addition to two other songs Dylan himself sang at the March, is that it so clearly resists and criticizes a spirit of triumphal hopefulness. King's speech imagines a realizable future, in which we can say, as in his address' last lines, "*Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are Free at Last.*" Dylan's short song, by contrast, is full of questions (nine to be exact), not answers – all having to do with the central question of why it is that so many of us do not do the things we know to be just. And while a single,

repeated answer is given to these questions, it is an answer that is no answer, the enigmatic answer that “the answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

To frame the matter more precisely, “Blowin’ in the Wind” leaves untouched only the first of the three elements of the triumphal hopefulness expressed by Travers and Stookey in their reminiscences and expressed by King in his majestic speech: the idea that political action could effect meaningful social change and that, specifically, black people in America might overcome their oppression through a successful political movement. Lyrics in the song – especially two of its questions – did after all harmonize with these core aspirations and were experienced as such by participants at the March:

How many roads must a man walk down / Before you call him a man?

...

Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist /  
Before they're allowed to be free? (*Lyrics* 53)

But “Blowin’ in the Wind” refuses to let the possibility of a specific political success (the achievement of some civil rights for African-Americans) become the basis for the other two elements of triumphal hopefulness: the good conscience of being self-consciously solidaristic with a just cause and the faith that the *full* realization of justice (free and equal citizenship for *all*) might itself be accomplished within a liberal democracy.

With regard to the first of these critical gestures, Dylan raises the uncomfortable question of just how much self-described activists and progressives fully desire the change that they say they seek. Dylan’s song challenges his listeners to question how committed they are to the cause of justice:

How many times must a man look up

Before he can see the sky?

Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have

Before he can hear people cry? (*Lyrics* 53)

Sung before amassed protestors, the polemical target of these lines is not merely those who *oppose* justice and thus represent forces of reaction. These lines are all the more forceful when they identify and interrogate what I am calling “bourgeois progressives,” that is those who *support* justice but do so inconstantly and so imperfectly.

King was himself all too aware that the movement he led brought together different constituencies and that, specifically, the *militancy* he advocated and represented had to cooperate, often unsuccessfully, with other, less steadfastly committed progressive communities, such as white moderates, liberal politicians, church leaders (both black and white), and some middle-class blacks. King defined the militant in terms of totality of commitment – “To be militant merely means to be demanding and to be persistent” (“Conversation” 661) – and he knew that not everyone sympathetic to the cause of social justice would qualify as a militant. But part of King’s spirit of triumphal hopefulness is that his message served to bridge the potential rift between the militant and the non-militant and to avoid shaming non-militants for their failure to act and sacrifice sufficiently.<sup>5</sup> He did this, first of all, because his own totality of commitment – reflected not just in his concrete activism, but the personal risks and sacrifices he endured (jailed 14 times by 1965, arrested 29 times in his life, stabbed once, his home bombed on three

occasions, constantly harassed by death threats, and ultimately assassinated) – inspired many others to become militants themselves (“*Playboy* Interview” 341).<sup>6</sup> He further eroded the boundary between militant and non-militant in conceiving of non-violent mass protest as a political vehicle that could bring together radical activists and more ambivalent young people who, though critical of America, were still “struggling to adapt [themselves] to the prevailing values of our society” (“Trumpet of Conscience” 642). And, perhaps most of all, King softened the divide between militant and non-militant through his frequent use of rhetoric that enabled non-militant listeners to feel themselves as fully committed to the cause. His “I Have a Dream Speech” at the March, for instance, even as it privileges the perspective of the militant, sometimes invites all of his listeners to imagine that they might be militants too. That is, King does not always distinguish the community of those physically assembled before the Lincoln Memorial (“we [who] stand today” in Lincoln’s “symbolic shadow”) from the community of those totally committed to social justice: “we [who] can never be satisfied” until, as the last lines of speech conclude, “we are free at last.” In one passage in particular, King seems to invite all of his listeners to conceive of themselves as militants:

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. (“I Have a Dream” 219).

In contrast, the probing questions of “Blowin’ in the Wind” expose and emphasize the contrast between those who are militants and those who are not:

Yes, ’n’ how many times can a man turn his head  
Pretending he just doesn’t see? (*Lyrics* 53)

Dylan’s song thus explores the limits of the progressive conscience – reminding us that the situation of many progressives – specifically bourgeois ones – is that they are not progressive all the time, that their moments of activism are complemented by other periods, probably much more numerous, of compromise and comfort. The bourgeois progressive represents not any kind of non-militancy (such as that of those who lack any interest in fighting injustice or of those who, not obviously beneficiaries within an unjust system, may lack the resources for such a fight) but rather refers to non-militants who, as relatively prosperous and comfortable members within an insufficiently just society, embody a non-militancy that is primarily the function of their haphazard and imperfect commitment to causes they otherwise know to be just.<sup>7</sup>

So far I have discussed one of the two ways “Blowin’ in the Wind” challenges a spirit of triumphal hopefulness: its exposure of the figure of the bourgeois progressive who, unlike the militant progressive, is not fully committed to the cause of justice. If we turn to the second aspect of Dylan’s critical stance – his questions about whether justice, in the full sense, is even possible – we find another way in which his message addresses the bourgeois: not just exposing certain progressives as bourgeois (in their insufficient concern for justice), but exposing the liberal-democratic regime, so often seen as a morally perfect political ideal, as merely bourgeois (in its inescapable favoring of the economically privileged) and also as having an enduring connection to violence.

