



CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

THE POLITICAL WORLD OF BOB DYLAN

Freedom and Justice, Power and Sin

Jeff Taylor & Chad Israelson



CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

Mainstream political theory has been experiencing an identity crisis for as long as I can remember. From even a cursory glance at the major journals, it still seems preoccupied either with textual exegesis of a conservatively construed canon, fashionable postmodern forms of deconstruction, or the reduction of ideas to the context in which they were formulated and the prejudices of the author. Usually written in esoteric style and intended only for disciplinary experts, political theory has lost both its critical character and its concern for political practice. Behaviorist and positivist political “scientists” tend to view it as a branch of philosophical metaphysics or as akin to literary criticism. They are not completely wrong. There is currently no venue that highlights the practical implications of theory or its connections with the larger world. I was subsequently delighted when Palgrave Macmillan offered me the opportunity of editing *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice*.

When I was a graduate student at the University of California: Berkeley during the 1970s, critical theory was virtually unknown in the United States. The academic mainstream was late in catching up and, when it finally did during the late 1980s, it predictably embraced the more metaphysical and subjectivist trends of critical theory. Traditionalists had little use for an approach in which critique of a position or analysis of an event was predicated on positive ideals and practical political aims. In this vein, like liberalism, socialism was a dirty word and knowledge of its various tendencies and traditions was virtually non-existent. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different. Strident right-wing politicians have openly condemned “critical thinking” particularly as it pertains to cultural pluralism and American history. Such parochial validations of tradition have implications for practical politics. And, if only for this reason, it is necessary to confront them. A new generation of academics is becoming engaged with immanent critique, interdisciplinary work, actual political problems, and more broadly the link between theory and practice. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* offers them a new home for their intellectual labors.

The series introduces new authors, unorthodox themes, critical interpretations of the classics and salient works by older and more established thinkers. Each after his or her fashion will explore the ways in which political theory can enrich our understanding of the arts and social sciences. Criminal justice, psychology, sociology, theatre and a host of other disciplines come into play for a critical political theory. The series also opens new avenues by engaging alternative traditions, animal rights, Islamic politics, mass movements, sovereignty, and the institutional problems of power. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* thus fills an important niche. Innovatively blending tradition and experimentation, this intellectual enterprise with a political intent will, I hope, help reinvigorate what is fast becoming a petrified field of study and perhaps provide a bit of inspiration for future scholars and activists.

STEPHEN ERIC BRONNER

Published by Palgrave Macmillan:

Subterranean Politics and Freud's Legacy: Critical Theory and Society

Amy Buzby

Politics and Theatre in Twentieth-Century Europe: Imagination and Resistance

Margot Morgan

Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Legacy

Edited by Jason Schulman

Hannah Arendt and the Specter of Totalitarianism
Marilyn LaFay

The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm
Kieran Durkin

Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom
Nichole Marie Shippen

The Politics of Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century
Steven Best

The Political World of Bob Dylan: Freedom and Justice, Power and Sin
Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson

The Political World of
Bob Dylan

Freedom and Justice,
Power and Sin

Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson

palgrave
macmillan



THE POLITICAL WORLD OF BOB DYLAN

Copyright © Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson, 2015.

All rights reserved.

Portions of Chapter 4 are adapted from "Bob Dylan and Antithetical Engagement with Culture" by Jeff Taylor, *Pro Rege* 41:4 (June 2013) © Pro Rege (Dordt College), 2013. Used by arrangement with the publisher.

Small portions of Chapter 1 (Anglo-Celtic folk music) and Chapter 7 (agrarianism) are adapted from *Politics on a Human Scale: The American Tradition of Decentralism* © Lexington Books, 2013. Used by arrangement with the publisher.

Dylan concert raps (1979–80) are from *Saved!: The Gospel Speeches of Bob Dylan* © Clinton Heylin, 1987–88, 1990. Used by arrangement with the editor.

Scripture quotations are from Revised Standard Version of the Bible © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All quotations, including lyrics, are for review, study, or critical purposes only.

First published in 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-137-48234-1 ISBN 978-1-137-47747-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137477477

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Taylor, Jeff, 1961– author.

The political world of Bob Dylan : freedom and justice, power and
sin / by Jeff Taylor and Chad Israelson.

pages cm. —(Critical political theory and radical practice)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-349-69431-0

1. Dylan, Bob, 1941—Political and social views. I. Israelson, Chad,
author. II. Title.

ML420.D98T39 2015

782.42164092—dc23

2015001197

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: July 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Chapter 1 Bob Dylan's Roots and Traditional World	1
Chapter 2 Voice of a Generation	43
Chapter 3 Freedom and Justice	93
Chapter 4 Conversion and Culture	127
Chapter 5 Christian Anarchism	151
Chapter 6 Dylan and the Jesus People	173
Chapter 7 Dylanesque Politics in the Real World	201
<i>Notes</i>	235
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	281
<i>Index</i>	289

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

According to Bob Dylan, we live in what his 1989 song calls a “Political World.” He is correct. But what does this mean? And what is Dylan’s relation to this world?

As an artist, a public figure, and a man, Dylan has at once been typical and exceptional. An examination of his songs, interviews, and pronouncements indicates that he defies easy categorization. He is identified as one of the most iconic figures of the 1960s, yet he felt virtually no connection with the decade’s mythos. Dylan was accorded prophetic status while he criticized American society and idealized many of its traditions. Additionally, he has been an unwilling voice of a generation and a willing corporate spokesperson. He has held devout religious convictions while partaking in a libertine lifestyle.

In the 1970s, Dylan sometimes attributed this dualistic quality to being a Gemini. Astrology aside, he shares a trait that many successful politicians possess: the ability to be projected upon by audiences. People see characteristics in Dylan that they want him to embody, whether that belief conforms to reality or not. When Jack Nicholson introduced Dylan for the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 1991 Grammy Awards, the actor said that he searched the dictionary for a word to describe Dylan and all of them applied.

Dylan once sang that everybody wants him to be just like them. He has fought against being defined by outside expectations his whole career. Liberal audiences asserted that Dylan belonged to them. In later years, claims to Dylan’s conservatism have been staked. Jews, Christians, nonsectarian spiritualists, and atheists have all assumed, sometimes simultaneously, that his beliefs and theirs are the same. To borrow a religious term, fans and critics have turned Dylan into a totem. He has become a symbolic representation, a projected image—good or bad, with adulation or antipathy.

