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The Twilight's Last Gleaming: Dialogues and Debts in Bob Dylan's "Chimes of Freedom"

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ABSTRACT

Bob Dylan's song "Chimes of Freedom" marks a creative turning point in the evolution of his art. Dylan displays his debts to influential artists from Woody Guthrie to Allen Ginsberg, and he engages dialectically with iconic American artworks including "The New Colossus" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Dylan also works through his grief over the Kennedy assassination and wrestles with his increasingly complicated relationship with the American political Left. "Chimes of Freedom" is at once the high-water mark of Dylan's achievement as a protest singer and his resignation letter as spokesperson for a political movement he had outgrown by 1964.

On 9 June 1964, Bob Dylan recorded fourteen new songs in an all-night studio session. Eleven of them made it onto his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. As the title announces, this album was self-consciously transitional, presenting a different side of his art than the material which had earned him the unwanted title "Voice of His Generation." Nat Hentoff was present at the recording session, and he spoke with the singer-songwriter about his new direction. Dylan insisted, "There aren't any finger-pointing songs in here, either. Those records I've already made, I'll stand behind them; but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard and a lot of it was because I didn't see anybody else doing that kind of thing. Now a lot of people are doing finger-pointing songs. You know—pointing to all the things that are wrong. Me, I don't want to write *for* people anymore. You know—be a spokesman" ("Crackin'" 15–16). In the follow-up to his politically charged third album *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, his fourth album included only one song that might be labeled political: "Chimes of Freedom." However, this was a very different kind of political song than Dylan had ever written. Though sometimes considered an aberration on an album composed chiefly of love songs, "Chimes of Freedom" can best be understood as a love song for liberty, a love song for those denied their due share of freedom, and a love song for those dedicated to righting such wrongs. The song is a product of its times, an anthem for a nation busy being born or busy dying in the turbulent 1960s. But it also reaches back across multiple eras and influences to engage in dialogue with other iconic American works. "Chimes of Freedom" marks the apotheosis of Dylan's protest phase and serves as a harbinger for new directions in his art.

The opening verse lays the foundation for the entire song:

Far between sundown's finish and midnight's broken toll
 We ducked inside the doorway, thunder went crashing
 As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sounds
 Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing
 Flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight
 Flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight
 And for each and every underdog soldier in the night
 And we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing (lines 1–8)

The first-person narrator describes an experience of being trapped in a church doorway waiting out a thunderstorm. With lightning flashing and thunder booming, the cathedral bells begin to toll. These sensations become jumbled together into synesthesia, where bolts are capable of casting shadows upon sounds and chimes don't ring but flash. With each flash, the narrator has visions of various people for whom the bell tolls. In the first verse he sees "warriors whose strength is not to fight" (5), a reference that could be historically specific to the civil rights activists in the Jim Crow South or to the growing anti-Vietnam-War movement but which carefully avoids such specifics so as to be universally, trans-historically applicable. However, lest this song be lumped with his previous antiwar protest songs like "Masters of War," Dylan also includes "each and every underdog soldier" in the litany (7), suggesting that his sympathies lie more with the suffering and less with the precise cause for which each suffers. Later verses extend beyond the political to include a diverse cast like "the outcast, burnin' constantly at stake" in verse two (15), "the mistreated mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute" in verse four (30), and "each unharmed gentle soul misplaced inside a jail" in verse five (37).

