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The Other Sides of Billy Joel: Six Case Studies Revealing the Sociologist, the Balladeer, and the Historian

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Music

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Abstract

The failure of music critics to recognize Billy Joel's tendency towards writing songs about issues such as the Vietnam War, the Cold War, struggling American industries and the effect of mass media on popular culture, particularly on two albums, *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front*, has led to a pronounced lacuna in serious scholarship on Joel and his music. Relegated to adult contemporary radio stations due to the success of romantic pop ballads such as "Just the Way You Are" and derided as a drunken egomaniac by many reviewers, Joel has thus far been largely ignored by the academic world. The greater part of Joel's oeuvre supports these assumptions, as the majority of his creative output focuses on his personal life, both romantic and professional. Careful analysis of six songs, however, three from each of the aforementioned albums ("Pressure," "Goodnight Saigon," and "Allentown" from *The Nylon Curtain* and "We Didn't Start the Fire," "Leningrad," and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" from *Storm Front*) reveal Joel, for perhaps the only times in his lengthy career, placing the priorities and needs of his audience before his own. The result is a pair of albums (and three pairs of songs) that stands out from the remainder of his output in terms of social relevance. In these six songs, Joel adopted new roles, roles that he had previously eschewed. In "Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire," Joel becomes a sociologist, commenting on the societal effects of pop culture. "Goodnight Saigon" and "Leningrad" address the two great wars of Joel's lifetime, the Vietnam War and the Cold War, while "Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" provide narratives on the decline of the Pennsylvania steel industry and the North Atlantic fishery, respectively. Joel's evolution as both a songwriter and a global citizen becomes apparent through close examination of these six songs and the albums on which they appear, and their respective videos, revealing Joel's songwriting powers at their peak and his groundbreaking approach to the art of video-making.

Keywords: Billy Joel, rock & roll, songwriting, music videos, MTV, Vietnam War, Cold War, steel industry, North Atlantic fisheries

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Preface

When he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame on 15 March 1999, after he thanked his band members, his mother and daughter and girlfriend, and his bosses at Columbia Records, Billy Joel, in the direct manner for which he has been known throughout his extensive career, addressed his numerous critics head-on: "I know I've been referred to as derivative. Well, I'm damn guilty. I'm derivative as hell!"[1] For most of his career, which began in the late 1960s but did not get off the ground until his second solo album, *Piano Man* (1973), Joel has endured a reputation for writing music that copied (at best) or lampooned (at worst) his heroes and contemporaries, such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. The writers of *Rolling Stone* magazine in particular seemed to enjoy panning Joel's efforts, despite the fact that his records consistently charted high on the *Billboard* Hot 100 (three number 1 hit singles and thirty-three in the Top 40) and sold extremely well (Joel is the sixth-highest selling artist all-time in the United States and has sold over 150 million albums worldwide according to the Recording Industry Association of America).[2] One particularly scathing review appeared in 1980, after Joel released *Glass Houses*. In *Rolling Stone*, Paul Nelson took almost gleeful pleasure in exposing the irony that the song that would become Joel's first number 1 hit, "It's Still Rock 'n Roll to Me," was hardly rock 'n roll at all, but more "cocktail-lounge piano man."[3] Nelson continued by accusing Joel of copying the Rolling Stones on "You May Be Right," Paul Simon ("Don't Ask Me Why"), the Beatles ("All for Leyna") and the Eagles ("Close to the Borderline"). Nelson, however, unwittingly recognized Joel's efforts at writing

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[1] Billy Joel. "Billy Joel Accepts His Induction," *rockhall.com*. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, n.p. Web. 31 May 2011.

[2] "Top Selling Artists." *www.riaa.com*. Recording Industry Association of America, n.d. Web. 16 May 2011.

[3] Paul Nelson. "Billy Joel: Glass Houses," *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 1 May 1980. Web. 30 May 2011.

something new with this album; he writes of "Billy Joel's all-out attempt at a rock & roll album" and how Joel should "fess up, forget about being a rock & roller and settle down in the middle of the road."[4] In so doing, Nelson alludes to the fact that, until this point, very little in Joel's catalogue could truly have been considered rock & roll. He had been labeled "pop pastiche" by Stephen Holden in his review of *52nd Street* in *Rolling Stone*; Holden went so far as to call Joel "vaudevillian" and a mimic who "has the grasp of rock and the technical know-how to be able to caricature Bob Dylan and the Beatles … and an updated Anthony Newley … all in the same Las Vegas format."[5]

In these two reviews, Nelson and Holden paint a picture of an artist who relied on flash and dazzle to entertain crowds; Nelson calls Joel "a lounge lizard, whipping himself into an artificial frenzy,"[6] while Holden labels him a "bantam, hyperkinetic Rocky Balboa onstage," working his audiences "into a lather of adulation with the snappy calculation of borsch-belt ham."[7] Although their rhetoric may have been somewhat vitriolic, the view of Joel held by Nelson and Holden (and other reviewers in other publications) was not far off the mark. Their criticisms of Joel's style, in terms of both composition and performance, are not inaccurate. Much of Joel's catalogue in the 1970s does sound derivative (as the artist himself admits) of artists such as Dylan (on tracks such as "Captain Jack" and "She's Always a Woman") and Paul McCartney ("My Life"), or of styles like Tin Pan Alley ("New York State of Mind"). Joel's audience did not seem to mind that originality seemed to come and go in the early albums (songs such as "The Entertainer," with its clever lyrics packed with internal rhymes, witty observations about the recording industry, and intriguing use of multiple

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[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Stephen Holden. "Billy Joel: *52nd Street*." *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 14 December 1978. Web. 6 June 2011.

[6] Nelson, "*Glass Houses*."

[7] Holden, "*52nd Street*."

keyboard instruments, and "Summer Highland Falls," which features Joel's characteristic virtuoso piano playing and quietly defeated lyrics, show Joel at his original best), nor that his subject matter seemed restricted to songs about his life, his work and his loves, as his albums from the 1970s all sold well (save for the disappointing *Streetlife Serenade*). In fact, the same criticism could be leveled at most of the successful bands of the 1970s. The writers at *Rolling Stone* did not reserve their acerbic reviews and accusations of derivative music for Joel alone. For example, Joe McEwen called the Bee Gees "chameleons" and compared them unfavourably to KC and the Sunshine Band, Hall & Oates, and the Stylistics in his review of *Children of the World* in 1976.[8] Despite the largely negative review, the album hit number 1, had three major hits and sold almost three million copies.

Joel has suffered these types of scathing reviews throughout his career, particularly from influential popular culture periodicals such as *Rolling Stone* and *Stereo Review*, despite his success in terms of record sales and sold-out tours. After studying the various reviews of Joel's albums, it becomes clear that one of the primary reasons for this antagonistic relationship is that reviewers such as Nelson, Holden and Stephen Thomas Erlewine (among others) have identified only one trend that runs through Joel's music: his tendency towards autobiographical lyrical content. Many reviewers tire of such songs, especially if they consist of what could be perceived as the songwriter lamenting the difficulties of his or her life (see "Captain Jack" or "Summer, Highland Falls" for early examples of such tracks in Joel's oeuvre). These reviewers have failed to identify other, more subtle themes in Joel's compositional output, in which Joel is revealed as a more sensitive, thoughtful and self-aware songwriter. One such trend appears upon closer analysis of two landmark albums, 1981's *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front*, Joel's penultimate rock album to date, released in

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[8] Joe McEwen, "Bee Gees: *Children of the World*." *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 4 November 1976. Web. 7 June 2011.

1989. These albums appeared at crucial moments in Joel's development, both as a songwriter and as a global citizen. The first album, as I will demonstrate, came about as a result of Joel's identifying a new audience for his music, one that cared about how issues such as failing American industry and the Vietnam War impacted their lives and those of their neighbours. Written as he approached his thirtieth birthday, *The Nylon Curtain* also represents Joel's first comprehensive exploration of the potential of the music video; songs such as "Pressure," "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon" reveal Joel's thoughts on the influence of mass media, the collapse of the American steel industry and the war in Vietnam through aural (lyrics and music) and visual (the video) cues. *Storm Front* is the first album Joel wrote after another crucial event in his life, his ground-breaking tour of the Soviet Union in 1987. Armed with the lessons he learned in the process of writing *The Nylon Curtain*, such as writing from experience and doing thorough research, Joel once again tackled issues greater than the challenges he faced in his own life. "We Didn't Start the Fire," "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," and "Leningrad" reveal a more mature, more deliberate songwriter than the impulsive, self-centred one present on albums such as *52nd Street* and *Glass Houses*.

The failure of critics to recognize this trend in Joel's writing (the parallel nature of these two albums and the six songs that will feature most prominently in this study) has led to a pronounced lacuna in serious scholarship on Joel and his music. Relegated to adult contemporary radio stations due to the success of romantic pop ballads such as "Just the Way You Are," "She's Always a Woman" and "Uptown Girl," and derided as a drunken egomaniac by many reviewers, Joel has thus far been largely ignored by the academic world. Articles about Joel and his music in scholarly journals are virtually non-existent.[9] (Other examples of articles on Joel's music include "Billy Joel's History Lesson," a brief report by

[9] One important exception of note is Walter Everett's "The Learned vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel," which appeared in *Contemporary Music Review* in 2000.

Michael Longrie that appeared in *College Teaching* (Fall, 1997) regarding the author's attempts to teach his students to think historically, and David James' "The Viet Nam War and American Music," which discredits "Goodnight Saigon" as "derived as much from a decade of cultural exploitation of deranged vets ... as from any actual experience.")[10] Monographs about Joel that do exist are largely journalistic in tone and lack serious analysis. For example, the most significant biography of Joel to date is Mark Bego's 2007 offering, *Billy Joel: A Biography* (Thunder Mouth Press). Bego did not succeed in talking to Joel for his book, relying instead on extensive interviews with former band members such as Richie Cannata and Liberty DeVitto. The end result, while a fascinating examination of Joel's life and works with an extensive bibliography, therefore relies heavily on anecdotal evidence and interviews given by Joel to newspapers and magazines. Other biographies take an even less scholarly approach; Hank Bordowitz's *Billy Joel: The Life and Times of an Angry Young Man* (Billboard Books, 2005) contains virtually no analysis and does not have a bibliography, relegating it to fan reading only. This study, therefore, will rely heavily on examining these six songs in their historical and cultural context, analyzing the lyrical constructs as they relate to the musical characteristics distinct to each song, and situating the songs in the backdrop created by the accompanying videos. A brief discussion of Joel's life and works, and the musical environment in which he wrote, is necessary for providing a historical and cultural context for these six songs. The study will then continue with an in-depth analysis of the pairs of songs: "Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire;" "Goodnight Saigon" and "Leningrad;" and "Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'."