On multiple occasions, fans have turned on Dylan, labeling him a traitor and a sellout. This happened in the mid-1960s when he went electric, in the late 1960s during his rural family man retreat to upstate New York, in the late 1970s after his conversion to Christianity, and in the 2000s when he began lending his music and image for commercials. People were confused and reacted as if an interloper had taken the place of the “real” Dylan. Robbie Robertson, a member of the Band and Dylan collaborator, has said, “People have a fictitious past in mind about him.”¹

One of the tasks for anyone writing about Bob Dylan is sifting through the layers erected to keep the world at bay and discerning what is real and what is not. This speaks to the difficulty of understanding Dylan. Dave Kelly, Dylan’s personal assistant in 1979–80, says, “I’m not sure anybody really knows him.”² In Kelly’s opinion, this intrigue is a key component of Dylan’s success. To make any definitive assessment, an assumption must be made that most of what Dylan puts out is not directly contrary to himself—and if a theme occurs frequently enough, it carries some likelihood of being true. Within the enigmatic man, there are core beliefs. This book will address the forces that acted upon Dylan and to which he reacted, the world that he influenced and that influenced him. From this comes an understanding that while there may be many Bob Dylans, there is a single life that they encompass. Today, he can play “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “Like a Rolling Stone,” “If Not for You,” and “Gotta Serve Somebody,” and it is all water from the same fountain.

Sometimes in interviews Dylan has engaged in deliberate obfuscation, other times he reveals annoyance at being asked questions that have no answer. Dave Kelly watched this process during an interview with the BBC: “He turned into another guy. It was brilliant to watch. He just came up with all these riddles and he had them jumping through hoops and he took them on a merry dance... It was like theatre. And they lapped it up. And then they left and he went back to being regular old Bob like it’d never happened.”³ For these reasons, not all of Dylan’s statements can be taken at face value, though oftentimes writers take one and ignore the rest. We have attempted to base our conclusions on themes that have repeated themselves in his songs, interviews, and pronouncements and apply them to broader historical, political, and religious concepts.

This is a book about the politics of Bob Dylan—not only his personal politics but his influence on the wider world. The political themes most commonly appearing in Dylan’s work are freedom, suspicion of power, belief in universal sacred truths, and justice for the vulnerable. He understands that to be free is to be empowered and the downtrodden enjoy very little of either. Power is at the heart of politics and Dylan distrusts both the

exertion of power and the ability of human beings to utilize it to correct the wrongs of society.

This work is not an attempt to analyze Bob Dylan's music per se, or to provide a complete biography of him, but rather we are trying to place his politics in historical context and examine the political ramifications of his art. In a sense, this book is similar to an LP. Any one of the chapters could essentially stand on its own as a self-contained essay, just as one can put the needle down on a record and listen to a song. However, the book's meaning is best understood when taken as a whole. Dylan fans familiar with *Bringing It All Back Home*, containing an electric side A and an acoustic side B, may appreciate our approach as two authors. The first and second halves of the book are distinct, yet the chapters build on one another and transitions will make the connections explicit.

The first half of the book, written primarily by Chad Israelson, provides the foundation and origins of freedom, justice, and power, as they appeared in Dylan's life and work. The second portion of the book, with Jeff Taylor serving as primary author, focuses on Dylan's conversion to Christianity and the manner his newfound faith interacted with the aforementioned themes while adding a fourth value (salvation). The subtitle of the book refers to two sides of Dylan's politics: freedom and justice, power and sin—the idealistic and the realistic, the inspirational and the theological.

The entire book contains history and ideas as we examine the political world of Bob Dylan. Yet each half has a somewhat different feel. Chad the historian emphasizes events and the cultural, while Jeff the political scientist emphasizes theory and the institutional. The former has more zeitgeist, the latter more time-transcendence. The first half deals more with Dylan's biography and musical evolution, the second more with his conversion and theological perspective. Chad concentrates on the first half of Dylan's life, Jeff on the second half.

In contrast to many Dylan analysts, we are lifelong Americans, which might give us some insights that are less accessible to those who are not. More specifically, like Dylan, we are both sons of the Upper Midwest. Chad's roots are in Minnesota, where he lives today. Jeff was born and raised in northern Iowa—30 miles from Minnesota—and he spent a dozen years living in the North Star State. Most of our lives have been spent in the Minnesota-Wisconsin-Iowa-Nebraska-Dakotas region.

Chapters 4 through 7 include many endnotes that are not only source citations but also carriers of information. If you find something of particular interest in the text of these chapters, you may wish to consult the notes for additional information.

The second half of the book contains Christian theology and Bible verses. This is necessary since these chapters mostly deal with Dylan during the post-1978 period. The reader may or may not share Dylan's Christian worldview and interpretation of Scripture, but it is important to take his thoughts and actions seriously, and in the way they have been intended. In an oversimplified nutshell, we could say that Bob Dylan's political philosophy since 1979 has been that of Woody Guthrie supplemented by the gospels of the New Testament, of C. Wright Mills supplemented by the prophet Isaiah, of *Merchants of Death* supplemented by the book of Revelation. This being the case, ideology and theology are naturally intertwined.

Fifty-one years after interviewing the singer for the *Freewheelin'* liner notes, Nat Hentoff called Bob Dylan a "singular person."⁴ Dylan is a singular person, but he embodies some important values that we would all do well to consider. If Dylan were totally sui generis, listening to him might be fascinating but of little practical value because we could not hope to learn from his example or find a real connection to the things that he is saying. Every human being is unique and perhaps geniuses are even more so, but Dylan lives within a context and exemplifies certain thoughts and tendencies, even as he puts his own stamp on them. Intentionally or not, Dylan has something to teach us about politics. He is more a conduit than an idol, more a servant than a leader. His power comes from truth. One of the truths Dylan shares is the danger of power.

Acknowledgments

This was an unexpected, fast-moving, lifetime-dream book. It is special to be able to write at length about someone we admire and about songs that have affected our lives deeply over the years.

In addition to the multitude of books, articles, and webpages we have used, there are a handful of helpful reference sources that deserve mention, including Michael Gray's *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* and Clinton Heylin's *Bob Dylan: A Life in Stolen Moments, Day by Day* and *Bob Dylan: The Recording Sessions*. Olof Björner's *Still on the Road* website of concert setlists has been useful. Karl Erik Andersen's *Expecting Rain* website continues to be a great source of daily information about Dylan.

Nat Hentoff is a legendary music critic. Born in Boston, he later moved to New York City. He became famous writing about jazz and then branched out into other genres. A self-described Jewish atheist, Hentoff became friends with Duke Ellington and Malcolm X, among many other talented individuals, over the years. Bob Dylan was also a friend. Hentoff first interviewed Dylan in 1963 when he wrote the liner notes for his second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Hentoff subsequently conducted important interviews with Dylan for *The New Yorker* (1964) and for *Playboy* (1966). He interviewed Joan Baez and Allen Ginsberg when writing a story about the Rolling Thunder Revue for *Rolling Stone* (1975–76). A half-century after he met Dylan, we asked Hentoff for his impressions of the young man, and Hentoff agreed to write the foreword to our book. Unfortunately, circumstances prevented the foreword-writing, but it was an honor to speak with Mr. Hentoff on several occasions and we appreciate his encouragement.