The kaleidoscopic imagery has a psychedelic effect, as in this mind bender from the third verse: "Through the mad mystic hammering of the wild ripping hail/The sky cracked its poems in naked wonder" (17–18). In a similar vein we are told in verse four, "In the wild cathedral evening the rain unraveled tales" (25). Those tales leave the listener in a trance by the fifth verse: "Electric light still struck like arrows" as "the hypnotic splattered mist was slowly lifting" (34–35). By 1964 Dylan was expanding his artistic palette, moving beyond the folk and blues repertoire that sustained his early work to begin absorbing and emulating the radical poetic experiments of the Beats¹ and the "systematic derangement of the senses" advocated by the French Symbolists.² Like those artists, Dylan sometimes chemically induced strange visions and altered states of perception. Any honest discussion of his influences in "Chimes of Freedom" must also acknowledge that Dylan was increasingly under the influence of pot and speed. This is in no way to dismiss or belittle his achievements. Rather, it is simply to observe that, like Coleridge, Poe, Rimbaud, Yeats, Huxley, Burroughs, Ginsberg, and countless other artists before him, Dylan sometimes passed through the doors of perception and the smoke rings of his mind in search of creative inspiration.

His finest performance of "Chimes of Freedom," immortalized in Murray Lerner's documentary *The Other Side of the Mirror*, occurred on the giddy final night of the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. At first Dylan wanders around stage laughing and playing with props, before flipping a mental switch and delivering the first two verses. Then after an extended musical interlude (where he seems to be groping to remember the next line),

the words come and he hurdles forward, building momentum all the way to the end—though visibly struggling to fight off the giggles as he brings it all back home. It is an exhilarating performance, made all the more impressive by the fact that a visibly stoned Dylan makes it through a complex song that most singers could not pull off half as well sober. In a 1966 *Playboy* interview he reflected, “I wouldn’t advise anybody to use drugs—certainly not the hard drugs; drugs are medicine. But opium and hash and pot—now, those things aren’t drugs; they just bend your mind a little. I think *everybody’s* mind should be bent once in a while” (Hentoff, “*Playboy*” 108). Dylan’s mind-bending experiments galvanized his art in the mid-Sixties. At its most basic level, “Chimes of Freedom” is his attempt to capture how it feels to be tripping during a thunderstorm.

Dylan is a stoner savant, however, and there is much more to this song than psychedelic novelty. Consider the title and guiding metaphor of “Chimes of Freedom.” Paul Williams observes that “as the Liberty Bell tolled to proclaim American independence, and church bells in general toll to celebrate a wedding or mourn a death or call to the faithful, Dylan experiences each lightning bolt as tolling (or flashing or striking or cracking or firing) *for* someone, specifically for the underdogs, the needy, the modest, the meek of the earth Christ refers to in the Sermon on the Mount” (111–12). The Liberty Bell is at least as famous for being cracked as it is for representing the values of American freedom. Like the Liberty Bell, America’s commitment to its professed ideals of “liberty and justice for all” has been cracked with fault lines ever since its inception. Dylan’s early protest songs were fueled by righteous indignation against these injustices, and he generally left little room for doubt about his target or message. For instance, he ends one of his first topical songs, “The Death of Emmett Till,” with this explicit rallying cry:

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 (25–28)

Earnest, but awfully preachy, no? Dylan’s most sophisticated protest songs appear on *The Times They Are a-Changin’*. In songs like “Only a Pawn in Their Game” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” he points out subtler forms of institutional racism responsible for perpetuating injustices against Medgar Evers, Hattie Carroll, and by extension all African Americans throughout the country’s history. Dylan’s political sympathies may not have altered radically on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, but his artistic approach to his material certainly has. The cracked symbol of the Liberty Bell is implicitly invoked, but Dylan feels no need to name it or to spell out the fractious imperfection embedded within that symbol. “Chimes of Freedom” is no finger-pointing song. Instead of focusing on what he’s against, this song focuses on what he’s for.

The people with whom Dylan expresses solidarity are essentially the same down-but-not-outers Woody Guthrie spent his career rubbing elbows with and defending. Guthrie defined his approach to songwriting this way:

I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing. Because you are too old or too young or too fat or too slim or too ugly or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or poke fun at you on account of your bad luck or

hard travelling. I am out to fight those songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood. I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work. And the songs that I sing are made up for the most part by all sorts of folks just about like you.