The song, for example, does not concern only implicit support for racial equality but takes issue with violence. At least two of its questions speak to the quest for peace:

Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly  
Before they're forever banned?

...

Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died? (*Lyrics* 53)

But is peace – the cessation of inter-state violence, killing, weaponry – a possibility? Perhaps, on the basis of the declining incidence of war (Pinker 189–294), one can look forward to the greater approximation of peace. But compared to overcoming legalized racial discrimination within a particular society, peace is goal about which one can truly doubt whether it can be achieved. And by extension, there are other commitments which may themselves be constitutively out of reach: for example, the long-standing liberal-democratic ambition that one's socioeconomic status has no bearing on one's political voice or educational opportunities seems noble as an ideal to work towards, but nonetheless also something that is not fully realizable so long as there are institutions like private property and the family, as I have elsewhere argued (Green 43–61). Dylan's song, with its recurrent appeal to an "answer" that cannot be implemented but remains in the wind, makes intimations of a justice that is not of this world – and in so doing raises the possibility that living under conditions of less-than-full-justice is part of the human experience itself.

The question of whether it is appropriate to have hope in the ultimate realizability of justice in the world can be evaluated from two different perspectives: whether it is true that justice someday can be achieved and whether, regardless of its truth, it is productive or otherwise beneficial to think that it can be achieved. King's hopefulness stemmed from both sources. He not only evinced an earnest faith in the full realization of justice, whose most memorable, but hardly sole, aspect was his often-expressed remark that the arc of the moral universe tends toward justice ("Facing the Challenge" 141; "Christmas Sermon" 256). King also suggested that this optimistic metaphysical view enabled the militancy he embodied and advocated and thus for this reason, too, independent of its truth, was justified ("Where Do We Go?" 583–84). Dylan's challenge to hopefulness itself operates within these two dimensions, with his songs at the March both questioning whether justice can ever be fully achieved and implicitly cautioning that, at least for bourgeois non-militants, too much hope in the future might generate an inappropriate complacency. King himself was not unaware of this potential latter problem, as he occasionally recognized that hopefulness in the ultimate perfection of society might undermine individual responsibility in the here and now ("Facing the Challenge" 141), but the fact is that this concern was dwarfed by his primary focus on inspiring and maintaining a spirit of militancy for which such hopefulness was, in his view, as practically necessary as it was metaphysically true. But Dylan, who lacks this militancy, sings most poignantly to those not altogether persistent or demanding in the fight against injustice and who actually prosper in the face of injustice. To such people, it becomes important (in a way lacking for the militant) to acknowledge the remoteness if not outright impossibility of full justice as well as the ways in which even a much-reformed liberal-democratic society that had overcome legalized racial discrimination would continue to unfairly advantage



the rich and well-born and other privileged identities. The importance of such sober reflections lies not only in their claim to truth (as they seem at least as persuasive as King's metaphysical optimism), but in their disciplining bourgeois progressives so that, even if they fail to do all they might to eradicate injustice, they can at least attain a more minimal standard of decency by not indulging in the undeserved self-celebration of triumphal hopefulness.

Travers and Stookey, in singing Dylan's words, felt themselves to be militants, when in fact the message of the song they sung was to remind them that they were not militants but only bourgeois progressives. If one cringes at all when one hears Travers and Stookey, ultimately more entertainers than social activists, reflect on their epiphanies while performing at the March on Washington, it is because one recoils at their triumphalism and how it signifies their misidentification of themselves and their role within an unjust society.

### **The Dilemmas of Bourgeois Triumph**

As I have indicated, in defining the bourgeois progressive in terms of a non-militant, partially complicit relationship to injustice, my purpose is not to challenge a more familiar socioeconomic definition of the bourgeois (as the holder of economic privilege and unfair advantages within an insufficiently just liberal-democratic order), but rather to examine the ethical situation of this socioeconomic category in the moments of its political activism. Given this connection, there is relevance in considering what frequently has been one of the sharpest criticisms of the bourgeois, socioeconomically conceived: the bourgeois' profound illusion about herself (her belief that she is not a bourgeois) and her society (her belief that it instantiates free and equal citizenship). As Lukács puts it, "The veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society is indispensable to the bourgeois itself" (66). Barthes goes even further, insisting on the incompatibility of a bourgeois society ever using the name bourgeois in reference to itself: "The flight from the name 'bourgeois' is not therefore an illusory, accidental, secondary, natural or insignificant phenomenon: it is the bourgeois ideology itself, the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature. And this image has a remarkable feature: it is upside down. The status of the bourgeois is particular, historical: man as represented by it is universal, eternal" (141). Such criticisms are relevant not only in their suggestion that simply being aware of oneself as a bourgeois would already be a consequential political act, but in their emphasis that such self-consciousness likely proceeds by overcoming comforting, self-congratulating illusions.