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[10] David James, "The Viet Nam War and American Music." *Social Text*, No. 23 (Autumn-Winter 1989), p. 137.

Chapter 1

A Biographical Sketch

Joel developed his distinctive compositional style with several solo albums in the 1970s. Beginning with *Cold Spring Harbour* (1971), Joel's forte was obviously his keyboard playing, as evidenced from the dominance of the piano in early albums such as the aforementioned *Cold Spring Harbor* and *Piano Man* (1973). He had previously played in a two-man band that specialized in hard rock called Attila, and he felt that he had explored rock & roll to the extent he needed. The early albums are, therefore, lighter in touch and more sensitive lyrically than some of his later, more heavily produced albums. Joel had attempted to commit suicide shortly before recording *Cold Spring Harbor* and had also started an affair with Elizabeth Small (née Weber), the wife of his former band mate from Attila. Joel's resulting emotional vulnerability and fragile psyche are evident in the songs from this album. Tracks such as "She's Got a Way" (still one of Joel's most moving love ballads) and "Got to Begin Again" started Joel's reputation as a premier writer of thoughtful love songs and earned him comparisons to Cat Stevens and James Taylor. The pop ballad "You Look So Good to Me" references Bob Dylan with the use of a Hammond B3 organ and Joel's harmonica playing, while "Tomorrow is Today" evokes Carole King's sensitive piano playing and understated vocals on tracks such as "So Far Away" and "Home Again" from her seminal 1971 album *Tapestry*. *Cold Spring Harbor* even includes Joel's first purely instrumental track, "Nocturne," a solo piano piece that showed Joel's skills as a keyboard player as well as the influence art music had played on his development as a musician (Joel had taken classical piano lessons from a young age).[11]

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[11] Walter Everett's article, "The Learned vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel," published in 2000 by *Contemporary Music Review*, details Joel's early exposure to classical music and many examples of the influence of such music on his pop repertoire, especially in pages 108 through 114.

Cold Spring Harbor sold poorly and received little radio play, mostly because an error during the overdub process created problems during the mastering: the backing track was sounded correct, but Joel's vocal track was too high. In 1984, Columbia Records bought the album from Family Productions, then remixed and re-released the album without any involvement from Joel. As Mark Bego states, the rerelease reveals "a simply produced, well-crafted, finely written collection of sensitive songs … it remains the purest example of his raw talent as a young songwriter and singer, as well as an accomplished pianist. His keyboard work is very clearly up front in the mix, and his voice sounds young and fresh."[12] The songwriting style evident on *Cold Spring Harbor* attracted Clive Davis, head of Columbia Records, to Joel, and Davis signed the new young talent to his label in 1972. Davis had already established a reputation for discovering promising young talent by signing artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Sly and the Family Stone and Janis Joplin. In the wake of hit records by singer-songwriters such as Carole King, Melanie, Harry Chapin, Don McLean and Cat Stevens, Davis (among others at Columbia) could sense a change in the musical landscape in the early years of the 70s, and Joel, by this time playing in Los Angeles under the pseudonym Bill Martin, fit the mold perfectly. The style that he developed while playing at piano bars was not as flamboyant as Elton John's, nor did he have the same blues rock edge as Bruce Springsteen (to whom he is often compared); rather, it was Joel's dexterous, virtuosic playing, combined with his honest and accessible lyrics ("People tell me life is sweeter, but I don't hear what they say/ Nothing comes to change my life so tomorrow is today." – "Tomorrow is Today," *Cold Spring Harbor*), that drew listeners to his music. Melanie, a rising star herself after her surprise number 1 hit "Brand New Key," was attracted to Joel's potential: "He had the voice, he had the insightful writing skills, and he could

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[12] Mark Bego. *Billy Joel: The Biography*. (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007), p. 58.

play the piano brilliantly."[13] The time was right for Joel to make a statement as a fresh face on the singer-songwriter scene.

That statement came in the form of Joel's second solo album, *Piano Man*, released on Columbia Records in 1973. The album features a wide variety of styles, from the Kris Kristofferson-inspired "Travelin' Prayer," which played into the increasing popularity of country music, to "Captain Jack," Joel's epic and introspective snapshot of New York in the early 70s. Joel was undoubtedly influenced by Elton John's *Tumbleweed Connection*, released two years earlier, as evidenced by Sneaky Pete Kleinow's steel guitar on "Travelin' Prayer" and "You're My Home," and the country-rock feel of "Stop in Nevada." The album also included the banjo playing of Eric Weissberg (whose playing can be heard during "Dueling Banjos" in the 1972 film *Deliverance*). The most enduring single from *Piano Man* was the title track, in which Joel-as-narrator sings of his experiences with playing in a piano bar, and his interactions with the lonely and desperate regulars. "Piano Man" could be read as a parody of the piano bar experience, but Joel maintains the song was an homage, not a spoof. He called it "an appreciation for the fact that I don't have to do that anymore," and claimed "I've never given myself more than two seconds of self-pity ever since I realized that the piano bar gig is something a lot of people have to do for years, and maybe for their entire lives."[14] Joel asserts that the characters in the song, from Paul, the real estate broker who wants to write a book, to the waitress "practicing politics" (Elizabeth, his girlfriend and soon-to-be wife, waited tables in the bar at which he worked), to Davy in the Navy, were real people he encountered during his gig at the bar in Los Angeles. He has also been accused of imitating Bob Dylan during the harmonica solo in the instrumental verse. Joel readily admits to doing so: "I remember I saw Bob Dylan when he played in the Village in the

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[13] Interview with Melanie conducted by Mark Bego, cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 67.

[14] Bill DeMain. "Billy Joel: Scenes from a Musical Life," *Performing Songwriter*, January-February 1996.

early 60s. He was wearing that harmonica holder … I always loved Dylan's style of harmonica playing: he breathes in, he breathes out. And if his lips happen to hit the right notes, great."[15] Despite his obvious evocation of Dylan's harmonica style in "Piano Man," the song has become synonymous with Joel; he has since been known as the "Piano Man," and rarely does one of his concerts end without Joel leading a rousing rendition of the song for his final encore. Joel managed to use the amalgamation of idioms on *Piano Man* to create his own image, an image that has persisted throughout his career.

To some critics, Joel's new image evoked the character of the dispassionate narrator, while to others it conjured up the image of the sympathetic observer. In his first *Rolling Stone* review, however, Joel was accused of being "unable to come to terms with himself" despite his "facility at portraying others," and that his "bristling ego mocks his supposedly objective point of view."[16] To others, though, Joel's perspective on events in his life suggested an ability to cast himself "in the role as the careful eyewitness to the lives of the people around him" and to tell a story "as a spectator and yet in an involving and deeply touching way."[17] For his next album, 1974's *Streetlife Serenade*, Joel continued to focus on this spectator/narrator role. Songs such as "Los Angelenos" and the title track show Joel commenting on his surroundings, while "The Great Suburban Showdown" and "Souvenir" are more poignant personal statements about the life he wished he had had and the realities of his show-business life. The centrepiece of the album, however, is "The Entertainer," in which Joel puts his cynicism about the recording industry on full display. (Ironically (considering the lyric "If you're gonna have a hit, you gotta make it fit, so they cut it down to 3'05"), in an attempt to make "The Entertainer" more palatable for national airplay, Columbia cut out

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[15] "Billy Joel," *Blender*, 2000, as cited in Bego, p. 69.

[16] Jack Breschard, "Billy Joel: *Piano Man*." *www.Rolling Stone.com*. *Rolling Stone* magazine, 14 March 1974. Web. 7 June 2011.

[17] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 72.

the verse that included the lyrics "I played all kinds of palaces, I laid all kinds of girls." In so doing, the song was cut from an album length of 3'39" to 3'05".)[18] *Streetlife Serenade* sold slowly and charted poorly; the album peaked at number 35 and "The Entertainer" was the only charting single (reaching number 34). Critical reviews were mixed. *Rolling Stone* lambasted it: "Billy Joel's pop schmaltz occupies a stylistic no man's land where musical and lyric truisms borrowed from disparate sources are forced together … he has nothing to say as a writer at present."[19] *Stereo Review*, however, named it "Album of the Year."

Perhaps the most significant result of Joel's third album was the comparisons that listeners and reviewers alike began to make between Joel and Elton John. Joel claims a diverse range of influences from this time, including Steve Winwood and Paul McCartney, while stylistically, Joel was fascinated by the soundscapes possible from the development of Moog synthesizers, especially the work that he heard on albums such as *Close to the Edge* by Yes (1972) and Emerson, Lake and Palmer's self-titled 1970 debut.[20] It was John, however, with whom the listening public and other artists began drawing the closest parallels. Shortly before recording *Streetlife Serenade,* Joel signed a management deal with Caribou, the same company that managed John's career (as well as that of Chicago). Joel had already been compared to Elton John for the country-influenced songs from *Piano Man*, and so after he signed with Caribou and agreed to record his third album with Caribou Recording Studios, where John had recently recorded *Caribou* (1974), the parallels between the two keyboard players were too numerous to ignore. Ultimately, Joel did not record *Streetlife Serenade* at

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[18] Walter Everett. "'If You're Gonna Have a Hit': Intratextual Mixes and Edits of Pop Recordings," *Popular Music*, Volume 29/2 (2010), p. 229.

[19] Stephen Holden, "Billy Joel: *Streetlife Serenade*," *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 5 December 1974. Web. 4 June 2011.

[20] Bego, Billy Joel, p. 79.

Caribou Records, but rather at Devonshire Sound Studios in California, but the comparisons between him and John persisted.