One can hear Woody's boxcar cadence chugging through "Chimes of Freedom," especially in the final verse's salute to the downtrodden:

Tolling for the aching whose wounds cannot be nursed
 For the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones and worse
 And for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe
 And we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing (45-48)

"Chimes of Freedom" is Dylan's "This Land Is Your Land" refracted through a prism of Beat poetics and Symbolist thought-dreams. Guthrie never wrote a song quite like "Chimes of Freedom," but he would certainly have recognized and identified with the marginalized and destitute in Dylan's roll call.³

So, too, would the poet-activist Emma Lazarus. In the late nineteenth century, eighty years before Dylan arrived in New York, Lazarus became an outspoken advocate for mistreated Jewish immigrants to America. In 1882 she wrote a book on the subject called *Songs of a Semite*, and the following year she wrote her best known poem, "The New Colossus," a celebration of that great American icon the Statue of Liberty and the promise of protection and opportunity it symbolizes. The closing lines of the poem, written in the voice of Lady Liberty, are inscribed on the statue's plaque:

Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door! (10-14)

Dylan adopts strikingly similar phrasing for his catalogue of exiles in "Chimes of Freedom." His storm imagery may also echo Lazarus's description of Lady Liberty in "The New Colossus":

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. (4-6)

Robert Allen Zimmerman, a.k.a. Bob Dylan, is the grandson of Zigman Zimmerman, a Jewish immigrant who arrived beneath the flame's "imprisoned lightning" at "the golden door" of Ellis Island in 1907 (Gray 740). Dylan himself arrived as a tired and poor exile to New York in 1961. The immigrant dream of America as a sanctuary for the persecuted and a land of opportunity has often been exposed as an illusory pipe dream. But it is a mythical ideal with very personal resonance for the Zimmerman family, a myth that Dylan invokes with unabashed hope in "Chimes of Freedom." It is surely this poignant dimension of the song that led Bruce Springsteen to adopt it as the anthem for his 1988 Amnesty International tour celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴

Dylan's most sustained dialectal engagement in the song is with the most familiar American anthem about its most hallowed symbol of freedom: "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Francis Scott Key. Key was sent as a delegate to negotiate a prisoner exchange with the British during the War of 1812. Pinned down in Baltimore Harbor during British bombardment, Key was inspired to write the poem "The Defence of Fort M'Henry," the first verse of which provides the lyrics for "The Star-Spangled Banner." The words of the national anthem are so familiar to many Americans that they are effectively emptied of content, sung by rote before ball games but rarely considered with any care. For instance, when was the last time—if ever—that you noticed the national anthem does not contain a single declarative statement but is composed entirely of questions? Question #1:

O say can you see by the dawn's early light,
 What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
 Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
 O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming? (1-4)

Translation: "Is it still there? Can you see the American flag still flying? The last we saw, when evening fell, the fort was still withstanding the assault; the British had not yet defeated the Americans in battle and replaced our flag with the Union Jack. Now that the sun is rising, what's our status?" Question #2:

And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
 Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
 O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave,
 O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave? (9-12)

Translation: "It's been a rough night. The fort has been blasted by heavy artillery. But whenever a rocket or bomb blast lit up the sky, we could still see the stars and stripes waving. So tell me now: Is it still there? Are we still a free country with democratic control over our own destiny? Or has the freedom we won a generation ago been lost?"

"The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Chimes of Freedom" are both written from the perspective of an unspecified "we" enduring a night of bright flashes and loud noises while meditating upon the fate of the country and its "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Commentators too easily assume that the "we" in "Chimes of Freedom" is autobiographical, referring to Dylan himself and a companion, possibly girlfriend Suze Rotolo or Joan Baez. Perhaps the initial inspiration for the song did come from an actual experience of getting caught in a thunderstorm. But it would be a mistake to automatically and exclusively equate Dylan's first-person lyrics with autobiography. He frequently assumes the voice of a fictional character in his songs, and that seems to be the case in "Chimes of Freedom." Just as the visions and echoes flashing before the speaker keep changing as the bell tolls, the speaker likewise seems to shift shapes, transformed by epiphanies and morphing into multiple figures "on the unarmed road of flight." Given the epic national sweep of the song, the "we" conjures up any number of manifestations: The "we" could represent runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad, or dustbowl drifters driven out of their homes, or Vietnam draft dodgers fleeing a war they considered unjust—any "We the People" who have had to suffer together through the fear and uncertainty of a dark night in search of freedom,