We want to thank those who agreed to be interviewed and with whom we had conversations and email exchanges: Charles Evers, Dave Kelly, Jerry Waldman, Charles Norman, Wendell Berry, Robert Dean Lurie, Michelle Werner, Alberta Cooley McCrory, Suzanne Duscha, Ralph Nader, Matt

Zawisky, Allen Flemming, and Bill Batchelder (and his father, Speaker William Batchelder III).

We also want to thank Cindy Lee Berryhill (widow of Paul Williams), Daniel Mark Epstein, Stephen Webb, Clinton Heylin, Jesse Walker, and Bill Kauffman for their assistance and encouragement.

We are grateful to Palgrave Macmillan acquisitions editor Brian O'Connor, to editorial assistants Nicole Hitner and Elaine Fan, and to Abby Oladipo, Chelsea Morgan, Deepa John, and the entire production team.

Thanks to the anonymous peer reviewer who provided support and suggestions.

A special thank-you goes to our friend—and fellow Dylan fan—Jon Benson. He has once again used his computer program to assist with the indexing of the book.

* * *

Chad would like to thank:

Beth, Addison, and Garrison for your love, support, hard work, and sacrifice. There is no way I could have done it without you three. What you mean to me cannot be expressed in words, certainly not in the space allowed—our family is what it is all about.

Kit and Isaac, my parents, who provided my foundation, bought me cassettes, LPs, and CDs; influenced my musical tastes and passions; and aided and loved me always.

Jeff, who gave me this opportunity, believed in my own ability, and enlightened me with conversations over the years.

My friends from La Crescent, UW-L, and UN. You contributed to this more than you know.

Zobin, I really appreciate your pep talks.

The Hogans, who, among other things, lent me those Dylan albums back in 1987, and lifelong friends who value music (Pat, Frank, Boohan, and Russ).

The professors who inspired me: Vettes, Pemberton, Hollenback, Miller, and Rader.

The RCTC library staff and faculty: Diane, Gwenn, Sandy, Teddy, Gretchen, and the student workers who helped me get materials and answered my questions.

Rochester Public Library, especially Brian Lind for his assistance.

Cheryl at the Hibbing Public Library for her help.

Those at RCTC who read chapters and gave me their comments: Atef, Barry, Richard, Ruth, Scannell, especially Mark Schnaedter (Dylanologist

is a real word) who put in so much time, and all my friends and colleagues at RCTC for their encouragement during the fall of 2014.

Anyone else—family or friend—who I may have missed due to space constraints, but who contributed to the project.

* * *

Jeff would like to thank:

Nat Hentoff for being so kind when we spoke. As a civil libertarian, consistent prolife advocate, and biographer of A. J. Muste, you have long been a hero of mine.

Steve Wandro for talking to me about Dylan and letting me listen to your *Greatest Hits* albums at a time when I was only familiar with the Dylan of *Slow Train Coming* (July 10, 1980).

Fellow Dylan fans over the years, including Sally Flake Pitlyk, Kelly DeBrine, Tim Carter, and Karen Carlson.

Dordt colleagues Neal DeRoo, Jake Van Wyk, and Charles and Pam Adams in connection with the Popular Culture Conference on campus, which inspired me to write what became the foundation of this book (chapter 4).

Mary Dengler for wanting to publish that conference paper in *Pro Rege*, and Cal Seerveld for noticing the journal article and expressing thanks, and Gabe Eliserio for your e-mail.

Matt Drissell for cover design advice.

Peter Haworth for creating the Ciceronian Society panel at APSA that sparked Brian O'Connor's interest in my planned Reagan paper. The paper wasn't presented and was already a chapter in my previous book, but Brian's query led to a Bob Dylan book instead.

Chad, who was a kindred spirit at RCTC, has been my compatriot in political perspective, and is into Dylan as much as I am. You made the writing of this book not only easier but possible.

My older brother Greg shaped my taste in music—the Beatles coming first and then later moving into other manifestations of power pop. Your Byrds and Hollies albums were a gateway to Dylan.

Of course, I am indebted to my parents, Jim and Judy Taylor, for all you have given me over the years. I first heard Dylan songs on albums in your record collection. They were covers by Peter, Paul and Mary (*In the Wind*—1963), the Dillards (*Live!!!! Almost!!!!*—1964), and Johnny Cash (*Orange Blossom Special*—1965; *At San Quentin*—1969).

This book is dedicated to my wife, Shirley, and to my children, William, Jane, and David.

אלוהים תודה לך על בוב דיילן

CHAPTER 1

Bob Dylan's Roots and Traditional World

From a purely statistical standpoint, Bob Dylan—Jewish and hailing from Minnesota's Iron Range—should reliably vote Democratic. Loath to have labels put upon him, his political outlook cannot be reduced to statistics. Dylan's political world has proved too broad and independent to be classified simply as left or right, conservative or liberal, though he has often been assumed to be decidedly leftist. His political outlook is partly derived from the atmosphere of his home state and partly from his religious upbringing. Placed into those two cultures by birth, Dylan melded what he learned from them with traditional American ideals and roots music. His appreciation for the ideals of an America rooted in the past, a powerful sense of the sacred, and identification with the underdog coalesced into a belief system that transcended contemporary politics. This combination intermingled in the fertile and artistic mind of a sensitive young man and reappeared consistently over the years.

Upon his arrival in New York in January of 1961, Bob Dylan created a persona separate from his actual background. Whether that meant emulating Woody Guthrie, changing his name, or creating a false adventure-filled past, he desired to fulfill a vision of greatness that existed within him from a very early age. However, a pseudonym, a phony back story, and misleading comments in an interview did not divorce Dylan from the culture that shaped him. One of his great talents as a songwriter has been the ability to apply his influences. In nearly every biography or interview about Dylan, someone who knew him in Greenwich Village refers to him as a "sponge" due to his ability to absorb the culture around him. They use the term to explain Dylan's immersion in the culture and music of the folk scene, but

he had already begun the process of assimilating nearly everything around him. Though his career began in New York, it was neither Dylan's home nor his background. Bob Dylan's roots lie to the north and west, in a small Minnesota mining town with an even smaller Jewish community.

Political Culture

The culture of Dylan's home state still retains the influences of its early European settlers. In the 1850s, when Minnesota achieved statehood, the greatest number of white immigrants came from New York and New England. These immigrants were referred to as Old Stock Americans, Yankees, or Yorkers. They transmitted to Minnesota their Puritan heritage, which originated in Massachusetts. David Hackett Fischer and Daniel J. Elazar, among others, have noted the strong cultural connection between Minnesota and New England. Fischer's *Albion's Seed* lays out four cultural ways prevalent in the United States, all tracing their roots to a group of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Isles immigrants: Puritans, Cavaliers, Quakers, and Backcountry. According to Fischer, even though new groups moved in, merged with and influenced American culture, these four remained dominant and spread across the nation. Although Fischer has received criticism for painting with too broad a brush, nonetheless his analysis has merit.