The similarities between Joel and John are striking. Both were born in the post-war years (Joel in 1949, John in 1947) to musical families in which the father was noticeably absent. Joel's father, a German by birth and a classical pianist, moved back to Europe in 1957 after divorcing his mother, while John's father and mother divorced when he was fifteen (afterwards, John lived with his mother and stepfather). Both artists showed remarkable talent on the piano at a young age and studied music privately through their adolescence. John, then going by Reginald Dwight, his birth name, took a job as a pianist at a local pub, just as Joel did in his early twenties, where John played for a small salary and tips. He showed great skill as a vocalist and piano player, but it was not until he teamed up with Bernie Taupin in 1967 that he found his niche as a melodist. Taupin provided the lyrics for John, who then wrote melodies and accompaniment. In fact, in an interview with *Billboard* magazine in 1997, Taupin confirmed the claim that he and John had never actually written a song together in the same room; Taupin defended their technique saying "We both do what we do relatively well. So what would I do – just sit there – while he plays piano?"[21] When asked whether they had ever tried writing songs the other way around, Taupin stated, "The only times we've tried to do it … it was really useless and awful. The only album that really has a lot of songs on it that we wrote the other way around is 'Jump Up!,' and it's a really lame album."[22]

This approach baffled Joel, who almost always wrote melodies first, then added lyrics at a later date. At one point when the two were on tour together, John showed Joel some lyrics from Taupin and asked his opinion on what to do with

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[21] Craig Rosen, "Interview with Bernie Taupin," *books.google.com*. Google Books. From *Billboard*, 4 October 1997, p. EJ11-80. Web. 8 June 2011.

[22] *Ibid*., p. EJ-16

them. Joel recalled thinking, "I'm looking at these lyrics and I can't make head or tail of how to do this, because what it means to me is that the music is secondary to the lyric. In other words, the music isn't the motivational beginning of the song being written … A lot of writers write like that. I'm the opposite." Regardless of their differing approaches to songwriting, the two artists found early success with pop ballads. John's first hit came from his second album, the self-titled *Elton John*, released in 1970. "Your Song" was originally released as the B-side to "Take Me to the Pilot," but American disc jockeys preferred "Your Song;" consequently, the folk-tinged love song climbed into the top ten on charts in both the United Kingdom and the United States. *Elton John* was nominated for the Grammy for Album of the Year in 1971, and "Your Song" became an enduring hit for the young John. In Joel's case, his most popular song from *Cold Spring Harbor* was "She's Got a Way," a "cornball song" according to him, while his first top ten single was "Just the Way You Are." John did not chafe at achieving great popularity with romantic pop ballads, however, unlike Joel, who worked to gain favour with the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart on later albums by adopting a harder, more rock & roll sound.

The similarities between the two do not end with biographical details, however. There are also parallels that can be drawn from their playing styles. Both John and Joel play predominantly on the piano, and they both received their initial training through classical lessons. This early focus on art music is evident both in their playing style and their compositions through the use of "classical" idioms; examples in Joel's oeuvre include suggestions of Chopin's preludes in the opening of "She's Got a Way," the direct quotation of the second movement of Beethoven's *Pathètique* Sonata in the chorus of "This Night," the Copland-esque instrumental break in "The Ballad of Billy the Kid, and the Baroque figurations in the keyboard sections of "James."[23] John seems to have been more influenced by sacred music than Joel, however, who has repeatedly claimed that his greatest classical

[23] Everett, "Songs of Billy Joel," pp. 110-112, 120-122.

influences were Beethoven and Chopin. John once stated, "If in doubt, I write a hymn."[24] This assertion is confirmed by John's strong chordal playing, his inclusion of suspended fourths (such as in the introduction to "Tiny Dancer" and in "Amoreena"), and the use of plagal cadences. The use of subdominant-to-tonic cadential gestures is not always suggestive of sacred music when such gestures arise in popular music, as most popular music genres favour IV-I over V-I during cadences, but John's voice leading sometimes suggests the strong influence of hymn music on his writing.[25] He also uses hymn-like chord progressions and voice leading, such as the E minor – G major 7 – C major in the second phrase of "Amoreena" and the opening phrase of "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road."

John's signature style emerged early in his oeuvre; the piano introductions for "Your Song," (1970) "Levon" and "Tiny Dancer" (both from his fourth album, 1971's *Madman Across the Water*) all begin with the same rolling left hand technique with arpeggiated chords in the right hand. Joel displays techniques similar to John on early songs such as "Turn Around" (arpeggios in the right hand with simple chording in the left) and "Tomorrow is Today" (hymn-like chord progressions), both from *Cold Spring Harbor*, but his own distinctive style also begins to emerge on this album. On songs such as "She's Got a Way" and "You Can Make Me Free," Joel shows a tendency to establish the piano as a rhythmic device early in the track, providing steady beats, before embellishing the melody in the right hand later in the song. Another distinguishing feature of Joel's playing is his ability to play virtuosic maneuvers in the right hand; this technique appears in "Falling of the Rain" and "Everybody Loves You Now," then again later with "Summer, Highland Falls" (*Turnstiles*, 1974) and "Running on Ice." (*The Bridge*, 1986) Other similarities include favouring the use of syncopation after a left hand arpeggio in keyboard introductions (evidenced in

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[24] Lee Hall, "'I Grew Up in Billy Elliot's World'," *The Telegraph*, 19 April 2005.

[25] Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen For in Rock: A Stylistic Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 113-14.

"Tiny Dancer" and "Just the Way You Are"). Joel did not always appreciate the comparisons to John (he once said "I see critics compare me to Elton John … and I go, 'No, no, no, it's McCartney!"),[26] but their presence as two of the most popular piano-based pop-rock acts in the 1970s drew them together nonetheless. They became close friends, and the two virtuoso piano players decided to go on tour together in 1994. The "Face to Face" tour was such a global success that they decided to tour together again in 1995, 1998, 2001-03 and 2009-10.

Joel was not very happy with the results of the *Streetlife Serenade* recording sessions, and once claimed that since he "drizzled synthesizer oil all over the album," he had not listened to it since its release.[27] Feeling at a creative standstill and tired of the seductive lifestyle that he was enjoying in Los Angeles, Joel decided that he needed a change of scenery, and there was only one logical place to go: back to New York. Joel's move to New York in 1976 produced two of his most popular songs to date. First, Joel literally made his farewells to California by writing "Say Goodbye to Hollywood;" then, upon his arrival in back in New York, he immediately wrote an ode to his hometown. "It took me about half an hour to write. I got back to New York, I moved into the house [in Highland Falls, NY], literally had my suitcase with me. I got off a bus that I took up the Hudson [River] and dropped my bags. There was a piano in this house, and I went right over to it and played 'New York State of Mind.'"[28] The move stimulated Joel's creativity, and he soon felt ready to record a new album. Dissatisfied with the results of using studio musicians on *Streetlife Serenade*, Joel decided to try using a band. Caribou had had great success with Elton John's band, and so Jimmy Guercio, the head of the label, pressured Joel to use the same band for the new

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[26] John Rockwell, "Billy Joel Sings the Praises of New York," *New York Times*, 10 December 1978.

[27] "Billy Joel," *Blender*, 2000, as cited in Bego, p. 79.

[28] Bill Demain, "In a New Romantic State of Mind," *Performing Songwriter*, November 2001.

album; the two were both keyboard players, and so it might work. Joel recorded a few songs with John's band, hated the results, and threw out the recordings.

He was intrigued by the possibilities that came along with having a steady band playing with him, however; consequently, with the help of Brian Ruggles, his sound man, Joel put together a group of East Coast musicians that would form the core of his band for the following ten years: Doug Stegmeyer (bass), Liberty DeVitto (drums), Russell Javors (guitar) and Richie Cannata (saxophone). At least one member of this core group participated in every one of Joel's tours between 1976 and 2000; DeVitto and Cannata both played on Joel's final studio album (to date), *River of Dreams* (1990). The album that resulted from the genesis of this new band is one of Joel's most critically-acclaimed: *Turnstiles*. While it failed to crack the top 100 on the *Billboard* charts, the album is one of Joel's most successful in terms of continuity of theme and connecting with a specific audience. The previous albums show Joel experimenting with a wide variety of styles, both instrumental and vocal, but *Turnstiles* is more consistent, and Joel accordingly sounds more confident and secure in his vocals. *Turnstiles* captured a moment in time, especially for New Yorkers. In 1976, New York suffered a terrible financial crisis, during which the city turned to President Gerald Ford's federal government for aid. Ford turned down the city, and New York came perilously close to declaring bankruptcy. The blackout of 1977 led to widespread looting and vandalism and the arrest of over 3,000 people; by the end of the decade, more than one million people had moved out of New York and into the suburbs. It took the city decades to recover from the population loss. Joel tapped into the feelings of despair and loss that many New Yorkers were feeling at the time with songs such as "Summer, Highland Falls," "New York State of Mind" and "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)." "New York State of Mind" is a jazz-inspired tribute to the city of his birth. Rather than creating a saccharine paean to New York, however, Joel uses his upper vocal range to great effect here, creating a sense of anguish as he sings of "Chinatown and … Riverside." There is a desperation evident in this track as Joel builds to an

emotional climax; the song is Joel's response to Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York," but rather than painting a picture of a "city that never sleeps," Joel uses his feelings of melancholy that had been building during his time in Los Angeles to create a sensation almost of relief by the end of the song. Joel had finally come home, but he returned to find a city on its knees, crumbling under its own weight.

The sense of malaise and defeatism at which Joel hints in "New York State of Mind" is fully evident in "Summer, Highland Falls," ("Now I have seen that sad surrender in my lover's eyes/ And I can only stand apart and sympathize./ But we are always what our situations hand us/ It's either sadness or euphoria."), while in "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)," Joel imagines telling his grandchild about the day he watched New York go dark and close its doors, after witnessing the worst fears of New Yorkers come true in the financial crisis of the time. "James" and "I've Loved These Days" continue a trend that Joel began on the earlier albums, that of relating stories from his own life with a sense of tragedy and irony. In "I've Loved These Days," Joel sings about the excesses in his life, the champagne, caviar and cocaine that have now become available to him, but the accompaniment is contemplative and laced with *ennui*, while the hints of overindulgence creep their way into the lyrics: "We're going wrong, we're gaining weight/ We're sleeping long and far too late." Under the pretense of asking an old friend how his life has gone, Joel ends up questioning his own career choices in "James": "I went on the road, you pursued an education ... Do what's good for you/ Or you're not good for anybody." Finally, Joel pays tribute to Phil Spector with the opening track, "Say Goodbye to Hollywood." DeVitto's opening drum hits are immediately reminiscent of The Ronettes' "Be My Baby," while the echoey vocal track and orchestral strings are an homage to Spector's "Wall of Sound" production technique.