weathering the tempests of injustice when this country has fallen short of its noblest ideals. At the beginning of the final verse, one might easily imagine that Dylan is channeling the “we” of Francis Scott Key and his compatriots as they discovered that the star-spangled banner was indeed still waving:

Starry-eyed and laughing as I recall when we were caught
 Trapped by no track of hours for they hanged suspended
 As we listened one last time and we watched with one last look
 Spellbound an’ swallowed till the tolling ended (41–44)

Though Dylan never directly references the latest crisis to have shaken the nation, the pall of the John F. Kennedy assassination hangs over “Chimes of Freedom.” In the winter of 1963–64, Dylan wrote several poetic fragments in response to the assassination. One unpublished six-line fragment reads:

the colors of friday were dull
 as cathedral bells were gently burnin’
 strikin’ for the gentle
 strikin’ for the kind
 strikin’ for the crippled ones
 an strikin’ for the blind (quoted in Heylin 177)

The Friday referenced here is undoubtedly 22 November 1963. Etched in the memories of so many Americans who watched the TV coverage of the President’s requiem mass at St. Matthew’s Cathedral, the mourning bells eventually became the central motif of “Chimes of Freedom.” The lines “strikin’ for the gentle/strikin’ for the kind” survived intact in verse three of the final song (21). The words “toll” or “tolling” appear eleven times during the song. The only other words that appear as often are “flash” or “flashing.” This flashing image has disturbing connotations in the context of the Kennedy assassination, conjuring up the gunfire in Dealey Plaza and the Dallas Police Department garage, the newsflash and photo flashes of the media frenzy surrounding the shootings, and the overwhelming surge of chaos, grief, and confusion that spread rapidly over the nation, in the sense of a flash fire or flash flood.

Like most Americans, the 22 year-old Dylan was devastated by Kennedy’s murder and stunned when the accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was gunned down by Jack Ruby on live television two days later. Unlike most Americans, however, Dylan was regarded as the Voice of His Generation and therefore expected to help his followers process their grief and put it into perspective. He struggled mightily, and at first unsuccessfully, with this unwanted burden. The month after the assassination, Dylan was honored with the Tom Paine Award by the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (ECLC) at their annual fundraising Bill of Rights dinner.⁵ By the time Dylan rose to the podium to accept his award, his discomfort level was as high as his blood-alcohol level. He delivered drunken, disjointed, irreverent remarks, including a confession that he could relate personally to Lee Harvey Oswald. It was too much too soon for the ECLC audience, who responded with loud boos. Ten months later, Dylan was still stung by the incident. His long rant on the subject to Nat Hentoff in October 1964 is worth quoting at length:

As soon as I got there, I felt uptight. First of all, the people with me couldn't get in. They looked even funkier than I did, I guess. They weren't dressed right, or something. Inside the ballroom, I really got uptight. I began to drink. I looked down from the platform and saw a bunch of people who had nothing to do with my kind of politics. I looked down and I got scared. They were supposed to be on my side, but I didn't feel any connection with them. Here were these people who'd been all involved with the left in the thirties, and now they were supporting civil-rights drives. That's groovy, but they also had minks and jewels, and it was like they were giving the money out of guilt. I got up to leave, and they followed me and caught me. They told me I had to accept the award. When I got up to make my speech, I couldn't say anything by that time but what was passing through my mind. They'd been talking about Kennedy being killed, and Bill Moore and Medgar Evers and the Buddhist monks in Vietnam being killed. I had to say something about Lee Oswald. I told them I'd read a lot of his feelings in the papers, and I knew he was uptight. Said I'd been uptight, too, so I'd got a lot of his feelings. I saw a lot of myself in Oswald, I said, and I saw in him a lot of the times we're all living in. And, you know, they started booing. They looked at me like I was an animal. They actually thought I was saying it was a good thing Kennedy had been killed. That's how far out they are. I was talking about Oswald. And then I started talking about friends of mine in Harlem—some of them junkies, all of them poor. And I said they need freedom as much as anybody else, and what's anybody doing for *them*? The chairman was kicking my leg under the table, and I told him, "Get out of here." Now, what I was supposed to be was a nice cat. I was supposed to say, "I appreciate your award and I'm a great singer and I'm a great believer in liberals, and you buy my records and I'll support your cause." But I didn't and so I wasn't accepted that night. ("Crackin'" 26-27)