The Puritan culture mandated a lifestyle built on a sober, hardworking citizenry. "Yankee idealism," a notion that expressed faith in government as an instrument of protecting the public good, was transmitted across the northern tier of America.¹ These Yankees advocated participatory politics and placed an emphasis on education. The Puritan influence in Minnesota remains present today in leftover Blue Law restrictions that mandate, for example, that liquor stores stay closed on Sunday.

In political scientist Daniel Elazar's analysis, the dominant political cultures in states such as Minnesota and Massachusetts are identified as "moralistic." States or regions that embody this type of political culture cling to a sense that power should be used for society's improvement. Thus, when political power is exerted, it should be for the purpose of pursuing justice, civic betterment, or similar activities. Elazar linked the moralistic culture to areas populated by large numbers of Yankees, Scotch, Dutch, Scandinavians, and Jews.² The desire for community enhancement makes Minnesotans acutely attuned to human shortcomings, and in their attempt to overcome them, Minnesotans are prone to "issuing jeremiads... commentaries on the weakness of their society."³ Dylan has denied repeatedly that he is any sort of political figure and that politics can affect real change

in the world. Although he has never claimed to have answers, frequently in both songs and interviews he has pointed out the failings manifest in society. Less a crusading reformer or political activist than a social critic, Dylan's pronouncements have the ring of an individual raised in a region accustomed to striving for civic improvement.

Puritans stressed hard work, humility, and a strict adherence to biblical law. During the English Civil War, they generally pitted themselves against the landed gentry. The Puritans came to America as one of the most egalitarian groups of colonists and were "suspicious of inherited privilege and the conspicuous display of wealth."⁴ Dylan consistently acknowledged the corrupting influence that the concentration of economic power brought and despite his vast wealth, seemed to grapple internally with reconciling the two.

The Puritan sense of freedom and justice originated in their religious beliefs and obedience to God's will via the Covenant. They emphasized predestination, adherence to Old Testament laws, and the concept of original sin. In New England, the Puritans sought to make a "city on the hill" or a "New Israel" as a model for a sinful world. Dylan consistently paralleled this discontent with a society he viewed as corrupt, wayward, or empty. His 1989 song "Everything Is Broken" addressed a variation of a world gone wrong—which also happened to be the title of his 1993 folk covers album.

To the Puritans, allowing heretical beliefs such as witchcraft to exist among them threatened to incite God's wrath on the entire community. This notion of collective guilt caused early New Englanders to fear the potentially damaging consequences of "otherness."⁵ That created an atmosphere that exerted pressure to conform and fostered suspicion of outsiders. That attitude found its way into Minnesota, a state known both for its "niceness" and for its stoic aloofness, which is notoriously hard for newcomers to penetrate.

In Minnesota, the population centers of Minneapolis and St. Paul dominate the attention and often the politics of the state. In the Minnesotan lexicon, Minneapolis and St. Paul along with their suburbs are called "the Cities." Everything outside this metro region is considered "outstate," and just about anything north of the Twin Cities is "up north." Bob Dylan did not just come from "up north"; he was raised on the ore-rich Iron Range. This is a distinct region within the state and stands apart geographically and culturally from Minnesota's seat of power. "The Range," as it is commonly known, has produced billions of dollars worth of iron ore that has benefitted the entire state. Despite its essential contributions to Minnesota's economy, the Iron Range has been overlooked politically and has only seen one of its politicians ascend to the governorship—Hibbing's Rudy Perpich. The

region's uniqueness has been summed up as a "frontier melting pot mixed with the fierce pride of the people [which] has brewed a certain mystique on the Iron Range that has always been difficult for outsiders—even fellow Minnesotans—to understand."⁶

During the twentieth century, Minnesota's largest three immigrant groups—Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans—comprised the majority of the ethnicities found in the state. For most of the state's history, the Iron Range and Duluth, a harbor city roughly an hour from Hibbing, encompassed Minnesota's most diverse locale outside the Twin Cities. The Range's population consisted of Italians, Irish, Poles, Finns, and a variety of Eastern Europeans—to which Dylan and his relatives belonged. All told, thirty-five "sufficient sized" ethnic groups and a few members "from a handful more" found a home on the Iron Range.⁷

In the late nineteenth century, Jews from Eastern Europe arrived in Duluth and the Iron Range. Overall, the state's religious distribution remained nearly as homogenous as its ethnic groupings. The vast majority of Scandinavians and many of the Germans were Lutherans, though a sizable number of Germans practiced Catholicism. Other Protestant denominations were represented across the state as well. Minnesota housed a small Jewish contingent, less than 1 percent of the state's population, generally clustered in the Twin Cities, Duluth, and the Iron Range.⁸ During the early to mid-twentieth century, the Iron Range housed four synagogues, one of them in Hibbing. Especially as he grew older, Dylan has acknowledged the degree to which his experiences growing up on the Iron Range impacted him.

Throughout its history, Minnesota's political tradition has boasted a strong independent streak and voters have expressed their willingness to diverge from major parties. In the late nineteenth century, the People's ("Populist") Party garnered strong support among farmers, workers, and those who sympathized with them in Minnesota and other Midwestern states. Primarily a reaction against economic hardship and corporate power, populism concerned itself with the plight of the "little guy" oppressed by a system rigged against him.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, populism's strength reached its pinnacle. The presidential election of 1892 was the high-water mark for the Populist Party on a national scale and its candidate, James Weaver, finished second in Minnesota behind Republican Benjamin Harrison. Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota wrote the preamble to the Populist Party's platform. In 1912, former Republican President Theodore Roosevelt, who ran as a Progressive, won the state over both Woodrow Wilson and President William Howard Taft. In addition, Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs received the most popular votes from two of Minnesota's northern

counties. In 1924, Independent candidate Robert La Follette, from neighboring Wisconsin and a torchbearer of populist sentiment, finished second to Republican Calvin Coolidge, but received roughly six times the votes of Democratic candidate John Davis.⁹

Minnesota's populist heritage, its independent streak, and the country's economic woes converged in the 1930s. When the Great Depression hit, a new political force formed, the Farmer-Labor Party. It was similar in scope and sentiment to North Dakota's Nonpartisan League and other independent or populist organizations. In Minnesota, the Farmer-Labor Party combined the Populist Party's base of agriculture with the mining and manufacturing workers of the Twin Cities and Iron Range. The Farmer-Labor Party won gubernatorial races in 1930, 1934, and 1936 when their dominance seemed so complete that the Democratic Party did not even run a candidate. By the 1940s, the third party's profile was high, but its electoral success waned and it merged with the Democrats. This created an entity unique to Minnesota, a party called the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL).¹⁰

Minnesota voters' willingness to support candidates outside of Democrats and Republicans sustained throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In 1998, Minnesota gained national attention by again sending a third-party candidate to the governor's mansion. In this case, former professional wrestler Jesse Ventura, who ran as a member of the Reform Party, won the office. In national elections, third-party candidates such as John Anderson (1980), Ross Perot (1992 and 1996) and Ralph Nader (1996, 2000, and 2004) did better in Minnesota than their national averages (roughly two percentage points higher for Anderson and Nader's 2000 bid and five points for Perot in 1992).