Turnstiles represents a significant turning point for Joel in that it was his first album with the band that would remain with him for most of the rest of his career, but it also showed Joel his own limitations in terms of musical

production. Additionally, Joel was envious of the success Barbra Streisand achieved with her cover of "New York State of Mind" that appeared on her 1977 album *Superman*; the album reached number 3 and was certified platinum within three months of its release date. No song of Joel's had reached the top 10 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 ("Piano Man" peaked at number 4 on the Adult Contemporary charts), and neither had any of his albums. The pieces seemed to be in place for Joel to make a serious attempt at garnering public success (through sales) and critical success (through the reviews): he was back at home in New York, he had an enthusiastic and talented band behind him, and his confidence in his own writing abilities had grown through his experience with *Turnstiles*. All that remained was for Joel to find the right producer for his next album. Joel's first choice was George Martin, the producer for the Beatles; Joel took a great deal of inspiration from the Beatles, and so Martin seemed a logical option. Martin auditioned Joel and the band but ultimately turned them down; the producer wanted to use studio musicians for the album, but Joel refused, insisting on using his new band. Elizabeth, now Billy's wife and manager, suggested approaching Phil Ramone, who had had great success producing Dionne Warwick, Paul Simon, Phoebe Snow and Kenny Loggins in previous years. His ability to produce hit songs and albums consistently made him a hot ticket in the music world, and so Billy and Elizabeth pursued him aggressively. They invited Ramone to hear the band play at Carnegie Hall in 1977 (Joel played four nights at Carnegie in June of that year), and the producer liked what he heard:

> I was prepared to see the newest singer/songwriter in the old balladeer tradition. But what I observed was a first-rate rock & roll band. The interplay between Billy and his band members was extraordinary. They had much more than just raw power; they had a certain joy in playing together, without ever losing sight of the meaning of the material.[29]

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[29] *Songs in the Attic*, liner notes, Columbia Records, 1981.

Ramone contacted Joel soon after and told him that he wanted to begin recording a new album immediately. For both Joel and Ramone, the band was vital for the success of any projects they might work on; Ramone's dedication to the integrity of Joel's band cemented the relationship between the two artists.

The collaboration was an enormous success and paid immediate dividends with Joel's fifth studio album, *The Stranger*. Considered by most critics to be Joel's best album, *The Stranger* was an unqualified smash hit. The album peaked at number 2 on the *Billboard* charts, stayed on the charts for 137 weeks and was certified ten times platinum. Only Joel's *Greatest Hit Volume I and Volume II* has sold more copies, and four of the nine tracks on the album reached the top 25 of the *Billboard* Hot 100: "Only the Good Die Young," (number 24) "She's Always a Woman to Me," (17) "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)," (17), and "Just the Way You Are." (3) Joel wrote most of the album before he and the band entered A&R Recording Studio, Ramone's private studio (only "Vienna," "Get it Right the First Time" and "The Stranger" were written in the studio), but it was Ramone's suggestions and creative genius that turned some of Joel's ideas into hit singles. For example, Joel originally intended "Only the Good Die Young" to be played in a reggae style, but Ramone suggested that Joel try it as a shuffle;[30] furthermore, when the band was having difficulty finding the right groove for "Just the Way You Are," Ramone got DeVitto to try a South American rhythm. DeVitto started "dropping the bass drum out in certain places, and playing the tom-tom on the 'and' of four."[31] Ramone's suggestions changed "Just the Way You Are" from a song the whole band considered "schmaltzy" (Joel originally suggested using a cha-cha rhythm which, according to Ramone, made the song sound like Elton

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[30] David and Victoria Sheff. "Playboy Interview: Billy Joel." *www.piano-man.de*. Die Billy Joel Fansite, n.d. From *Playboy*, May 1982. Web. 21 October 2008.

[31] Phil Ramone, *Making Records: The Scenes Behind the Music* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), p. 48.

John's "Daniel" or Stevie Wonder's "You are the Sunshine of My Life") to Joel's first *bona fide* hit single.[32]

Joel had found success in relating stories about the surroundings in which he had grown up with several songs on *Turnstiles*; it seemed only natural to continue in the same vein with this new album. The tracks on *The Stranger* are at times intensely personal ("Just the Way You Are," "The Stranger" and "She's Always a Woman") while at others, they show Joel concentrating on narrating his view of life in New York. "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)" is a thinly-veiled reference to organized crime in New York and New Jersey; the cast of characters, including Anthony, the overprotective Mama Leone, and Sergeant O'Leary, the cop on the take, is colourful, but the underlying tone is dark and threatening: "If he can't drive with a broken back, at least he can polish the fenders." Joel initially conceived of "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" as three separate songs: "The Italian Restaurant Song," "Things are O.K. in Oyster Bay," and "The Ballad of Brenda and Eddie." Each 'song' has its own distinct character and represents a different aspect of Joel's life and experiences. The first section takes the form of a romantic piano ballad, typical of so much of Joel's repertoire, as the narrator welcomes his friend to their restaurant. A saxophone solo enables the segue from pop ballad to upbeat New Orleans-influenced jazz when the narrator gives his own background, which then morphs into a high-energy rock & roll number for the story of Brenda & Eddie. "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" is an excellent example of Joel's songwriting process. For the most part, he begins with a melody and then the lyrics come later; such was the case with the middle section

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[32] The song still would not have made the album, however, if not for the efforts of Phoebe Snow, who heard Joel play the track and immediately told him, "That's the hit!"

of this song.[33] In this instance, Joel had a good tune but no good lyrics; he would play around on the piano, singing "There's the L, it's the doorbell, Brian's there with a bottle of whiskey, get in the mood for Chinese food." Joel called it a "dopey" little song that only came together when he realized that his character was talking about Brenda and Eddie, the protagonists from the third section. This realization enabled Joel to write the instrumental transition from "Oyster Bay" to "Brenda and Eddie" and link the whole narrative to the first section.[34]

Joel's profile ascended quickly after the release of *The Stranger*. In September 1977, Joel appeared on Saturday Night Live and played "Just the Way to Are" to an estimated television audience of twenty million. The tour for *Turnstiles* primarily included concerts at university performance halls; with the tour for *The Stranger*, however, Joel began playing to sold-out crowds in arenas such as Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto and Nassau Coliseum in New York. In 1978, Joel was profiled in *People* magazine, and even *Rolling Stone* magazine grudgingly gave the album a positive review, stating "This is the first Billy Joel album in some time that has significantly expanded his repertoire ... Together with producer Phil Ramone, Joel has achieved a fluid sound occasionally sparked by a light soul touch."[35] Joel was eager to use his newfound success and to take advantage of the instant chemistry he had found with Ramone (Ramone first heard the band in June of 1977 and *The Stranger* was released only three months later), and so he began planning ideas for his next album while touring *The Stranger*. He had shown himself to be somewhat of a chameleon thus far, including a wide range of genres throughout his repertoire such as country

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[33] Ironically, one time that Joel wrote the lyrics first and the melody later, he produced one of his biggest hit singles, "We Didn't Start the Fire." Joel hated the melody for the song, citing it as a reason that he usually writes melodies first, but it became his third career number 1 single when *Storm Front* was released in 1989.

[34] Demain, "Billy Joel: Scenes from a Musical Life."

[35] Ira Mayer, "Billy Joel: *The Stranger*," *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 15 December 1977. Web. 5 June 2011.

("Travellin' Prayer"), Latin-infused pop ("Just the Way You Are"), Dylan-esque folk rock ("Piano Man") and classical ("Nocturne" from *Cold Spring Harbor*). Joel had also shown some interest in jazz, especially after enlisting the services of Cannata, whose jazz-tinged sax can be heard on "New York State of Mind" and "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant." Ramone heard the potential with Joel's band for a greater focus on jazz, and so he approached Joel about experimenting with the genre on the next album. Ramone recalls telling Joel, "Why shouldn't you experiment a bit, at least on a few songs, if not a whole album? It's okay to create a jazz kind of mind. You can do it credibly because you've written a song called 'Zanzibar' and at the very end there are jazz riffs. Those phrases are a nod to all of the great jazz artists you heard while you were growing up."[36]

The resulting album, *52nd Street*, represented a dramatic shift in Joel's sound, one that resonated with his fans. Released in 1978, *52nd Street* sold over seven million copies and gave Joel his first number 1 album. Three singles charted well on the *Billboard* Hot 100, including "My Life," which peaked at number 3. The most distinctive tracks on the album, however, are those in which Joel fully embraced the jazz sound to which Ramone had referred during the creation of the album, namely "Zanzibar," "Stiletto" and the title track. Ramone supplemented Joel's band with several big-name jazz soloists for the album such as Freddie Hubbard (whose flugelhorn solo in "Zanzibar" became one of the iconic melodies of *52nd Street*), Hugh McCracken and Eric Gale (guitar), and Mike Manieri (vibes and marimba). These musicians brought with them the experience of playing and recording with artists such as Steely Dan, B. B. King, Aretha Franklin, Van Morrison, John Coltrane and Herbie Hancock. The combination of Joel's regular band members and these "prodigious contemporary jazz soloists" worked so well that Ramone and Joel started calling the band "The Lords of 52nd Street."[37] Joel's band members, rather than being

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[36] Ramone, *Making Records*, p. 37.

[37] *Ibid*, p. 37.

threatened by the presence of outside musicians (during recording sessions for *The Stranger*, Cannata had reacted poorly when Ramone brought in alto sax player Phil Woods for the solo on "Just the Way You Are"), enjoyed the experience of jamming with such experienced jazz artists. Joel recalled a conversation with bass player Doug Stegmeyer when Stegmeyer proclaimed, after recording "Zanzibar," "Now I feel like an adult." Recording *52nd Street* was a legitimizing process for the band, and the fans responded. The tour for the album included sold-out shows across the United States and Canada, highlighted by a multi-show gig at Madison Square Garden. Additionally, Joel's first two Grammy wins came in the year *52nd Street* was released, including awards for Record of the Year and Song of the Year for "Just the Way You Are," and in May of 1978, Joel had three different singles on the charts.