Dylan rebelled against expectations that he should behave politely and accept a payoff for his acquiescence in the form of an award and increased record sales. As anyone familiar with his subsequent career well knows, it was not the last time that he would court the hostility of audiences by refusing to live up to their stifling expectations, nor was it the last time he would be lustily booed on stage. (The wariness with which Dylan greeted the news of his 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature was forged in the smithy of his 1963 Tom Paine Award.) He also refused to be associated with any organization typified by wealth, privilege, and pious rectitude. Instead his thoughts remained with derelicts, criminals, and outsiders: like Oswald, like drug addicts in Harlem, and like his funky friends barred from entering the banquet because of their shabby appearance.

Dylan's perspective on the Tom Paine Award controversy shines a revealing light on "Chimes of Freedom," written only a month after the banquet. So much of the inspiration for that song is drawn from imagery associated with Kennedy's murder, and yet the second half of each verse expresses solidarity with social outcasts very much like the President's accused murderer. In this light, "Chimes of Freedom" comes across as a sequel to "Only a Pawn in Their Game." There Dylan emphasized how the man who killed Medgar Evers was only a pawn in a larger game, the byproduct of white supremacist ideology perpetuated by Southern politicians for their own gain. Similarly, without pointing any fingers or naming the pawns and kings explicitly, "Chimes of Freedom" builds sympathy for individuals driven to desperation because they have been systematically denied understanding, opportunity, justice, and real freedom.

Though Dylan still bristled at the award dinner debacle, he also had enough humility and maturity after the fact to recognize his affinity with the basic principles of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee. Despite his innate revulsion at formal ceremonies and all the trappings of prosperity, Dylan's political principles were perfectly in

sync with the mission of the ECLC. This group's primary purpose was providing legal defense for controversial Bill of Rights cases, and its ultimate mission was to protect the free right to dissent. Ironically, no group would have fought harder to defend Dylan's right to offend them with his speech than the ECLC group who booed him. Dylan understood this. Within a week he sent a long and largely contrite letter in verse to the ECLC membership. He did not exactly apologize for what he had said, but he did admit to saying it very poorly. He also conceded that he now owed a "moral debt" to the organization for ruining its fundraiser. Elaborating on his Oswald comments, he wrote:

when i spoke of Lee Oswald, I was speakin of the times
 I was not speakin of his deed if it was his deed
 the deed speaks for itself
 but I am sick
 so sick
 at hearin "we all share the blame" for every
 church bombing, gun battle, mine disaster,
 poverty explosion, an president killing that comes about
 it is so easy t say "we" an bow our heads together
 I must say "I" alone an bow my head alone
 for it is I alone who is livin my life
 I have beloved companions but they do not
 eat nor sleep for me
 an even they must say "I"
 yes if there's violence in the times then
 there must be violence in me
 I am not a perfect mute
 I hear the thunder an I cant avoid hearin it
 once this is straight between us, it's then an
 only then that we can say "we" an really mean
 it..an go on from there t do something about
 it ("Message")

This response sheds more light on the enigmatic "we" in "Chimes of Freedom." Dylan transitions from his instinctive, if politically incorrect, identification with the desperate outlaw Oswald to broader distinctions between "I" and "we." He insists upon his autonomy as an artist and as a free citizen to speak his mind in his own uncensored voice, no matter the subject or the occasion. He vows to continue giving honest expression to his feelings of outrage, disgust, hope, fear, joy, madness, and violence—personal feelings grounded deeply in his times and culture. He characterizes his compulsion to speak his mind by invoking storm imagery—"I hear the thunder an I cant avoid hearin it"—that looks back to "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall" as surely as it looks forward to "Chimes of Freedom."