The economic realities of the Iron Range helped to shape its political leanings as well. Not exactly urban, it is different from typical rural areas also. General attitudes on the Range demonstrate a population somewhat socially conservative but economically liberal, and who tends to vote overwhelmingly Democratic. Iron Range political stances have been branded a "quasi Libertarian brand of Democrat."¹¹ In every presidential election since World War II, essentially when Dylan's family moved to Hibbing, Democratic candidates far outpolled Republicans—generally by a two-to-one margin. Even in contests that were national blowouts, such as 1972 when Richard Nixon defeated George McGovern, St. Louis County (which includes Duluth and much of the Mesabi Range) turned out for the Democrat 3:2. Incidentally, in that same election, perennial Communist candidate and Iron Range native Gus Hall received his highest vote total in the entire state from St. Louis County at 138. That number proved two votes higher than he got from Hennepin County, home of Minneapolis,

with roughly two and half times more voters. Continuing to the present, in elections for state and national offices, Iron Range voters remain one of Minnesota's most reliable Democratic strongholds.¹² Though the Range retains elements that are "Minnesotan," the culture and political leanings of its residents have been shaped by ethnic, geographic, and economic factors that make it unique within the state.

Hibbing, Minnesota

Robert Zimmerman (Bob Dylan) was born in Duluth, a picturesque city on the shore of Lake Superior in northern Minnesota. When he was six, his family moved from Duluth to Hibbing about 75 miles to the northwest. Despite having a history of radical political activity, Hibbing in the 1940s and 1950s may have seemed dreary to a youngster. Margaret Stark, who knew Dylan in high school, says, "He was treated as an outcast as he was growing up. He was odd, and different."¹³ Thus, Dylan, both Jewish and socially unconventional, experienced some element of being "the other" among the dominant culture of his hometown. Although Hibbing's social norms could be stifling, the town also provided enough freedom and lack of distraction for Dylan's personality to emerge—a situation that was not exactly oppressive, not completely fulfilling, and requiring the development of a self-reliant streak. Reminiscing about a youth he called neither "happy nor unhappy," Dylan remembers Hibbing as a place where he had the "whole town to roam."¹⁴ He graduated from Hibbing High School in 1959, and that fall he attended the University of Minnesota. Within roughly a year, he left school and headed to New York City to pursue a career in music.

Those who live on the Iron Range venerate hard work and have a proud heritage of union support. Organized labor helped create a sense of camaraderie among residents who "learned to stand together for working men and women during collective bargaining strikes."¹⁵ Whether in time of strike or in difficulties inflicted by the harshness of the climate, cooperation potentially meant survival. In addition, the economy's volatility created a leveling effect on Range attitudes. Dylan speaks of his experience growing up in Hibbing: "Being poor when I was young didn't have a terrific influence on me. Where I came from, everyone was the same, so you didn't know you were poor, because you had nothing to compare with."¹⁶ According to a lifelong Ranger, "It's more of a stigma to be rich here than it is to be poor."¹⁷ In his autobiographical book *Chronicles*, Dylan explains that growing up on the Iron Range, "mine owners were more to be feared, more of an enemy," than communists.¹⁸ Dylan's distrust of those in power began in his formative years and never wavered.

Dylan's father, Abraham Zimmerman, worked with two of his brothers, Paul and Maurice, at their appliance/furniture store. The Zimmerman family was comfortable, but very few people in town could be said to be well off. According to close high school friends, working with Abe helped to shape Dylan's empathy for those down on their luck. Echo Helstrom, his high school girlfriend, relates that Dylan had to accompany his father to repossess items when miners missed their payments to the Zimmermans' store. Helstrom thinks that this was when "Bob first started feeling sorry for poor people." She adds that when Dylan had to help load the truck with the repossessed item, he "hated that—used to dread it more than anything."¹⁹ John Bucklen, a good friend from Hibbing and fellow music enthusiast, reiterates the young Dylan's feelings in an *A&E Biography* episode on the singer.²⁰ Abe Zimmerman told the *Saturday Evening Post* that he used to make Bob obtain payments from poor residents. Even though he knew that his son would not be able to collect, Abe Zimmerman wanted to show him "another side of life." He also imparted to Bob that some of them made as much money as the Zimmermans did, but they could not "manage it."²¹

Many stories relate Dylan's quiet beneficence to family and friends, though not all acquaintances claim to have experienced his generosity. Whether or not this sentiment stemmed from sympathies he developed as a young person, Dylan frequently espoused support for those on the fringes. According to Joan Baez, he "seldom reached out to anticipate another's needs, though occasionally he would exhibit a sudden concern for another outlaw, hitchhiker, or bum, and go out of his way to see them looked after."²² Baez uses the phrase "another outlaw," implying that Dylan was some sort of outlaw or at least identified with them. He certainly saw himself as an outsider in Hibbing, and he continued to resist being "one of them," a notion he voiced several times in the *No Direction Home* documentary. Dylan says that his friends, as a teenager, were those "who couldn't make it as the high-school football halfback" or "Junior Chamber of Commerce leader."²³ Friends and teachers note that Dylan preferred individual or small group pursuits and avoided "organized activities."²⁴ The Iron Range shaped the young Dylan's sense of being an outsider and most likely caused him to identify with kindred spirits and underdogs.

The societal pressure to not stand out stemmed, in part, from the Iron Range's economic situation and its abundance of nationalities. Although the ethnic groups maintained their own foods and customs, they faced external expectations to assimilate.²⁵ Linda Fidler, a Hibbing native, says that residents were raised with few expectations except to be like everyone else.²⁶ Dewey Collyard, an old Dylan acquaintance, sums up the mood in Hibbing: "The demand for conformity here is strong"; even if a person was

“talented and successful,” that “talent and success should never stand in the way of being just like everyone else.”²⁷ A local historian, Pat Mestek, confirms the same sentiment. She stated that her mother taught her not to “stick your head above the herd. You’ll get it chopped off.”²⁸ When the Hibbing Historical Society explored honoring Dylan, “he did not cooperate with us in any way,” Mestek says. Dylan indicated through family channels that “he did not want any notoriety about him here.”²⁹