There are no doubt many potential illusions that might be unmasked within a bourgeois society, but in the context I examine here – the bourgeois in her moments of dedication to social justice – the illusion most clearly involved concerns the bourgeois commitment to freedom. The bourgeois after all is, or always can be, a progressive being who can work to make his surrounding world freer, healthier, and more vibrant. Bourgeois society so often came into being in the overthrow of feudal societies that did not recognize, even as bare principles, notions of freedom and equality. The anti-feudal, liberal-democratic state, which is the bourgeois system of government par excellence, affords basic liberties to its citizens, in a manner unprecedented in political history. As

a progressive being, the bourgeois seeks to further the reach and meaning of these liberties, opposing gross injustices like racial and gender discrimination, promoting liberal democracy in areas of the world where it does not exist, and in her own liberal-democratic society working to diminish the arbitrary impact of socioeconomic status on civic opportunities and life prospects.

But bourgeois freedom is never complete. And the possibility of conflating the real particular that is achieved with the imaginary universal that is not is thus always a risk for the bourgeois. Ending gross oppression is not the same as introducing a robust liberal-democratic order. Even a so-called well-ordered liberal-democratic state will not be able to fully realize the conditions of free and equal citizenship (e.g., social class will continue to impact politics and education) (see Green 43–61, 84–91). And furthermore, there is a kind of freedom which exceeds the principles of free and equal citizenship – not the freedom to compete for opportunities on fair terms, but the freedom from having to compete at all: the freedom from obligatory work. Dylan often speaks of this kind of freedom, which exists within but also beyond the institutions of bourgeois liberal democracy, as when he indicts a category of persons who may be legal citizens in a prosperous liberal-democracy but suffer from envy in the knowledge that they are not fully free:

For them that must obey authority  
 That they do not respect in any degree  
 Who despise their jobs, their destinies  
 Speak jealously of them that are free  
 Cultivate their flowers to be  
 Nothing more than something  
 They invest in.  
 (“It’s Alright, Ma [I’m Only Bleeding],” *Lyrics* 177; also see 143, 369)

To live without labor is the ultimate form of bourgeois comfort, even if it remains, for most bourgeois, just an aspiration or something they will only very partially experience. Nonetheless that only a few will enjoy this freedom reminds us, along with the other factors, that there is no straightforward or complete accomplishment of freedom in the bourgeois liberal-democratic world.

The bourgeois progressive, then, when she is honest, seeks freedom, but understands that not everyone can be equally free. Yet it is precisely in moments of triumphant transformation, when genuine success has been achieved, that the subtlety of the authentic bourgeois standpoint becomes difficult to maintain. In such moments, the bourgeois who supports a just cause is prone to forget that she is after all a bourgeois, not a universal being. Much like Fukuyama, who on the eve of the West’s defeat of the inferior Communist societies in Eastern Europe could falsely imagine liberal democracy as a perfect political system representing nothing less than the end of history, so are all bourgeois, in their successful support of just causes, at risk of going overboard and falling into a self-satisfaction that is as obnoxious as it is undeserved. The bourgeois thus struggles about the proper way to be triumphant. To deny bourgeois progressivism any expression of satisfaction in its victories would be unfair to its achievements. But to exaggerate these achievements is offensive not just in its bravado but in its fundamental dishonesty about the profound limits to the kind of freedom that is possible within a bourgeois, liberal-democratic order. Most of all, such exaggerations – such excessive and inappropriate self-

regard – are counterproductive when they instill a new complacency that erodes further progressive commitments. In our time, Žižek (2013) seems to have had his finger on this concern when, in addressing protestors in Zuccotti Park in New York City at the Occupy Wall Street Movement, his chief advice was, “Don’t fall in love with yourselves. . . . Carnivals come cheap.”

One of the two songs Dylan himself performed at the March on Washington, “When the Ship Comes In,” speaks insightfully to the issue of bourgeois triumph, for it concerns both triumph and its limits. This was a fitting theme for the occasion since the March was both an instrument in the pursuit of progress and a celebration of recent and anticipated successes in the civil rights movement. In a sense, the very gathering was itself a success since it manifested, in its peaceful magnitude, the growing potency of the commitment to progressive change in the United States. King’s famous speech, after all, begins by referring to the March as nothing less than “what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation” (“I Have a Dream” 217).

That the central theme of the song is triumph – success and prosperity – is indicated by the key idiomatic metaphor of a ship coming to harbor and, with it, the profitable realization of a commercial venture. One need not be on the ship that comes in. The merchant Antonio, in *The Merchant of Venice*, waits expectantly on shore for “my ships” (Shakespeare, 1.3.177). And in the nineteenth century, the land-bound wives of sailors at sea, who had purchased goods on credit from local tradesmen, promised to repay what they owed when their “ships came in” – that is, when their husbands returned with money.

At the same time, Dylan also employs the metaphor in a secondary way, referring to the ship of state that has overcome unjust enemies (and “the chains of the sea”) and, now landing on shore, has the potential to start anew. Indeed, for the American context in which Dylan was singing, such a ship was not merely metaphorical, but quite literal, since the country was founded by European colonists who made the sea voyage over the Atlantic – sometimes with commercial interests foremost in mind, other times in pursuit of a new and better world, and perhaps usually with some mix of the two. One of the prophetic documents of the American experience – John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” – is supposed to have been preached aboard the *Arbella* as it made its way from England to Salem in 1630, effectively founding the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. After delineating the principles of justice according to which the new colony should be organized, Winthrop’s sermon is most famous for its exhortation to his fellow Puritans to treat their nascent society as a beacon to the world: “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us” (90–91). Dylan seems to repeat these words in the fifth verse of “When the Ship Comes In,” which imagines the actual landing of the ship and the disembarkation:

Then the sands will roll  
 Out a carpet of gold  
 For your weary toes to be a-touchin’  
 And the ship’s wise men  
 Will remind you once again  
 That the whole wide world is watchin.’ (*Lyrics* 100)

There are, then, two logics in the song: triumph and justice. How are they to be related? The all-too-easy, self-congratulating linkage – which appeals to the bourgeois

progressive when he is complacent and unreflective about his bourgeois nature – is to think that the triumph is the construction of a just society. This was Winthrop’s vision in his sermon, which outlines the way in which the new colony might abide by the “two rules whereby we are to walk one towards another: Justice and Mercy” and also abide by “the Law of Nature and the Law of Grace.” Winthrop calls on his fellow colonists to embody the highest form of moral rectitude and follow the instruction of the Hebrew prophet Micah:

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others’ necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. (91)

Clearly, the America that was founded did not live up to Winthrop’s moral vision – and Winthrop was also wrong that it needed to abide by this vision in order to survive at all and “avoid shipwreck.” Even as an ideal, though, Winthrop’s conception of justice is likely to be seen wanting, both in its theological aspect and in its too easy acceptance of inequality. The address begins: “God Almighty in His most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission” (90). Winthrop could have attained something resembling bourgeois self-consciousness if he had acknowledged this circumstance as a reason not to expect the nascent political community to fully abide by the dictates of justice, but instead he still thinks a just and pious republic is possible in spite of these profound socioeconomic divisions. The point, though, is not to indict Winthrop per se, but any bourgeois society, grounded on private property and the family, that fails to see how these institutions infect and inhibit the full realization of political justice.

The subtlety of Dylan’s song – which makes it an admirable expression of a bourgeois progressivism that is honest to itself about its real triumphs but also real limits – is that it does not collapse triumph and justice, but recognizes a triumph that is something less. The ecstasy of beating back enemies (of overcoming some condition of gross oppression) is not allowed to uncritically become the positive achievement of a full-fledged good society. If there is a kind of moral purity, it is reserved for the negative and finite experience of *liberation*, as distinguished from the ongoing and imperfect effort to achieve concrete free and equal citizenship in a specific political community:

And the words that are used  
For to get the ship confused  
Will not be understood as they’re spoken.  
For the chains of the sea  
Will have busted in the night  
And will be buried at the bottom of the ocean.  
A song will lift  
As the mainsail shifts  
And the boat drifts on to the shoreline.  
And the sun will respect

Every face on the deck  
The hour that the ship comes in. (*Lyrics 100*)

The greatest attainment of equal respect is afforded to the sailors still on board the ship, before it has landed and the new society is begun. It is the equality of being partners in a specific effort at liberation, which as such is momentary and finite – a revolutionary changing of the guard which is not itself instantiated in a new constitutional structure. It is fitting, too, that the equality comes from a non-human source (the sun), suggesting that when humans try themselves to be the source of each other's mutual recognition there will be problems and distortion. These two verses immediately precede the one I have already cited and which, now in context, appears in an even more ambiguous hue:

Then the sands will roll  
Out a carpet of gold  
For your weary toes to be a-touchin'.  
And the ship's wise men  
Will remind you once again  
That the whole wide world is watchin'. (*Lyrics 100*)

As much as these lines speak to the responsibility of a people, in the condition of their post-liberation, to make good on its promises and be a beacon for the rest of the world, they also suggest that any particular constitutionalization of liberty into a governmental and socioeconomic structure will be something less equal than the ephemeral experience of liberation itself. Both the image of a "carpet of gold" and the figure of "wise men" imply the return of socioeconomic inequality (goods to compete over on the basis of a "merit" that may always have at least a somewhat dubious quality about it). This is the only verse where the pronoun "you" is used, with the hypothetical listener directly addressed, and it is significant that this "you" is not allowed to stand for everyone, but is immediately distinguished from the "wise men" doing the reminding (and no doubt leading, ruling, etc.).

The one place where the collective "we" is used without differentiation is the final two verses, which emphasize not the new society that we will have built (for in fact this society will divide us from ourselves) but the old society that we have come to collectively oppose:

Oh the foes will rise  
With the sleep still in their eyes  
And they'll jerk from their beds and think they're dreamin'.  
But they'll pinch themselves and squeal  
And know that it's for real  
The hour when the ship comes in.  
Then they'll raise their hands  
Sayin' we'll meet all your demands  
But we'll shout from the bow your days are numbered.  
And like Pharoah's tribe  
They'll be drowned in the tide  
And like Goliath, they'll be conquered. (*Lyrics 101*)

Whereas Winthrop draws on the biblical legacy to incite his listeners to follow a prophet of justice – Micah – and become a fully good people, Dylan's biblical references are to figures that achieve a monumental liberation but then go on to a life

of ambiguity and transgression, whether the Israelites' continual forgetting of God and regression to idolatry in the years after their escape from bondage in Egypt or David's seduction of Bathsheba and killing of her husband Uriah later in his life following his victory over Goliath.