By 1980, Joel had firmly established himself as a rising star and a significant recording artist. He had a number 1 album to his credit, he was playing to sold-out crowds at the biggest venues in the United States, and his onstage antics, which included developing his trademark closing phrase, "Don't take shit from anybody!", were starting to solidify his reputation as a "belligerent, rowdy and uncouth" performer, but also as a dynamic and passionate musician.[38] Joel was pleased with how he and the band were developing as a group and with the fact that he had an image both as "the Entertainer" and "the Piano Man," and as "a scrappy Long Island balladeer."[39] He did not want to stagnate, however; Joel has often stated that he intended to change his approach for each album: "I have never done the same thing twice … After *Stranger*, I could have done *Son of Stranger*, but I've never done that … When I come up with a melody, it is not calculated … There's no formula."[40] When it came time to write his next album,

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[38] Dave Marsh, "Billy Joel: The Miracle of 52nd Street," *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 28 October 1982. Web. 7 June 2011.

[39] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 155.

[40] Sheff, "Playboy Interview."

therefore, Joel wanted to strike out in a new direction. He was not the only one to do so. In response to the emergence of New Wave artists such as the Talking Heads and Blondie, and punk rock groups like the Sex Pistols, "softer" artists began to put an edge on their sound. Linda Ronstadt enlisted the help of emerging songwriter Elvis Costello for *Mad Love* and Carly Simon adopted a harder style with *Spy*. Joel followed suit in an endeavour to create a stronger image for himself. He had made forays into the world of harder rock & roll in the past on tracks such as "Big Shot" and "Captain Jack," but at this point, Joel decided that it was time to attempt to write an album that focused thematically on rock & roll, just as *52nd Street* had with jazz. Joel's intentions were clear even from the album cover of *Glass Houses*: he stands with his back to the camera, dressed in a leather jacket and blue jeans, arm cocked back to throw a rock at a glass house (his own), while the back cover shows him looking through a hole in a glass pane, presumably the one he has broken. Furthermore, the album begins with the sound of glass breaking, kicking off one of its more successful tracks, "You May Be Right." Joel could not have sent a clearer message to start this album: his previous image as a romantic pop balladeer was going to be a thing of the past.

The rock edge that Joel was looking for is evident on several tracks on *Glass Houses*. "All for Lenya," a frenzied arena rock number that features Joel's high-energy piano playing in the foreground, was indicative of his new approach to song-writing. The "wall of sound" production is still in evidence, but the insistent lead guitar, impassioned lyrics, and heavy percussion during the bridge and short instrumental section give notice of Joel's intention to change his sound. Joel adopts a New Wave sound on "Close to the Borderline." The mix is pared down to a simple ensemble: lead guitar, bass, voice and drums. Joel's keyboard is conspicuously absent; in its place is DeVitto's tom-heavy percussion and a heavily distorted guitar solo. Joel experiments with his vocal range in this song, sacrificing some of the pure tone that made "Just the Way You Are" so popular with adult contemporary audiences for the sake of emulating the intensity of the

New Wave and punk rockers that were dominating the charts in the early 80s. The greatest success on the album, however, was "It's Still Rock & Roll to Me." Joel intended the song to be a reaction to music reviewers criticizing new genres of popular music such as punk rock, funk and New Wave. In the lyrics, Joel carries on a conversation with his publicist who insists that Joel change his image. His response: the sound is what matters, not the look. "Next phase, New Wave, dance craze, anyways, it's still rock & roll to me," sings the narrator, adding that "there's a new band in town,/ But you can't get the sound from a story in a magazine/ aimed at your average teen." This lyric represented the latest salvo in the ongoing battle between Joel and the press. When discussing "It's Still Rock & Roll to Me," Joel stated "I'm totally discounting everything these guys say. I don't sit around and play footsie with the press, especially with *Rolling Stone*. I have a running battle with them. I don't know when it started, but I know I'm not about to let it drop. I'm gonna keep it going. I kind of dig it."[41]

If Joel meant to bait the press with "It's Still Rock & Roll to Me," then the song was a resounding success. As I discussed above, *Rolling Stone* seemed to go out of their way to pan the album, devoting over one thousand words to their review of *Glass Houses*.[42] Alternately, *Stereo Review*, with whom Joel seemed to have a much better relationship, wrote "There isn't one instance in which he's coasting, or repeating himself, or taking a second (easy) shot at a favorite subject or theme … the music is there, the ideas are there, and the ability to execute both superbly is there. Billy Joel has reached an exciting and singular moment in his career: the first big crest."[43] The fans agreed. "It's Still Rock & Roll to Me" became Joel's

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[41] *Ibid.*

[42] The magazine published a similarly-sized review for *52nd Street*, but wrote only two hundred words for their positive review of *The Stranger*.

[43] Peter Reilly, "Billy Joel's *Glass Houses*: Beyond Category," *Stereo Review*, June 1980, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 160.

first number 1 hit single on the *Billboard* Hot 100, remaining atop the charts for two weeks. "You May Be Right," "Don't Ask Me Why" and "Sometimes a Fantasy" also spent time on the *Billboard* charts, and the album stayed on the charts for seventy-three weeks, eventually selling over seven million copies. Joel won another Grammy for Best Male Rock Performance, and the *Glass Houses* tour was a resounding success. Despite his success, the on-going battle with *Rolling Stone* (and others, such as Robert Palmer of the *New York Times*) took its toll on Joel. During concerts, he used to stop in the middle of "It's Still Rock & Roll to Me" – after singing "It doesn't matter what they say in the papers" – read something from a recent review, and then tear it up to the delight of his fans.

The foray into harder rock & roll was a success for Joel, but, consistent with his desire not to repeat himself, he decided once again to strike out in a new direction for his eighth studio album. *The Nylon Curtain* represented a fresh start for Joel in many ways. His marriage to his first wife, Elizabeth, came to an end while he was working on the album. Elizabeth Joel had also been acting as her husband's manager, but as the relationship grew strained in the early 80s, Billy's brother-in-law, Frank Weber, took over Elizabeth's responsibilities as manager (a disastrous move for Joel, as Weber stole millions of dollars from him over the several years following).[44] Furthermore, the band experienced a major shakeup at this time. Joel's band had remained fairly consistent through the late 70s: DeVitto, Stegmeyer, Brown, Javors, and Cannata played on every album from *Turnstiles* through *Glass Houses*. Indeed, Joel was so comfortable with the group that only these six musicians (including Joel) appeared on *Glass Houses*; in an effort to create the stripped down rock & roll feel for the album, he and Ramone dispensed with the guest stars and concentrated on the core band. Cannata was a vital member of the band; his contributions were not limited to providing the sax riffs that helped Joel's sound become so recognizable in the late 70s. He also played the clarinet, flute and tuba, and provided Joel with additional keyboard tracks

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[44] Bego, *Billy Joel*, pp. 176-77, 238-42.

when Joel experimented with other keyboard instruments such as the Farfisa organ or melodica. During the tour for *Glass Houses*, and after the release of their live album, *Songs from the Attic*, however, Cannata became disenchanted with the band and decided to leave to pursue his own interests. Joel and Cannata have since remained on good terms, but his departure necessitated a new approach to songwriting for Joel on the new album.

Two other events may have helped shape Joel's frame of mind during the production of *The Nylon Curtain*. First, Joel, born in 1949, turned thirty shortly before the release of *Glass Houses*; it is possible that this milestone birthday caused him to think about his audience, who was buying his albums, and what kind of content they wanted to hear in their music. Second, Joel turned down an invitation to participate in one of a series of "No Nukes" concerts held around the United States in 1979 in protest of the increased number of nuclear plants being built across the country. The concert at Madison Square Garden featured an all-star cast of musicians that included Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, the Doobie Brothers, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and James Taylor. Joel recalls getting into an argument with Taylor regarding the effectiveness of such concerts: "I agree with him about a nuclear freeze, but I told him he was wasting his time because he was playing to the people who already agreed with him. A farmer in Kansas doesn't trust rock & roll musicians, and a show like that is more apt to alienate him than get him to see your point of view."[45]

Whatever the reasons, the album that Joel and Ramone produced in 1982 represents a turning point in Joel's career. *The Nylon Curtain*, although not as much of a popular success as the studio albums preceding or following it (*Glass Houses* and *An Innocent Man* each sold over seven million copies in the United States alone, while *The Nylon Curtain* sold two million), received favourable reviews from critics, perhaps because for the first time Joel looked beyond

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[45] Barry Millman, "Billy Joel Talks Back," *Spin*, June 1985, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 153.

himself and his life for inspiration. Previously, virtually every song Joel wrote related to one of a limited number of topics: his work ("Piano Man," "The Entertainer"), important themes or people in his life ("James," "Souvenir"), significant events ("Say Goodbye to Hollywood," "New York State of Mind") or his relationships ("Just the Way You Are," "Summer Highland Falls"). These types of songs still exist on *The Nylon Curtain*. "Laura," "She's Right on Time" and "Surprises" are all about the women in his life (his mother in the first case, then his soon-to-be ex-wife in the second and third), while "Scandinavian Skies" and "A Room of Our Own" both refer to Joel's lifestyle at the time: touring, snorting cocaine and drinking heavily.

The standout singles from the album, however, show Joel moving in new directions and expanding his thematic repertoire. "Pressure," "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon" relate to themes that show Joel thinking outside his comfort zone and addressing larger issues such as the increasing influence of popular culture and mass media, the disintegration of important American industries such as the Pennsylvania steel business, and the Vietnam War. Not coincidentally, these are the songs that proved to be the most popular and enduring from the album: both "Pressure" and "Allentown" reached the top 20 on the *Billboard* Hot 100, while "Goodnight Saigon" hit number 56; due to its powerful message and stark treatment of the Vietnam War, however, it became one of Joel's concert standards. Even the title of the album indicated that Joel was considering larger themes when he wrote the album. In an interview with Barry Millman for *Spin* magazine in 1985, Joel discussed the meaning of the album title:

> There's all this paranoia about the Russians. We're so cut off from the rest of the world that merely bringing people closer together is a really radical change. The title of my album, *Nylon Curtain*, meant just that. The Russians have an Iron Curtain, and we have a nylon one. It's this very sheer, capitalist haze we all seem to have. Everything looks so rosy through it, so unreal. Making contact with

> another nation based on something other than what you read in the papers, or what some politician tells us, that's radical.[46]

Joel's comments about the album title seem somewhat prescient now, when one considers that two years later Joel embarked upon an historical and groundbreaking tour of the Soviet Union, becoming the first solo rock artist to do so.