It may seem hard to believe that someone who is as internationally famous as Dylan would have reservations about success, especially when he willingly chose a career in the spotlight and, even as a youngster, dreamt of making it big. Considering the accolades heaped on Dylan and the dizzying level of fame he achieved, his roots sustained him to a remarkable degree and he never escaped Hibbing’s influence. He frequently displayed the humility his northern Minnesota upbringing demanded. In a 2004 interview conducted with Ed Bradley, which aired on CBS’s *60 Minutes*, Bradley informed Dylan that 12 of his songs were placed in *Rolling Stone*’s top 500. Bradley pressed Dylan to express how gratifying that type of critical acclaim must have felt. Dylan seemingly unimpressed by the accolade and knowing well the fleeting nature of critical adulation responded laconically, “Maybe this week.” Bradley prodded him for a more enthusiastic response. Dylan, unwilling to take the bait, simply repeated the answer.³⁰

The amalgamation of pressure to conform and Dylan’s individualistic drive put him socially at odds with many in his hometown and certainly helped to form his sympathetic views toward those he saw as fellow outsiders. In the 1960s, the population of Hibbing was relatively small with one public high school. It seems reasonable that in 1964 most Hibbing residents would have known all about their most famous former citizen. However, that year, the *Hibbing Daily Tribune* ran articles on Dylan’s exploits and introduced him as the “son of Mr. and Mrs. Abe Zimmerman.”³¹ This was after stories about him had appeared in *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and *Life*, among other publications, and after Dylan had made multiple television appearances. Apparently in the Hibbing of 1964, Bob Dylan remained more easily identifiable as the son of Abe and Beatty Zimmerman than as the composer of “Blowin’ in the Wind.” Charles Miller, a social studies teacher in Hibbing, noted that Dylan’s political music “shook the hell out of the community. They were protest songs.”³²

Early in his career, Bob Dylan created a colorful past for himself, spinning a number of tall tales about working carnivals, playing music with old bluesmen, being orphaned, or running away from home. Some have interpreted this as an attempt by Dylan to deny his background as a Jewish Minnesotan who maintained a good relationship with his family. In late

1963, *Newsweek* ran a story that exposed Dylan's fabrications concerning his personal history, parental relationship, and last name. Dylan was furious about the *Newsweek* piece, which in addition to shedding light on his past contained an unsubstantiated claim that he stole "Blowin' in the Wind."³³

Dylan probably believed his upbringing in Hibbing lacked a certain cachet among the Greenwich Village folkies and may have sought to shield his family from investigation. During his ascent to fame, he alternately dismissed and spoke openly of his northern Minnesota roots. Other than briefly in 1979–80, Dylan has rarely called attention to his religious beliefs or other personal details of his life. In his *60 Minutes* interview, when questioned about choosing the name Dylan, he responded that in the land of the free, a person can call himself whatever he wants.³⁴

Dylan's refusal to divulge personal information, and/or his delight in confounding the press, was evident in 1964 when a writer for a Minneapolis newspaper asked him what he considered to be his hometown. Dylan responded first that it was Hibbing, then Fargo, insinuated Denver, and "some place in Michigan."³⁵ In written pieces such as "My Life in a Stolen Moment" (1963), he referred to Hibbing as "a good ol' town," perhaps in the manner of Sinclair Lewis's Gopher Prairie, and conversely in "11 Outlined Epitaphs" (1964) as desolate and dying. Both descriptions contain truth and need not be considered mutually exclusive. He was unequivocal about his need to leave it and keep "runnin."³⁶

Dylan's stated impressions of his hometown have varied over the years, but his need to break out from its limitations remained constant. He said in 1965, "I left where I'm from because there's nothing there. I come from Minnesota, there was nothing there." He added, "when I left there, man, I knew one thing: I had to get out of there and not come back."³⁷ In 2004, he described needing to get away from Hibbing and going to a place that had more to offer.³⁸ Despite his desire to leave, the truth is Bobby Zimmerman probably had a better chance of becoming Bob Dylan growing up in Hibbing than in some other little Minnesota town, or anywhere else in America for that matter. For the man who continually charted his own path, he began the practice of running counter to a dominant culture in Hibbing. As he ran, he carried the lessons he learned from the region with him.

As Dylan advanced in his career, he became less evasive about his childhood and willingly acknowledged the impact that northern Minnesota had on him. In 1978, the only interview Dylan granted in the Upper Midwest was with *High Times*, the Hibbing High School newspaper. Prior to a concert in St. Paul, he told the paper's student editor that he was "proud to be from Hibbing." He also said that hailing from northern Minnesota "gave me a sense of simplicity."³⁹ In 2009, he spoke wistfully of the region's beauty and the way

in which it remained partially frozen in time.⁴⁰ Dylan's observations in the twenty-first century express a fondness not only for the Hibbing of his boyhood, but for a society "before supermarkets, malls and multiplexes."⁴¹ In large part, Dylan's political views reflect his yearning for a bucolic, lost America.

Economic Populism

The Iron Range's place in Minnesota's history stems from its geography as well as its demography. The whole region is often called the Range, though there are technically three different ranges: the Cuyuna, Vermillion, and Mesabi. Historically, the Mesabi Range has been the most profitable and is also where Hibbing is located. The Iron Range rests on a natural resource that provided the economic impetus for the area's late-nineteenth-century settlement when iron was first discovered. The prospect of work brought an influx of immigrants to the region. Despite its far northern location and unforgiving cold weather that Dylan claims "equalizes everything," Iron Range towns flourished.⁴²

Hibbing is remote but it is not precisely a rural setting; rather it is a part of an industrial corridor that runs approximately 100 miles through northern Minnesota. This stretch of individual towns cuts through forests, lakes, and iron pits. Among places such as Babbitt, Virginia, and Eveleth, Hibbing grew to be the largest town on the Range and became the "unofficial capital" of the region. It was where the mine executives lived, and it housed the best retail stores.⁴³ It also boasts a spectacularly constructed high school. Built in the 1920s, it remains a remarkable testament to mining dollars and the region's civic commitment to education.

An economy reliant on a single natural resource is at the mercy of that commodity's availability and demand. The causal relationship was evident: as the iron ore mining declined, the economic well-being of the Range faltered. Discovered in the late nineteenth century, iron ore proved a timely find in a relatively new, sparsely settled state. Minnesota's ore became essential for the burgeoning Industrial Revolution. East Coast investors quickly purchased rights and soon owned much of the region's most valuable land. Financial titans Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, among others, had a financial stake in Minnesota mines and railroads. When mining companies began operating, immigrants in search of work moved into the area. Laborers endured miserable conditions but without the mines, there was little other employment, and the threat of immense hardship constantly loomed for the entire population.