That the triumph will be short-lasting is emphasized by the fact that the song does not celebrate the ship coming in tout court, but the *hour* that the ship comes in. This temporal constraint, which occurs in each of the four instances in which the song's title is sung, indicates a victory that consists only in the overcoming of enemies and in the promise of newness itself (when "the morning will be breaking"). Nowhere is this constraint more starkly and ominously presented than in the song's first verse:

Oh the time will come up  
When the winds will stop  
And the breeze will cease to be breathin'.  
Like the stillness in the wind  
'Fore the hurricane begins  
The hour when the ship comes in. (*Lyrics* 100)

If Winthrop's prophecy is how to avoid once and for all the shipwreck of political disorder and injustice, the victory Dylan foretells comes both after an oppressive past that has been escaped *and before* a future – when "the hurricane begins"<sup>8</sup> – in which, presumably, other disorders will reappear (perhaps of the kind Winthrop himself identifies but does not problematize: "the condition of mankind [so that] in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission"). The point is not to see the earlier injustice as fully equivalent with the later ones, but to recognize that progress from worse to better still leaves a lack – powerful elements of injustice, unfairness, and suffering that limit the progressive achievement being accomplished and thus make any excessive triumphalization of it repugnant to bourgeois progressives in moments of honesty and self-consciousness.

### **The Possibilities and Limits of Bourgeois Political Action**

The other song Dylan performed at the March on Washington, "Only a Pawn in Their Game," was perhaps most topical for the occasion, since it was about the recent assassination of Medgar Evers, a civil rights activist and field secretary for the NAACP in Mississippi. On 12 June 1963, the morning after President Kennedy had made a television address in which he described civil rights as "a moral issue" and pledged support for new civil rights legislation (what would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964), Evers was gunned down by Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the white supremacist White Citizens' Council and the Ku Klux Klan.

The surprising refrain of the song, which repeats four times, is that Beckwith "can't be blamed" – or similarly that "it ain't him to blame" – because he is only "a pawn in their game": a patsy manipulated by richer and more powerful beneficiaries of a broader social system that is economically and racially unjust. Crucial to Dylan's approach is that Beckwith is never named in the song. In redirecting moral outrage away from the

killer himself and towards the institutional sources of racial hate, Dylan hardly absolves Beckwith but rather condemns him in a different way: as someone who, in spite of the seeming significance of his deed, does not even deserve to be remembered as an actor because his motivations are so clearly manufactured by larger power interests that are at odds with his own well-being. The crushing last verse concludes with Dylan prophesizing the anonymity Beckwith will suffer for being a mere tool of corrupt power:

Today, Medgar Evers was buried from the bullet he caught.  
They lowered him down as a king.  
But when the shadowy sun sets on the one  
That fired the gun  
He'll see by his grave  
On the stone that remains  
Carved next to his name  
His epitaph plain:  
Only a pawn in their game. (*Lyrics 98*)

And so Dylan only further condemns Beckwith in claiming not to blame him. At the same time, the dominant message of “Only a Pawn in Their Game” is the extension of blame to forces and individuals whose complicity in the killing of Evers would be concealed by a wrongly microscopic focus on the single person shooting the gun. Dylan singles out Southern politicians:

A South politician preaches to the poor white man,  
“You got more than the blacks, don't complain.  
You're better than them, you been born with white skin,” they explain.  
And the Negro's name  
Is used it is plain  
For the politician's gain  
As he rises to fame  
And the poor white remains  
On the caboose of the train  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game. (*Lyrics 97*)

A racist culture does serve some economic interests beyond those at the top, but the poor and impoverished – whose interests are not being served – are tricked and manipulated, through indoctrination into racial hatred, so that they cannot perceive the fact of their economic exploitation:

The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the governors get paid,  
And the marshals and cops get the same,  
But the poor white man's used in the hands of them all like a tool.  
He's taught in his school  
From the start by the rule  
That the laws are with him  
To protect his white skin  
To keep up his hate  
So he never thinks straight  
'Bout the shape that he's in  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game. (*Lyrics 97*)

There are varying degrees of economic inequality in any society, of course. What makes “the poor white man” so susceptible to perpetuating a system of racial hatred at odds with an actual furthering of his economic and political interests is that he is not merely poor, but often impoverished: destitute and disadvantaged to such a degree that it damages his humanity and, in particular, his mind’s ability to think clearly for itself:

From the poverty shacks, he looks from the cracks to the tracks,  
 And the hoofbeats pound in his brain.  
 And he’s taught how to walk in a pack  
 Shoot in the back  
 With his fist in a clinch  
 To hang and to lynch  
 To hide ’neath the hood  
 To kill with no pain  
 Like a dog on a chain  
 He ain’t got no name  
 But it ain’t him to blame  
 He’s only a pawn in their game. (*Lyrics* 98)

As a descriptive matter, such reflections on the interpenetration of economic class and racism are, of course, already familiar to historians who have long understood how racism strengthened inter-class solidarity among American whites and, more recently, to contemporary scholars of intersectionality attuned to how systems of domination often make use of multiple categories (including race and class) to produce social hierarchies (see Hancock).

But “Only a Pawn in Their Game” is not merely a description. It carries within it the unmistakable pathos of the desire for social change. After all, Dylan sang this song at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which he presumably supported – and he sang it eight weeks earlier, on July 6, when he performed it at a civil rights gathering in Greenwood, Mississippi, just three weeks following Evers’ assassination (and 100 miles from Jackson, Mississippi where Evers was killed).