Joel's experiences in the Soviet Union, which included two concerts in Moscow and two in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), helped to shape his thoughts and inspire his writing for *Storm Front*, his second-to-last studio album of rock material (to date), released in 1989. The years between *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front* saw Joel produce two more albums in which he returned to the themes and subject material that had dominated his compositions prior to *The Nylon Curtain*. With 1983's *An Innocent Man*, Joel unabashedly paid tribute to the music of his youth, particularly doo-wop ("The Longest Time," "This Night") and Motown ("Tell Her About It"). In 1986, Joel released *The Bridge*, his final collaboration with Ramone. For Joel, *The Bridge* was a reaction against the concept album theme that had emerged since *Glass Houses*. Joel described the trajectory he felt the band had taken over the previous three albums in an interview with Stephen Holden in 1986:

> Because my band was a rock & roll band and we played large arenas, I needed to go for more rock & roll, and so the songs on *Glass Houses* were written to be performed in concert. The next album, *The Nylon Curtain* was just the opposite – an elaborate studio album that took a year to make and whose songs were difficult to perform live … The last album, *An Innocent Man* was a complete reaction to *The Nylon Curtain*, which had been so laborious. It was a romantic tribute to my rhythm & blues roots and the discovery of love when you're a teenager.[47]

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[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Stephen Holden, "Billy Joel Reaches Out to Embrace Pop," *www.nytimes.com*. The New York Times, 3 August 1986. Web. 4 June 2011.

The Bridge included duets with Ray Charles ("Baby Grand") and Cyndi Lauper ("Code of Silence," the only song on Joel's albums that has a dual writing credit) and showed Joel singing about his life and loves once again ("Big Man on Mulberry Street," "This is the Time" and "Running on Ice"). *The Bridge* was a modest commercial success for Joel (only selling two million albums), despite several songs reaching the top ten on the *Billboard* Adult Contemporary charts and "Modern Woman" and "A Matter of Trust" cracking the top ten on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1986.

By 1985, Joel had already begun considering a tour of the Soviet Union, after the United States signed a cultural agreement with the U.S.S.R. Joel had become such an international touring success that he was granted permission to stage four concerts in the Soviet Union; the concerts were filmed, and a live album and video were released following the end of the tour. When it came time for Joel to consider writing a new album, it was unsurprising that he should turn to his time in the Soviet Union for motivation. Joel had met a young man named Viktor while in Moscow, and his story inspired Joel to write "Leningrad," a song comparing his life to Viktor's; in so doing, he reveals that the two are not so different, despite the Cold War and the propaganda teaching them to hate each other from afar. "Leningrad," with its sensitive and personal treatment of the Cold War and its effects on individuals, is similar to "Goodnight Saigon," although the former did not have the same emotional impact as the latter. "Leningrad" is not the only song on *Storm Front* that shows Joel thinking outside himself, however.

In 1988, Joel, his second wife Christie Brinkley, and daughter Alexa moved from their apartment in Manhattan to a house in the Hamptons, on Long Island. It was a sort of homecoming for Joel, as he had lived in Oyster Bay, a small community on Long Island, in the early 70s, before his move to Los Angeles. He had even worked on the oyster boats at some point during his early struggles, and

so he was dismayed to learn of the plight of the North Atlantic fisheries, especially the situation facing baymen on Long Island. In 1988, the fishermen of Long Island lost access to their two main industries: scallops (due to a brown algae infestation) and striped bass (elevated levels of PCBs). Joel became fascinated with the history of the Long Island fisheries and decided to use his celebrity status to aid in the situation. He contacted Arnold Leo, secretary of the East Hampton Baymen's Association, to see how he could help. He recognized the importance of the industry to the survival of Long Island's character: "I feel that if these guys disappear we've lost a lot of the identity of what Long Island is … Herman Melville wrote stories about them. Winslow Homer painted them. Walt Whitman wrote poems about them … If they go, we're just a suburb. We're no longer an island. People forget that – we're an island."[48] Joel supported the baymen through one of his charities, Charity Begins at Home, an organization that funds projects specifically in the counties of Long Island. His most powerful message regarding the North Atlantic fisheries disaster, however, came through the third track on *Storm Front*, "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." While the song charted poorly (reaching number 57), its significance arises from the lessons Joel learned from his previous attempt at writing a socially-conscious folk-rock song, "Allentown." Joel realized that some of his previous efforts at writing songs with political messages were not complete successes because of his lack of direct experience: "I've said, 'I'm living here in Allentown,' and I don't live in Allentown. I said we were sharp as knives in Vietnam, and I wasn't in Vietnam … I know what being a commercial fisherman is – I did it."[49] Finally, Joel followed up on "Pressure" and its criticism of popular media with the more comprehensive and wider-sweeping social commentary present in "We Didn't Start the Fire." A rapid-fire patter-style song, "We Didn't Start the Fire" chronicles significant events that occurred during Joel's life, accompanied by one of Joel's least

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[48] Wayne Robins. "Billy Joel Charting a New Course," *Newsday*, 29 October 1989, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 248.

[49] David Wild, "On Fire Again: Billy Joel," *Rolling Stone*, 25 January 1990, p. 39. Print.

favourite melodies. Despite Joel's dislike of the melody, the song became Joel's third number 1 hit (the second was "Tell Her About It" from *An Innocent Man*); its popularity propelled *Storm Front* to number 1 on the *Billboard* charts. The album remained on the charts for sixty-nine weeks, while four other singles made appearances in the Hot 100: "I Go to Extremes," (number 6) "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," (57) "That's Not Her Style," (77) and "And So it Goes." (37)

The Nylon Curtain and *Storm Front* stand out from Joel's other albums because of Joel's endeavours to write music that was different, both in style and content. "Allentown" makes a statement about the Pennsylvania steel industry while "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" tells the story of another American industrial tragedy. Joel tackled America's two most significant wars of Joel's lifetime with "Goodnight Saigon," which illuminated the horrors of the Vietnam War and "Leningrad," a tale of two men experiencing the Cold War from opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. "Pressure," when taken in conjunction with its surreal video, is an indictment of social and popular media. "We Didn't Start the Fire" seems, at first listen, to be merely a checklist of important events, people and places of Joel's lifetime, but a closer reading reveals it to be a critical judgment of changing sociological, political and economic trends over the first forty years of Joel's life. As such, these six songs, and the albums on which they appear, are distinct from the rest of Joel's oeuvre, representing a movement away from his usual comfort zone of biographical compositions. An examination of the songs, and the videos that Joel made for each of them, will reveal that they can be viewed as three pairs of parallel songs, and also elucidate how Joel evolved as a songwriter through the process of writing them. The songs on *The Nylon Curtain* represent Joel's first attempts to write songs about issues greater than those of his own life, and while they succeeded as rock & roll singles, they show limitations in terms of how effectively they communicate the desired messages. When he decided to write similarly themed songs on *Storm Front*, however, Joel took the lessons he had learned on *The Nylon Curtain* and applied them to his songwriting process. For example, it is evident from the video for "Allentown" that Joel intended it to be a

sort of folk song, but the song itself rests firmly within the idioms of rock & roll. "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" addresses a similar issue to "Allentown," but Joel learned from his experience with the latter; he endeavoured to make "'Alexa'" more of a true folk song, and so he included idioms of folk music, such as the sea shanty, in the mix for the song.

Additionally, "Goodnight Saigon" is a less compelling and personal song than its parallel track, "Leningrad," in which Joel used his personal experience with the Cold War to illuminate the American experience during his lifetime. "Goodnight Saigon" is a remarkable song partially because of its atmosphere and description of the life of American soldiers in Southeast Asia, but "Leningrad" is convincing because the first person narrator in the song is Joel, not an unnamed soldier. Furthermore, Joel told the story of both sides of the war in "Leningrad" following his encounter with Viktor, a Soviet man around his own age who came to his concerts in the Soviet Union. The primary differences and the evidence for Joel's growth as an artist between "Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire" do not appear so obviously in the music. Both songs have repetitive melodies contained within the rock & roll edge that made many of Joel's songs successful. It is in the videos, however, that one can see how Joel evolved in the intervening years. The video for "Pressure" is highly stylized and contains a great deal of symbolism; the messages regarding criticism of social and popular media are embedded within the symbols Joel and director Russell Mulcahy chose for the video and are not easily discernible upon first viewing. With "We Didn't Start the Fire," however, Joel chose to make the message of the song more apparent with the use of a straight-forward narrative. Although the video still contains a great deal of symbolism, the use of a multi-generational story surrounding an American nuclear family gave viewers a stronger foundation upon which they could base their understanding of Joel's intended message.

These two albums, *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front*, and the three pairs of songs contained within them to be included in this study, represent turning

points for Joel. At significant points in his life, Joel discovered that he needed to turn outwards, to put his creative abilities to use for a purpose greater than exorcising his personal demons or telling his own stories. On the cusp of his thirtieth birthday, as the United States pulled itself out of the quagmire of the Vietnam War and began to understand its limitations as an economic power, and then later, as he prepared to turn forty, while the Cold War came to an end and great American industries such as the North Atlantic fisheries struggled for survival, Joel found a new and ultimately successful method of reaching out to his audience. In so doing, Joel not only put a new spin on his much-maligned image, one characterized by on-stage tantrums, off-stage accidents, lawsuits and stints in rehabilitation clinics to address his drug and alcohol issues; he also found a way to represent the world around him through his music, rather than merely commenting on his own place in the world.

Chapter 2
"Pressure"

By 1982, it seemed that Billy Joel could do no wrong. The recent success of his sixth and seventh albums, *52nd Street* and *Glass Houses*, with hits such as "Big Shot," "My Life," "You May Be Right," and "Sometimes a Fantasy," had begun to erode Joel's previous reputation as a balladeer, destined for the adult contemporary stations. The arena-rock single "All for Lenya" and the eponymous jazz-influenced "52nd Street" indicated a new direction for the much-maligned Joel, whose previous singles had included Adult Contemporary chart hits such as "Just the Way You Are" (number 1 in 1977) and the overplayed "Piano Man" (number 4 in 1973). *Glass Houses* spawned Joel's first number 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 with "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me," and Joel parlayed this chart success into tour success, receiving the "Gold Ticket" award from Madison Square Garden in 1980, "for being one of the few acts who had played to over one hundred thousand people at that highly revered venue."[50] Joel also took part in "Havana Jam '79," a rock festival designed to foster cultural relations between the United States and Cuba. Hugely successful, the festival also featured Stephen Stills, Rita Coolidge and Kris Kristofferson, among others. The popular success of his recent albums helped Joel to garner several awards, and even *Songs in the Attic*, a live album designed to update some of Joel's older material, such as "Say Goodbye to Hollywood," "Captain Jack" and "Everybody Loves You Now," gave Joel another top 25 hit in "She's Got a Way" and sold more than a million copies.