Importantly, Dylan does not permanently dismiss the possibility of meaningful collective action. He believes that the "I" and the "we" can coexist peacefully and work together for positive change. However, this can only become possible after the "I" of artistic freedom is recognized and granted unconditional autonomy: "only then can we say 'we' an really mean/it..an go from there t do something about/it." Of course, in practice radical individuality and unified collective action are rarely compatible, as many activist factions of the Sixties learned the hard way. Nevertheless, Dylan does achieve a momentary, tenuous balance in "Chimes of Freedom." He sympathizes

with the disenfranchised “we” while simultaneously retaining his association with the activist “we” whose aim is to acknowledge the suffering of others and do something about it. Do *what* about it, though? The song doesn’t really say. “Chimes of Freedom” doesn’t point the finger of blame at any specific targets, but neither does it point the way toward any tangible solutions. As Michael Gray notes, “‘Chimes of Freedom’ was, for many, uncomfortably close to blurry impressionism rather than activist clarity” (21).

Euphoria eventually wears off, visions fade, pop-up storms pass over—and in the jingle-jangle morning Dylan went following a new tune. In retrospect *Another Side of Bob Dylan* signals the beginning of a major transition in his art and public persona. He was through with politics. More precisely, he was through with subordinating his art to the news of the day, the cause du jour, or the talking-point agendas of “the Movement,” from which he felt increasingly alienated. *Another Side of Bob Dylan* marks a shift in focus toward more personal, introspective songs, but on the whole it also constitutes a break-up letter to the protest movement. The first verse of the first song, “All I Really Want to Do,” sets the theme:

I ain’t lookin’ to compete with you
 Beat or cheat or mistreat you
 Simplify you, classify you
 Deny, defy or crucify you
 All I really want to do
 Is, baby, be friends with you (1–6)

Translation: “I’m finished telling you who to be or what to do, and please show me the same courtesy. I’m nobody’s Messiah, so look elsewhere for your messenger or your martyr.” The theme resounds through to the last song, “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” which begins:

Go away from my window,
 Leave at your own chosen speed
 I’m not the one you want, babe
 I’m not the one you need.
 You say you’re looking for someone
 Who’s never weak but always strong
 To protect you and defend you
 Whether you are right or wrong
 Someone to open each and every door
 But it ain’t me, babe,
 No, no, no, it ain’t me, babe
 It ain’t me you’re lookin’ for
 Babe (1–13)

The “babe” addressed here isn’t the only one who’s been too needy, not the only one who leans too heavily on the singer to solve all her problems—and not the only one Dylan is ready to call it quits with. He is drafting his resignation from the post of Voice of His Generation, a message he would deliver with unequivocal fury on his following albums, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*; *Blonde on Blonde*, punctuated with an exclamation point in his mind-expanding, eardrum-exploding electric rock concerts of 1965 and 1966.

“Chimes of Freedom” marks the end of an era, Dylan’s political swan song written in a new register, though still delivered solo with acoustic guitar and harmonica. He