On the one hand, the political message of the song seems clear. If racial hate is founded on economic injustice – poverty and the severe maldistribution of resources – then these economic problems must be solved if a society can hope to overcome bigotry in its social institutions. Such a message, however, was hardly particular to Dylan. King’s speech at the March, even if it largely looks past the economic element of racial liberation, once refers to “the Negro [who] lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity” (“I Have a Dream” 217); and, of course, poverty would become a primary focus for King in the last years of his life. Even more, other leaders of the March, and civil rights activists more generally, insisted that civil rights could not be achieved without economic justice (see Jones, “Radical History”). At the conclusion of the March on Washington, Bayard Rustin, its deputy director, read aloud eight demands that had emerged from the March’s proceedings and that he – along with nine other leaders – would deliver to President Kennedy. Rustin referred to them as “the demands of this revolution.” Two of these demands pointed to economic justice and the *human dignity* this would bring:

#6: We demand that every person in this nation, black or white, be given training and work with dignity to defeat unemployment and automation.



#7: We demand that there be an increase in the national minimum wage so that men may live in dignity. (qtd. in Opie 120).

Slightly different versions of the March's demands only served to emphasize how much Rustin's sixth demand required. According to an alternate list of 10 demands, the seventh, repeating the key criterion of dignity, called for "a massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers – Negro and white – on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages" ("March on Washington" 460).

If implicitly supporting the kind of economic justice demanded by the protestors, Dylan's song makes its distinct – and distinctly bourgeois – contribution in challenging both the possibility of full-fledged economic justice and the robustness of his listeners' commitment to fighting for it. Even as it makes clear how racial hate feeds off of economic injustice, it describes economic injustice in terms that are not as readily solvable as Rustin and other like-minded protestors suggest. If poverty is not just material but relative, how can it be fully addressed – at least so long as there is private property and the family? Whereas Rustin imagines a threshold level of material well-being past which all "men may live in dignity," Dylan's metaphor of the "poor white [who] remains on the caboose of the train" envisions social hierarchy – and the indignity and indignation generated by it – as inescapable.<sup>9</sup> Further, as the Marchers realized, the economic policies they demanded were "massive" – amounting to nothing less than the ambition "to defeat unemployment." Has any society achieved such a goal? Even those with ample provisions for the unemployed can hardly be said to have placed all of their citizens in "meaningful and dignified jobs." If racial hate stems in part from an economic injustice that has never yet been – and might not ever be – satisfactorily addressed, then making progressive change becomes something more modest, imperfect, and always potentially frustrating and disappointing.

Of course, the problem is not just the world but the people in it. Not everyone – certainly not all progressives – want to do the things that would need to happen in order to bring about even the non-revolutionary but still massive changes to the economic system, such that there would be greater economic equality, no destitution, and thus only relative (but not absolute) poverty? I have labeled an incomplete, haphazard, partially complicit dedication to fighting injustice as a bourgeois, rather than militant, form of progressivism. If the customary rhetoric of the March served to elide the figure of the bourgeois – either by directing itself to militants or, what is almost the same thing, allowing bourgeois protestors to imagine themselves as fully allied with militants – the force and originality of "Only a Pawn in Their Game" consist, not just in its not naming Beckwith, but also in its not naming a militant perspective with which the bourgeois listener might easily (and falsely) identify. Consider how none of the four main characters in the song is someone with whom the bourgeois listener, in the moment of her protest, could expect to be:

*Pawns:* People like Beckwith who are both oppressed by an unjust society and themselves commit gross injustices to perpetuate the functioning of that society.

*Knights:* Keeping with terms employed by white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and perhaps the White Citizens' Council, both of which Beckwith was a member, Beckwith might have understood himself as a – "knight."<sup>10</sup> Yet the force of Dylan's song is to tell Beckwith, you think you're a knight, but you're only a pawn.

*Kings:* People like Medgar Evers who make the ultimate sacrifice for justice. At Evers' funeral, Dylan says "They lowered him down as a king." In so labeling Evers, Dylan emphasizes the extraordinary quality of militancy and, thus, its difference from more common forms of progressivism.

*Them:* That is, the "they" whose game it is: those who callously perpetuate an unjust society.

Dylan thus describes the main players of the battle for social justice in America in terms that exclude the bourgeois progressive. Most significantly, the bourgeois is not a king, because, as bourgeois, she will not go all the way, will not make the ultimate sacrifice, either in the sense of sacrificing her literal life for justice or more figuratively in the sense of sacrificing the time, energy, and resources, in the manner of a militant, which would be needed to instill her with the sense that she is sufficiently contributing to the fight against the racial and economic injustice in her midst. Of course, seen differently, this non-identification of the bourgeois is itself an identification since the bourgeois is precisely someone who ought not see himself as a major player in the fight for social justice.