Despite all the accolades, awards, sold-out tours and chart-topping albums, however, Joel felt that it was time for changes, both to his band and to the direction of his songwriting. As I mentioned earlier, despite Richie Cannata's importance to the band, not only because of his electrifying playing but also due

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[50] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 164.

to his role in the arrangement process for many of Joel's songs throughout the 70s (as drummer Liberty DeVitto said of the group, "We were a garage band, arranging songs as we played them – on the spot"),[51] Joel and Cannata parted ways during the production of *The Nylon Curtain*. Although he did contribute to some of the early arrangements of songs on the album, by the time the band got down to recording, Cannata had left to pursue his own interests. Without the distinctive sound of Cannata's saxophone (or *any* saxophone, for that matter), Joel decided to move away from the rougher, more improvisational blues-influenced sound of *52nd Street* and *Glass Houses*. In its place, Joel and producer Phil Ramone opted for a more complex and layered mix, and aimed the album at a new audience:

> This record is very richly textured; there're a lot of orchestral instruments on it, and synthesizers and sound effects. Sort of *à la* the *Magical Mystery Tour/Sgt. Pepper* era … [It's] a very American album, aimed at the post-Baby Boom kids. [It] was very complicated. As a matter of fact, halfway through it, I could have shot myself for deciding to make this quantum leap.[52]

The album does sound like a tribute to the Beatles in many places. It is also true, however, that this is not the first time one can detect the influence of the Beatles in Joel's music (or in many other artist's music, for that matter); "Through the Long Night," the closing track of *Glass Houses*, is unabashedly Beatles-inspired with its closely miked acoustic guitar, tight, complex harmonies, and synthesized woodwinds in the introduction. Examples of the Beatles' influence on *The Nylon Curtain* include the McCartney-esque "Where's the Orchestra" and the dreamy and complexly layered "Scandinavian Skies," during which Joel unintentionally sings like John Lennon. Ramone pointed out this similarity to Joel, at which point he tried singing it more like "Billy Joel." According to Joel, "it didn't work.

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[51] Ramone, *Making Records* p. 73.

[52] "Joel Pulls Back 'Nylon Curtain'," *Rolling Stone*, 2 September 1982, p. 22. Print.

I had to sing it as it was written, as it was conceived to be sung."[53] More remarkable on *The Nylon Curtain*, therefore, in consideration of the rest of Joel's catalogue to date, is the heavy vocal mixing, increased use of synthesizers and layered mixes, the movement away from blues-leaning tracks, and the more serious, contemplative nature of the some of the album's content.

Critical response to *The Nylon Curtain* was overwhelmingly positive. Even *Rolling Stone* gave the album a positive review; Stephen Holden wrote, "the songs on this LP are concerned with the tearing away of protective emotional filters to reveal naked truths."[54] The critics were also quick to recognize the change in genre apparent on this album, remarking that it seemed "a far cry from the pared-down rock of *Glass Houses* and [harkened] back to the late 60s psychedelia of The Beatles."[55] Some critics also commented on the level of maturity Joel showed on this album, remarking on the more serious nature of some of the content. Stephen Thomas Erlewine, in his review for *Allmusic*, called the album "a song cycle about Baby Boomers in the Reagan era … a fascinating cross between ear candy and social commentary," and stated that the album contained music that is "layered, successful, mature pop that brings Joel tantalizingly close to his ultimate goal of sophisticated pop/rock for mature audiences."[56] The "social commentary" Erlewine references in his review appears most significantly in the three songs to be discussed here: "Goodnight Saigon," "Allentown," and "Pressure."

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[53] DeMain, "Billy Joel: Scenes from a Musical Life."

[54] Stephen Holden. "The Nylon Curtain." *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 14 October 1982. Web. 25 September 2008.

[55] Stephen Holden. "Billy Joel on the Dark Side." *www.nytimes.com*. New York Times, 29 December 1982. Web. 16 June 2011.

[56] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "The Nylon Curtain," *Allmusic*, (accessed 21 October 2008) http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:h9fexq95ld0e.

Critics such as Erlewine and Holden were responding to a feature of this album that was of great importance to Joel. In early 1982, before the release of *The Nylon Curtain*, Joel agreed to an interview with David and Victoria Sheff that appeared in *Playboy* magazine in May of that year. In this interview, Joel discussed at length his inspiration for the album and the driving force behind the themes of the album. In response to a question about the album's tentative title, which was to be *Goodnight Saigon*, and any possible political content in the album, Joel stated his reasons for tackling such heavy content:

> Sheff: By the time this interview appears, your new album will probably be out. You're calling it *Goodnight Saigon*. Is it a political statement?
> Joel: No, but it is a serious album. It's about the stuff kids in my age group have gone through, about our attitudes, not our politics. People my age, 25 to 40, who grew up as Cold War babies, we don't have anybody writing music for us. There's a lot of chainsaw heavy metal aimed at the 14-year-old market, and there's stuff at the other end of the spectrum – Barry Manilow, Neil Diamond, Barbara [sic] Streisand. But the music business seems to be writing people my age off. So, in a way, this is an album dealing with us, with our American experience: guilt, pressures, relationships, the whole Vietnam syndrome.[57]

The vast majority of Joel's output to this point had been of an autobiographical nature, whether it be songs about his love life or his career as a musician. Here, Joel shows an awareness of the kind of people towards whom he thought he should be aiming his material, a willingness to look beyond his own experience to attempt to address the issues influencing people of his generation in the United States.

Accordingly, Joel decided to tackle some of the social issues at play at the time. He took on the "Vietnam syndrome" in "Goodnight Saigon," and the "American experience" in "Allentown," turning a critical eye outward for the first time. Usually one to stay out of political matters, Joel, in a surprising turn, showed an

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[57] Sheff, "Playboy Interview."

awareness of sociological issues of the time. A brief analysis of Joel's album covers to this point illustrates his changing view of American society, and the role of his music in reflected those changes. Before *The Nylon Curtain*, Joel's album covers featured his own image predominantly (not unusual for album covers). For example, the cover of *Piano Man* features a ghostly close-up image of Joel's face in black and white; for *The Stranger*, Joel is looking at a white mask (the mask that plays a strong role in the lyrics of the title track) while sitting on a bed; *52nd Street* features a full-length shot of Joel lounging against a brick wall. The cover for *Turnstiles* is the only one to feature more than one person, and the cover of *Glass Houses* is the only one to show Joel from behind, as he stands poised to throw a rock at his own glass house. *Streetlife Serenade* was the sole cover not to feature an image of Joel until *The Nylon Curtain*. The album cover for *The Nylon Curtain* includes an illustration of a line of houses, all exactly the same: two stories, an attached garage, and a car inside the garage. The houses are identical, evenly spaced, and coloured in black, with an eerie orange glow behind them. The cover material for this album, this featureless and foreboding, gloomy and dark depiction of suburbia, is reinforced by a picture in the liner material that shows a photograph of an American neighbourhood, where every house is the same, but the windows and doors have been blocked out in yellow. Nobody is outside in their yard, very few cars are in the streets; the glow of lights in every window is the only evidence of life present in this photograph. Through these images, Joel reinforces his comments concerning this album about the isolationism in which many Americans found themselves at this time, lost in the uniformity of suburbia (see page 32 for Joel's comments about the title of the album). The symbols of Western suburban prosperity, the magnificent homes and two-car garages, betray the contradiction present in these subdivisions: the

houses are places of rest, not vibrant homes, and the cars are merely means of escape from the homogenous fabric that makes up these "communities."[58]

Joel's comments about this album also touch on another matter that features prominently in his songs that have some element of social commentary: popular culture and mass media. During "Havana Jam '79," Joel was surprised by his experience in Cuba, given the image of Cuba that came through American press at the time. "We didn't think the Cubans would know any of the music," Joel stated in his interview with the Sheffs for *Playboy*, "but they pick up Miami radio stations, so they knew the hit records ... Stephen Stills came out and made this big speech about, '*¡Viva la revoluçion!*" in Spanish. And the audience just kind of went, 'We ... don't need to hear *this*.' They came to hear rock & roll."[59] In the same interview, Joel commented further on having his preconceptions of Cuba challenged by experiencing the country firsthand, rather than depending on information provided by the American media:

> You know, music is something everybody has ... It doesn't matter if they're Marxists or Communists. These kids want to party. They want to have a good time, to hear music ... We have all these ideas about what they're *supposed* to be like ... We buy what we hear about them, they buy what they hear about us. A lot of it has to do with the image projected by the press. We're fed a lot of crap. We're taught not to relate to foreigners as people.[60]

Five years after the release of *The Nylon Curtain*, Joel's ideas of people living under Communism and what the Cold War meant to him were challenged again, when he and his band toured the Soviet Union. Joel experienced an epiphany

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[58] The back cover of *The Nylon Curtain* does feature an image of Joel. Here, with another blurry image of suburbia present behind him, Joel, in a button-down collar with the sleeves rolled up, holds a cup of coffee and looks up at the camera, as if interrupted from reading the newspaper spread out in front of him.

[59] Sheff, "Playboy Interview."

[60] *Ibid.*

about the Cold War during that tour, one that will receive a thorough examination during the examination of "Leningrad."

Joel's distilled his critical thoughts concerning American mass media and expressions of popular culture in one song on *The Nylon Curtain*: "Pressure." The third track on the A side of the album, sandwiched between the much-maligned "Laura" (it is often labeled as misogynistic, but is better understood when one realizes that "Laura" is not an ex-girlfriend, but actually his mother) and the dramatic centrepiece of the album, "Goodnight Saigon," "Pressure" enjoyed moderate success as a single, reaching number 20 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. It was popular with American radio stations, however, and the song reached number 8 on *Billboard*'s "Top Tracks," a chart – now called Hot Mainstream Rock Tracks – that ranks the most-played songs on mainstream rock radio stations. Ostensibly, "Pressure" is about the stresses of being a songwriter, being forced to write under pressure from studios and recording companies: "You've only had to run so far, so good/ But you will come to a place/ Where the only thing you feel are loaded guns in your face/ And you'll have to deal with pressure."[61] During an interview on MTV in 1982, Joel stated, "The pressure I was writing about in this song wasn't necessarily music business pressure, it was writing, uh, writing pressure ... I was about halfway through [the album], and I said, 'Well, what am I gonna do? I don't have any ideas, it's gone, it's dead.'"[62] Ironically, Joel contradicted himself in some press material two years later, claiming "I wrote ten songs in about seven weeks, which I've never done before. It just came pouring out of me."[63] Regardless, however, Joel has also gone on record regarding the challenges of writing music, and the tactics he uses to overcome these challenges:

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[61] See Appendix A for the complete lyrics.