In the early twentieth century, local Range governments took on mining interests. The mining companies shipped their freight through the middle

of town, blasts from their mines shook and damaged homes, yet the companies contributed little to nothing for civic improvements. In addition, to be employed in the mines meant experiencing dirty, difficult, and dangerous conditions. Worker and citizen discontent developed and soon challenged the status quo. The emergence of a fiery populist sentiment on the Iron Range was the outgrowth of these realities. Politicians who pushed back against the mine companies attracted a following. The archetype of a feisty underdog willing to stand up and fight the moneyed interests resonated with many Rangers.⁴⁴

Politicians who were considered “for the people” influenced the development of a radical heritage in northern Minnesota. During the early twentieth century, it would have been common to hear communist, socialist, and anarchist speakers in numerous towns across the Range. In 1907, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) went to the Iron Range to organize. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) used the Socialist Opera House in Virginia, Minnesota, as a headquarters. The labor organizations hosted rallies and 17,000 strikers eventually walked the picket line. On both sides of the struggle, out-of-state strikebreakers and supportive socialists such as Mother Jones arrived.⁴⁵ In 1916, a second and much more violent strike occurred. Hibbing hosted an IWW parade and the city’s Workers’ Hall served as a planning center for the strikers.⁴⁶

By the 1940s and 1950s, some of the workers from this earlier contentious period remained in the area. Many of their children, who would have had the lessons from the strikes instilled in them, continued to live on the Iron Range in towns such as Hibbing. Their memories, resentments, and alliances helped to create the local political culture. Iron Range historian Marvin G. Lamppa notes that in every town, “there remained those who didn’t forget. To them, there were two Mesabi ranges, the Mesabi of ‘company men’ and the Mesabi of the ‘worker.’”⁴⁷

Dylan’s introduction to protest did not originate in New York’s Greenwich Village. Minnesota’s political heritage, and in particular that found on the Iron Range, exhibited a long history of dissent. According to Minnesota historian G. Theodore Mitau, “Voices of agrarian and urban protest, often discordant and intense, have risen from the mining pits of the Mesabi Range . . . to find expression in the platforms and conventions of Minnesota’s third and minor parties.”⁴⁸ He also notes that the Range’s “tradition of protest has continued to exert pressure on state politics.” Bob Dylan or anyone else growing up in the state received exposure to “the fervor for social justice and economic opportunity [that] has long had organizational expression in Minnesota.”⁴⁹ That influence was reflected in the songs he wrote throughout his career. Bob Dylan may not have been the politically radical “King

of Protest” in the manner that the media portrayed him. However, radical was a relative term and reporters, critics, and those who grew up in northern Minnesota interpreted it in different ways.

The centrality of the iron mines to the economy of the region cannot be overstated. The finances of the Iron Range revolved around the mines, the only game in town. Even before the United States entered World War II, iron ore production boomed due to the United States’ support of the allies. Steel production tripled between 1938 and 1943.⁵⁰ With the end of World War II, when Dylan lived in Hibbing, mining declined rapidly and the region experienced a recession. In the late 1940s, the miners on the Range participated in nationwide steelworker strikes. McCarthyism and the Red Scare helped to weaken unions in the next decade.⁵¹ The 1950s may have been the start of a decline for American labor, but the populist and prounion attitudes that developed during the previous 50 years in northern Minnesota thrived.

Dylan’s youth in Hibbing allowed him firsthand knowledge of the vagaries unleashed by power concentrated in the hands of a few businesses. Enormous holes, opened in the earth in pursuit of ore, served as a constant reminder of this. Dylan also would have known that a few decades before he lived there, the houses and buildings of his hometown were uprooted and moved a few miles south to accommodate the mining interests. When output declined, the impact reverberated across the region and all businesses suffered. In a 1964 interview with *Life*, Dylan described Hibbing’s economic situation as being like “death” all around him. “I was raised in a town that was dying. There weren’t no need for that town to die. It was a perfectly valid town.”⁵² The economic distress to families made a lasting impression on the young Dylan.

In “North Country Blues” from his third album, *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, Bob Dylan offers his most direct statement about his home and the financial hardship caused by mining corporations. The song invokes Dylan’s roots on the Iron Range and chronicles the social ramifications of sagging production. It begins in the vein of a Great Depression era folk song, inviting listeners to “gather ‘round.” Dylan then proceeds to describe when the “pits ran plenty” and the miners enjoyed a full “lunch bucket.”⁵³ This prosperity did not last and, as the song unfolds, the harsh reality is laid bare.

As a songwriter, Dylan possessed an uncanny ability—especially for a young man only 22 years old—to delve deeper than his contemporaries. “North Country Blues” represents not merely a lament that “times were tough” but describes the numerous social ravages that an economic downturn unleashed. For example, he addresses alcohol abuse and a room that smelled “heavy from drinking” where out-of-work men passed the time. Job

loss often led to family abandonment, and Dylan wrote “North Country Blues” from the perspective of a woman whose husband left her to care alone for three children.⁵⁴

Also apparent in “North Country Blues” is the influence of Minnesota and the Iron Range’s populist political sentiment. Populists often indicted eastern bankers as the root of their troubles. Populist icon and three-time Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan envisioned “a union between the producers of the South and West against the predatory corporations that dominate the politics of the Northeast.”⁵⁵ In his song, Dylan explains that “in the East” owners thought Mesabi Range miners were paid too much. Using Easterners to represent banking interests and mine owners, Dylan taps into a suspicion that had long percolated in Northern Minnesota. Iron Range educator and author Aaron Brown reflects that sentiment: “Those of us who grew up here weren’t taught we were radical. We were taught that people... probably wearing suits, were coming to get us, and that we needed to be prepared to defend ourselves.”⁵⁶ Denizens of the Iron Range often view those from outside with suspicion and they tend to “distrust a shirt and tie much more than a greasy pair of overalls.”⁵⁷

Dylan’s song recognized the rising impact of globalization before widespread use of the term entered the language. He witnessed mining jobs shifting to South America where miners worked more cheaply than their US counterparts. “North Country Blues” also identified a disheartening trend rampant in late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century rural and small-town America. Due to virtually nonexistent employment opportunities or the promise of only low-end jobs, many of these areas experienced a population stagnation or decline. Dylan captured the desperation brought on by the closed storefronts and a people forced to leave their homes. “North Country Blues” appeared during his so-called protest period and Dylan continued to write and speak about the plight of the American worker throughout his career.

In 1983, Dylan put out *Infidels*, an album that contained the song “Union Sundown,” something of an updated “North Country Blues.” Released during Ronald Reagan’s first term, the original lyrics contained a line criticizing the president who had busted the air traffic controllers’ union.⁵⁸ To start the song, Dylan lists a variety of items he owns that were made outside of the United States. At first glance, “Union Sundown” claims that the victims are American laborers put out of work by globalization. However, they are not blameless because very little of what they themselves own was “made in the USA.” Dylan, a singer and not an economist, oversimplifies the hypocrisy of Americans buying foreign products and then complaining about being out of work. Nevertheless, he makes a point concerning cheap goods, a lure

that has led to a materialistic culture and the working class undermining its own economic self-interest. He indicts an overly monetized society, observing that with capitalism, nothing counts “unless it sells.”⁵⁹ What Dylan describes in “Union Sundown” is a world without values, other than value determined by cash. This notion harkens back to his mid-1960s classic “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding),” in which he attacks excessive consumerism by declaring that it taints the culture until very little is sacred.