The authentic bourgeois force of "Only a Pawn in Their Game" can be seen in comparison to a seemingly similar song Dylan wrote the year before in 1962, "The Death of Emmett Till," about the murder of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old African-American teenager from Chicago, lynched in Mississippi in 1955 after allegedly flirting with a white woman there. But in this case, Dylan quickly dismissed his song as "bullshit" (qtd. in Marqusee 48). The last two stanzas are likely what Dylan found problematic – and in any case represent a perspective of bourgeois progressivism that has fallen into self-congratulatory illusion and self-deception:

If you can't speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that's so unjust,  
Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt, your mind is filled with dust.  
Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood  
it must refuse to flow,  
For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low!  
This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man  
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan.  
But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give,  
We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live. (*Lyrics* 20)

Despite concerning the same topic of racial injustice as "Only a Pawn in Their Game," this song expresses an entirely different mindset, much more in keeping with the prevailing mentality of the participants of the March on Washington in its failure to differentiate the bourgeois and militant forms of progressivism. Yes, what happened to Till is an awful crime. It need not happen. But Dylan locates himself here in an unambiguous place of righteous indignation. Most of all, he holds out the solution: "But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give / We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live." However, giving all that one can is precisely what the bourgeois progressive does *not* do. Situated in comparison to "The Death of Emmett Till," one appreciates the freshness of Dylan's angle of analysis in "Only a Pawn in Their Game." In addition to deftly criticizing Beckwith without mentioning him and indicting the broader unjust socioeconomic system Beckwith unwittingly serves, Dylan is no less shrewd in employing metaphors that locate

bourgeois listeners as individuals who will not be doing all they can to stop injustice. Thus, while the song might seem to denigrate only lower-class whites and thus preserve the clear conscience of the prosperous white bourgeois – a trend not uncommon in American culture<sup>11</sup> – in fact Dylan’s words are critical of *both* Beckwith (the white racist) *and* the bourgeois listener (who is denied a position of moral righteousness in the song).

Historians report that when Dylan sang “Only a Pawn in Their Game” at the March on Washington, it was greeted with a “tepid response” and “scattered applause” (Jones, *March* 192). The usual interpretation of this reaction is that the audience did not fully understand the song: that Dylan’s refrain that Beckwith “can’t be blamed” confused them, since the broader critique of the society which produced Beckwith was too complex to digest on first listen. What such an interpretation leaves out is that those who *did* understand the song might themselves have been led to a muted response, not because they didn’t appreciate its message, but because this message – in calling them out as bourgeois individuals, ultimately preferring themselves to others, not fully engaged in the contestation of the “game” of injustice – could not but elicit some element of discomfort.

In conclusion, I turn to what is the most mysterious line in “Only a Pawn in Their Game,” the second line of the opening verse:

A bullet from the back of a bush took Medgar Evers’ blood,  
*A finger fired the trigger to his name.*  
 A handle hid out in the dark  
 A hand set the spark  
 Two eyes took the aim  
 Behind a man’s brain  
 But he can’t be blamed  
 He’s only a pawn in their game. (*Lyrics* 97, emphasis added)

The phrasing is strange, as normally one would say that the trigger fires a gun, not that a trigger is itself fired. Further, what would seem to be the meaning here – that Beckwith shot and killed Evers’ name – makes no sense at all. In a song about who gets to have names, it does not follow that Evers – the person who (unlike Beckwith) is being named, remembered, and celebrated as a “king” – would have his own name destroyed. Thus, I disagree with the usual interpretation of these lines.<sup>12</sup> Although the phrasing is syntactically awkward, a more fitting interpretation would be that Beckwith’s finger (his killing of Evers) made Evers’ name into a trigger (a militant martyr who would inspire hundreds of others to take action against racial injustice). That is, Beckwith’s folly is not simply that he unwittingly served an oppressive social system of which he himself was a victim, but that he did not even succeed in this regard: his evil act had the unintended consequence of making Evers like a king and generating support to bring down Jim Crow.

But the bourgeois too is without a name, an ordinary – if prosperous and comfortable – member of a mass society. Sometimes the bourgeois are “fired up” by the trigger of Evers, King, and other heroes of militancy who have sacrificed themselves for social justice, but other times they are uninspired and do not act. Frederick Douglass understood well that, to achieve justice in a bourgeois society, “it is not light that is needed, but fire” (196). But if the bourgeois were always aflame, he would no longer be bourgeois. The intermittent flicker is all that the bourgeois progressive can muster.

## Who Is the Moral Leader of Our Nation?

At the March on Washington, Martin Luther King was hailed as the “moral leader of our nation.” But for those who are more bourgeois than revolutionary, more haphazard in their activism than steadfast, then perhaps Dylan is no less deserving of the title. The reason to take seriously the bourgeois form of progressivism is not that it is better than the militant variant (for it is clearly worse), but that most of the time it is the much more common approach to combating injustice, yet one that remains hidden by various tendencies (triumphal hopefulness, a conflation of liberation from oppression with the full-fledged achievement of free and equal citizenship, and a too-easy identification with the militant) that threaten an inappropriate complacency towards oneself and towards the nature of a liberal-democratic society. Dylan combats the various forms of self-deception whereby the bourgeois might escape, in the very moments of political activism, an honest self-assessment.

Some criticized Dylan’s participation at the March for drawing attention away from the real activists and leaders of the civil rights movement. The comedian Dick Gregory, who had endured arrests and beatings as a result of his activism in the South, objected, “What was a white boy like Bob Dylan there for? . . . To support the cause? Wonderful – support the cause. March. Stand behind us – but not in front of us” (qtd. in Marqusee 13). While it is true that Dylan did take the stage, his message to privileged bourgeois onlookers ultimately was not that different from Gregory’s.