reaffirms his allegiances with Woody Guthrie's America and for the final time deploys the first-person plural "we" to flash his credentials as troubadour-spokesman for the political Left in America. The song pays off in full his "moral debt" to the ECLC, and it acknowledges his artistic debts to other iconic American tributes to freedom like Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" and Francis Scott Key's "The Star-Spangled Banner." Having paid these debts, however, Dylan closed his account. No sooner had he composed what could pass for a new national anthem than he retired it. According to Clinton Heylin, except for a few performances in the late eighties, Dylan did not sing "Chimes of Freedom" live between Halloween 1964 and the Bill Clinton inauguration in 1993 (180).⁶ The spark was gone. Looking back on those heady times in 2001, Dylan reflected, "To me, music either expresses ideas of liberty, or it's made under the oppression of dictatorship. The only stuff I've heard that has that freedom is traditional Anglo-American music. That's all I know. That's all I've ever known. I was fortunate to come up at a time when the last of it existed. It doesn't exist anymore" Gunderson. Dylan absorbed, reworked, and contributed to that tradition in "Chimes of Freedom." Then he moved on. *Another Side of Bob Dylan* captures lightning in a bottle from 1964, when Bob Dylan could still sing "Chimes of Freedom" with unclouded conviction and his contemporaries could still identify with the "we" in the song: "As we listened one last time and we watched with one last look/Spellbound and swallowed 'til the tolling ended" (43–44).

Notes

1. In the liner notes to his *Biograph* box set, Dylan reflected on his influence from the Beats as far back as his Minneapolis days in 1959–60: "Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti—"Gasoline," "Coney Island of the Mind)". . . .oh man, it was wild—'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness': that said more to me than any of the stuff I'd been raised on" (quoted in Crowe). For an excellent overview of Dylan's relationship with Allen Ginsberg and his influence from the Beats, see Chapter Two of Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (47–84). *Gasoline* is by Gregory Corso. *Coney Island of the Mind* is by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. "I saw the best minds of my generation. . ." is the opening of *Howl*, by Allen Ginsberg.
2. In *Chronicles, Volume One* Dylan recalls being introduced to the work of Arthur Rimbaud by his girlfriend Suze Rotolo: "That was a big deal, too. I came across one of his letters called 'Je est un autre,' which translates into 'I is someone else.' When I read those words the bells went off. It made perfect sense. I wished someone would have mentioned that to me earlier" (288). Rimbaud's bells were still going off when Dylan wrote "Chimes of Freedom."
3. Dylan was inching out of Guthrie's shadow by 1964, but to this day he continues to revere Woody's achievement and be inspired by his mentor's prodigiously eclectic repertoire. In *Chronicles* Dylan marvels at "the phenomenal scope of Woody's songs—the Sacco and Vanzetti ballads, Dust Bowl and children songs, Grand Coulee Dam songs, venereal disease songs, union and workingman ballads, even his rugged heartbreak love ballads" (247).
4. Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band headlined the 1988 Human Rights Now Tour. Other featured artists included Sting, Peter Gabriel, Tracy Chapman, and Youssou N'Dour. Springsteen also released the EP *Chimes of Freedom* containing his cover of Dylan's song. Amnesty International invoked the song again in 2012 to celebrate its golden anniversary, releasing a star-studded four-disc set of new covers packaged as *Chimes of Freedom: The Songs of Bob Dylan—Honoring 50 Years of Amnesty International*.

5. Corliss Lamont was the Chairman of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee. The website devoted to his legacy provides an excellent repository of artifacts related to this incident, including a transcript of Dylan's remarks at the December 13 dinner, Lamont's letter of support afterwards to the membership, and the complete text of "A Message from Bob Dylan" posted 19 December 1963. See <http://www.corliss-lamont.org/dylan.htm>.
6. Presidential inaugurations are always heavy on symbolism, and Clinton scored a major symbolic coup with Dylan's performance. As a great admirer of President Kennedy and self-styled inheritor of the Kennedy legacy, Clinton could not have chosen a more appropriate representative of that generation to sing at his pre-inaugural celebrations. "Chimes of Freedom," whether picked by Dylan or requested by Clinton, was an astute choice to invoke the Kennedy legacy, written as it was in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. Finally, the concert location on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial could not have been more perfect, placing Dylan where Martin Luther King, Jr., stood to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech and returning Dylan to the platform from which he sang during the historic March on Washington.

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