Addressing globalization, Dylan leaves it open-ended whether workers in South America who make 30 cents per day—a considerable amount to them—are exploited, lucky to make even that, or both. Dylan refers to capitalism as “above the law” and makes clear that it steamrolls workers on both continents. This should not be understood as Dylan’s expression of Marxist rhetoric, although those ideas did flourish on the Iron Range of the early twentieth century. Rather, the populist in Dylan recognizes a need to call attention to the inimical effects of unbridled capitalism on people around the world. In his 1984 *Rolling Stone* interview with Kurt Loder, Dylan pointed out that people only recently started to work for “slave wages” and that the current situation was “just colonization.” He continued by connecting the example of South America to Hibbing’s fate of having lost jobs due to the quest for profit.⁶⁰

Dylan slammed the corruption of union leaders by calling their organization “big business too.”⁶¹ The intent of that line is not to judge whether unions are inherently good or bad, but rather to level a criticism against any organization preceded by the adjective “big.” Dylan saw big business, big government, and big labor as self-serving and therefore contemptible. In the late 1980s, he observed that individuals “who work for big companies, that’s their religion. That’s not a word that has any holiness to it.”⁶² The views Dylan expressed indicated belief that unfettered capitalism’s power results only in damaging effects. This did not preclude Dylan from earning a tremendous amount of money in his professional career or working with corporations. He may have been able to compartmentalize or rationalize the competing instincts from his background and professional reality. Still, Dylan always regarded corporatized interests with suspicion because they exerted power over individuals.

At one point in “Union Sundown,” Dylan envisions a scenario when the collusion of big business and government might declare a family’s home garden illegal. Though such a line may appear overly paranoid, it articulates a concern that consolidated finances could reduce the populace to a state of serfdom. With the balance of power tipped too greatly in favor of big business, the free market would cease to create freedom and people would lose the ability to sustain themselves independently. Dylan makes clear that

moneyed interests seek greater control and political organizations do their bidding. His understanding of the unholy alliance between financial and political powers can be traced back to Jeffersonian and Jacksonian advocacy of a decentralized political and economic system. Dylan observes, toward the end of the song, what he believes to be an insidious reality: violence rather than democracy rules the world.

The word "Union" in "Union Sundown" clearly applies to organized labor, but it can also be understood as the United States itself. The song implies that the middle class' erosion will lead to the country's demise. Once "greed got in the way" it subverted owners, union bosses, workers, and American values.⁶³ Sometimes interpreted as a patriotic, even a jingoistic declaration that advocates consumers buy only American made products, "Union Sundown" consists of more than simply that.

In 2003, Dylan released a feature film, *Masked and Anonymous*, which he cowrote with Larry Charles. The movie, set in a near-future, postrevolutionary United States, starred Dylan as Jack Fate, an imprisoned and out-of-vogue singer. John Goodman's character, Uncle Sweetheart, needs to raise money and stage a benefit concert in order to get out from under a mafia-type loan shark. The film is a commentary on politics, greed, popular culture, and what seem to be Dylan's personal experiences with fame. His distaste for political organizations and the damaging influence of big business is evident throughout. Early in the film, Uncle Sweetheart refers to the "dark princes, Republicans and Democrats," and states that money is the mother's milk of politics. Not an earth-shattering revelation but indicative of Dylan's general contempt for the business of politics and the politics of business.

Masked and Anonymous features a host of quirky characters, and one of the most off-kilter is an indigent man, played by Val Kilmer, who keeps a variety of animals. Some of the dialogue conveys messages that Dylan has expressed in song or interviews. In a scene with Jack Fate, Kilmer delivers a monologue essentially concerned with human depravity and observes that big corporations sacrifice humans in a manner reminiscent of the Aztecs. Later in the film, a stagehand played by Christian Slater comments that humans are comprised of only two races, workers and bosses.⁶⁴

Dylan has frequently expressed his antipathy for authority figures and the notion of bosses. When asked about Bruce Springsteen, Dylan acknowledged the New Jersey singer's *Nebraska* album, which featured several hard-scramble, down-and-out song stories. He also found humor in Springsteen's moniker, "the Boss." Dylan commented that typically, "the boss was a dreaded figure" who made workers endure dangerous conditions, and perpetually kept them "under his thumb."⁶⁵ On "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It

Takes a Train to Cry” from *Highway 61 Revisited*, Dylan sings to a potential love interest that he does not want to be her boss. He revisits the phrase “boss” in “Are You Ready?” from his gospel album *Saved*. Dylan asks himself whether he has submitted to God, or whether he is still “acting like the boss.”⁶⁶ He rarely displayed a willingness to surrender to authority until his conversion, but in this case Dylan mocks the notion of an earthly boss, who thinks himself in charge while ignoring the true power of the supernatural “commander-in-chief,” a title he later conferred upon God.

Separated by another two decades from “Union Sundown,” Dylan included “Workingman’s Blues #2” on his 2006 album *Modern Times*. The title could be interpreted as a commentary on the new millennium’s first decade, as well as a nod to Charlie Chaplin’s critique of industrialization in the film of the same name. Considerably less of a screed than “Union Sundown,” Dylan borrows the title of the song from one that Merle Haggard wrote and recorded, “Workin’ Man Blues.” Dylan once again broaches the subject of globalization when he observes that wages are kept low by the need for businesses to compete overseas. Singing from the perspective of a worker exhausted and pushed to the margins, Dylan adds that the proletariat’s purchasing power has declined and that this has resulted in a hunger creeping “into my gut.” He welcomes sleep as “a temporary death,” the only time he escapes the shattered life around him. In the song, Dylan evokes the melancholy of a lost world many Rustbelt laborers have experienced. In the postindustrial present, he deems the old life he once knew as a “sweet memory.”⁶⁷

At the song’s end, more wistful than bitter, Dylan sings that some people have never done an honest day’s labor and are unaware of “what work even means.”⁶⁸ Siding with the victims of the consuming drive for profit, he turns his scorn on owners who closed businesses. He articulated a reminiscent train of thought in a 1963 interview to the leftist *National Guardian*. As he did later in “Workingman’s Blues #2,” Dylan targeted the ruling and managerial classes. He addressed the damage inflicted upon Hibbing by corporate mining interests and personified the group of owners as “he.” “You should’a seen what he did to the town I was raised in—seen how he left it. He sucked up my town.” Dylan indicated that in his hometown, it was “too late now for the people—they’re lost.” He also wondered when it would be “too late for him?” Dylan connected the businesses that drained the ore on the Range to the military industrial complex—“The same guy who sucked up my town wants to bomb Cuba, but he don’t want to do it himself—send the kids.” Dylan asked the question many exploited workers wondered themselves and that he echoed over 40 years later on “Working Man’s Blues #2: “He made all this money, but what does he do to earn it?” Dylan characterized