## Notes

1. On aspects of this socioeconomic definition of the bourgeois, see Heller (6).
2. Thus, I disagree with Berdyaev (11-26).
3. See, e.g., “I can’t help it if I’m lucky” (“Idiot Wind,” *Lyrics* 367); “They say sing while you slave [in collective efforts] and I just get bored,” (“Maggie’s Farm,” *Lyrics* 166); “I know you’re dissatisfied with your position and your place / Don’t you understand it’s not my problem” (“Positively 4th Street,” *Lyrics* 211). Similarly, Dylan was careful to differentiate the comfort he enjoyed from the political persecution and other travails of the earlier generation of folk singers whom he admired. His 1961 encomium to Woody Guthrie, “Song to Woody,” for example, concludes with the admission: “The very last thing that I’d want to do / Is to say I’ve been hittin’ some hard travelin’ too” (*Lyrics* 6). The temptation to interpret Dylan as an anarchist, hostile to all organized political authority, should be resisted because even Dylan’s periods of aggressive withdrawal from political life often are joined with his admission that someone, other than himself, ought to be taking up the social responsibility he is disclaiming. Consider, in this regard, that in an unpublished 1965 audio interview for *Playboy* with Nat Hentoff, Dylan reiterates his general withdrawal from ongoing social movements, but then adds of such political work that “it definitely has to be done,” acknowledging that “people are starving” and “lots of people are in bad trouble” (minutes 12–13, 15–16). Consider, too, the reflection of Dylan’s father, Abe Zimmerman, in the *Duluth News Tribune* in 1963: “My son is a corporation and his public image is strictly an act” (Eldot). Also relevant is the fact that some interpreters have even found a conservative strain in Dylan’s politics (Webb 29-61).
4. Consider Dylan’s controversial remarks at a 13 December 1963 address to the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee: “There’s no black and white, left and right, to me anymore. There’s only up and down, and down is very close to the ground. And I’m trying to go up without thinking about anything trivial, such as politics” (qtd. in Drier).

5. To be sure, sometimes King wondered whether the white moderate was an even greater threat to the civil rights movement than outright racists, but this idea was overshadowed by a much more dominant focus on unifying the moderate and militant, which I discuss in the main text.
6. On his inspiration of others to be militants, consider King's account of meeting young black students, including "stylishly dressed young girls," who say: "Dr. King, I am ready to die if I must" ("Time for Freedom" 161).
7. It should be noted that in emphasizing the material comfort and economic privilege definitive of the bourgeois, I do not mean to reduce the bourgeois identity to a strictly economic category, since the bourgeois' economic privilege might stem from extra-economic sources, such as race and gender. Within the mid-twentieth century American context of the March, for example, it was not uncommon to link the bourgeois also with a white racial privilege stemming from Jim Crow and legalized discrimination. As one musical example of this phenomenon, consider Lead Belly's 1937 song, "Bourgeois Blues," which includes the lines, "Well, me and my wife we were standing upstairs / We heard the white man say 'I don't want no niggers up there' / Lord, in a bourgeois town / Uhm, bourgeois town." This mixing of the economic and the racial was reflected in the agenda of the civil rights movement itself, with the economic dimension receiving only greater attention over the course of the 1960s as King and other civil rights leaders increasingly emphasized the need to combat poverty and address the plight of poor people everywhere. Thus, just as the militant progressive represented by King is demanding and persistent in seeking an end to *both* racial discrimination and economic injustice, so the bourgeois progressive illuminated by Dylan – who lacks this totality of commitment – is ethically ambiguous as the holder of unfair advantages stemming from an unjust economic order and legalized racism. Because the bourgeois progressive is defined in part as someone who has primarily prospered within an insufficiently just liberal democracy, it is unlikely that many blacks in the 1960s could rightly be called bourgeois. How much that situation has changed today is a question that, though vital, exceeds my analysis, which is interested in exploring the idea of the bourgeois progressive as such rather than to define its particular constituency at a specific moment in political time.
8. The occurrence of wind imagery in both "Blowin' in the Wind" and "When the Ship Comes In" is a striking similarity in two of the three Dylan songs performed at the March. Read together, the suggestion might be that a social justice movement, even when successful, is unlikely to prevent both the "hurricanes" of future challenges and the enduring sense that society will have responded inadequately to meet them.
9. On the inevitable inability of any liberal democracy to fully respect the dignity of its citizens, and the indignation this generates, see Green (1-7, 61-66).
10. The documentary about Beckwith and his son is called *The Last White Knight* (2012).
11. On the tendency of wealthier whites to stigmatize "white trash" and thereby deny their own racism, see Love (125-54).
12. See, for example, Karlin who interprets the lines as: "[Evers'] killing is represented as an attack on his name" (23).

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Rider Music; “Only a Pawn in Their Game” © 1963, 1964 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1991, 1992 by Special Rider Music; “The Times They Are A-Changin’” © 1963, 1964 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1991, 1992 by Special Rider Music; “The Death of Emmett Till,” © 1963, 1968 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1991, 1996 by Special Rider Music; “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” © 1965 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music; “Maggie’s Farm” © 1965 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music; “Positively 4th Street” © 1965 by Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music; and “Idiot Wind” © 1974 by Ram’s Horn Music, renewed 2002 by Ram’s Horn Music.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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