[62] http://video.yahoo.com/watch/19636/1337004

[63] Columbia Records press biography, March 1984, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 189.

> The thing you don't have control over is writing – you have to pull it out of yourself, stretch yourself … You pace the room with something like the dry heaves, having no control over the muse, horrified that it won't come … all that's out there with you is the piano – this big black beast with 88 teeth. You have to lay your guts on the table and go through them eleven times on the album. 50,000 packs of cigarettes later, you start getting it.[64]

Although Joel claims to have written the material for *The Nylon Curtain* rather quickly, he also stated that the process took a lot out of him, physically and emotionally. Phil Ramone, who produced six of Joel's albums, from *The Stranger* to *The Bridge*, asserts that most of Joel's writing occurs in the studio during recording sessions: "Billy treats a session like it's a live performance: writing, rewriting, arranging, and rehearsing with his band, relying on the lively interaction between everyone to push things along." Ramone also quotes Joel as saying "I write for the way the band plays … writing this way can be torture for me, because they'll be standing there all the while, watching me like a jury; and they can be a really nasty bunch of guys."[65] Writing and recording *The Nylon Curtain*, although it seems to have taken a shorter time than some of Joel's other albums, was evidently a struggle. Cannata's absence during the recording process may account for part of this difficulty; he had been a vital member of Joel's band for ten years. It is evident from Joel and Ramone's accounts that the band played an important role in how the songs were shaped into their final products; Joel surely missed Cannata's leadership during the recording sessions for this new album, especially in view of his new sound, richly textured and synthesizer-heavy, but without Cannata's saxophone.

With its heavy use of percussion and forbidding bass line, established in the introduction and present throughout the song, and the sharp edge of the

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[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Ramone, *Making Records*, pp. 60-62.

repeating synthesizer motive, Joel succeeded in creating an atmosphere redolent with the pressures of the industry. Filled with references to high-stress situations ("here you are in the ninth, two men out and three men on") and violent language ("loaded guns in your face," "you have no scars on your face"), "Pressure" is both undeniably rock-influenced, drawing on Joel's *faux* punk-rock efforts on *Glass Houses*, and also highly stylized, taking advantage of new developments in synthesized music. Posing such existential questions as "All your life is Time Magazine/ I read it too, what does it mean?" and questioning the endless advice given by those around him ("I'm sure you'll have some cosmic rationale/ But here you are with your faith/ And your Peter Pan advice/ … You cannot handle pressure."), this song is one of Joel's most cynical tracks since "The Entertainer." Perhaps the most unsettling characteristic of this song is the near complete lack of piano in the mix. Keyboard instruments do play an important role in "Pressure," including the synthesizer used for the iconic theme during the instrumental interludes and synthesized string parts during the verses, but the only hint of a piano occurs during the bridge ("I'm sure you have some cosmic rationale"), where a highly mixed keyboard instrument can be heard. Only very rarely does Joel not play the piano throughout his extensive catalogue.[66] The majority of the non-piano songs still feature the melody played on a keyboard instrument, however, such as the use of an electric piano as the main melody instrument on "Just the Way You Are," but "Pressure" does not have any melodic instrument in the foreground of the mix. This effectively leaves Joel's vocal line, normally grounded by the doubling effect of a keyboard instrument playing the melody, without an anchor, thus adding to the isolating effect of the pressures he details in the lyrics.

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[66] Notable piano-free songs include "The Entertainer" (Joel used a Moog synthesizer on the album and a Farfisa organ for some live performances of this song), "Just the Way You Are," "Rosalinda's Eyes," and several songs on *The Bridge*, Joel's final collaboration with Ramone, during which he experimented with various electronic keyboards and synthesizers.

The evidence provided here, based on the lyrics and formal structure of the song, seems to place "Pressure" firmly within the vast bulk of Joel's catalogue: an autobiographical song of the cynical or defeatist type for which Joel was well-known before the release of *The Nylon Curtain*. More pointed in its pessimism than "Summer, Highland Falls" and without the dramatic arch of songs such as "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" and "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)," "Pressure" nonetheless deserves a place beside "Piano Man" and "The Entertainer" in terms of autobiographical songs that touch on Joel's career as a musician. Therefore, it seems at first less atypical than the other five songs to be discussed here; it is less global in scope than its partner in this examination, "We Didn't Start the Fire," and it does not possess the same sense of social or historic awareness present in "Allentown," "Goodnight Saigon," or the other relevant songs from *Storm Front*. How, then, does "Pressure" represent a departure for Joel? How does this song support the earlier assertion that "Pressure" shows Joel expressing his thoughts regarding mass media and popular culture? The answer lies in the video that Joel made for the song.

Joel was among many musicians in the late 70s and early 80s who recognized the potential of a new form, the music video. To understand Joel's attraction to making music videos, a short history of the medium and the emergence of the cable channel Music Television, known popularly as MTV, which quickly became one of the largest influences on the direction of pop music in the 1980s, is essential. The music video as Joel knew it at the time of *The Nylon Curtain* had its beginnings in European television broadcasts of weekly chart shows. Clips of bands playing their songs were popular in Europe in the 1970s, partially because radio stations did not play rock music in the same formats as American stations. Thus, television programs that showed promotional clips, usually of bands lip-synching to their songs, became important avenues for bands to promote their music. In the United States, there had been experiments in marrying images and songs together as early as the 1940s, including jukeboxes with pictures, short films versions of songs, and shows such as *American Bandstand* and *Hullabaloo*.

Most television appearances consisted of bands playing their songs live, but more popular bands could not attend taping of television shows. Tom McGrath detailed the results in his history of Music Television (MTV), *The Making of a Revolution: MTV*:

> … Record companies [began] shooting simple little films and sending them to the shows when the bands couldn't (or chose not to) make a live appearance … occasionally some of the clips were fairly creative … The Beatles, whose films *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* foreshadowed the frenetic style of later videos, did several promos … that went beyond the band-in-the-studio concept. The Who and the Stones also experimented with this new format.[67]

American record companies began to send clips to pop music shows in Europe to boost sales, as it was often difficult for bands to travel overseas. Inevitably, some groups decided to hire innovative directors to make "clips," as they were called in the 1970s, for their songs. One of the first such clips to have a significant effect on the popularity of a specific song appeared in 1975. In that year, the British rock band Queen, trying to avoid an undesired appearance on *Top of the Pops*, hired Bruce Gowers to direct a clip for "Bohemian Rhapsody;" he experimented with unusual visual effects to mirror the vocal effects used by the band in the song. As McGrath states, "When the song reached No. 30 on the British charts, *Top of the Pops*, Britain's weekly chart show, started to play the clip, and people went crazy for it. After just one airing on *Top of the Pops*, the song leapt into Britain's Top 5 and stayed there for more than a dozen weeks."[68] Although not the first of its kind, "the structure and complexity of the video when coupled with the sonic diversity of the song demonstrated the marketing value of substituting

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[67] Tom McGrath, *The Making of a Revolution: MTV* (Philadelphia: Running Press Book Publishers, 1996), p. 37.

[68] *Ibid*, p. 37.

videos in the place of live performance on television."[69] One of the most influential of the early practitioners of the music clip, however, was The Doors. Lead singer Jim Morrison attended film school at UCLA in the 1960s, which inspired him to experiment with videos for several songs. The Doors worked on promotional videos as early as 1967 (for "Break on Through (to the Other Side)"). Among their most important clips are those for "People are Strange" (which uses shots of people on the streets, including a transvestite, random dancers, and an old man playing the accordion on a park bench) and "The Unknown Soldier," which features a sequence in which Morrison and his bandmates simulate an execution on stage during which guitarist Robby Krieger "shoots" Morrison with his guitar.

A select group of radio and television executives quickly recognized the potential of the music video, especially with the expansion of cable television and improvement of video technologies. In 1979, after making a music clip of his own, Michael Nesmith, a former member of The Monkees, proposed the creation of a music video network to executives at Warner AMEX Satellite Entertainment Company (WASEC), the branch of Warner's cable business responsible for overseeing satellite-delivered programming. Warner owned an interactive cable system called QUBE, a system that offered subscribers specialized channels such as those for children's programming (Nickelodeon) and ten pay-per-view movie channels (including Star Channel). Although Nesmith ultimately decided against participating in the creation of such a network, WASEC executives John Lack and Bob Pittman pushed forward with the idea and won the support of Warner and AMEX chief executive officers to create a nationally available, twenty-four-hour all-rock cable channel that broadcast music videos, hosted by "veejays," the television equivalent of radio "deejays." On August 1, 1981, Music Television, known from that day as MTV, launched with an image of Neil Armstrong

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[69] Barry Promane, "Freddie Mercury and Queen: Technologies of Genre and the Poetics of Innovation"(PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2009), p. 60.

planting a flag on the moon, superimposed with the now-iconic MTV logo in bright pink and green, to the words, "Ladies and gentleman, rock & roll." The choice of the first video to hit the airwaves was a simple one for MTV producers: "Video Killed the Radio Star," by British New Wave group, The Buggles.

Although the original broadcast could only be seen by a small audience, and only in New Jersey, WASEC employees sold access to MTV across the country. Midsize markets such as Tulsa, Wichita, Des Moines and Syracuse bought access rights, and recording companies felt the effects of this new channel almost immediately. Pittman originally estimated that MTV would begin to turn a profit in its second year of operation and have an effect on record sales in the near future. During a marketing trip to Tulsa a few weeks after the launch of MTV, however, Pittman made a startling discovery. A local record store, Peaches Records, told John Sykes, MTV's head of promotion, that for several months previously, the store had had numerous copies of *The Age of Plastic*, the album by The Buggles that contained "Video Killed the Radio Star," in their inventory. Pittman was astounded by Sykes' description of the immediate effects of MTV upon the buying habits of young Americans:

> Three weeks after the channel went on the air and started showing "Video Killed the Radio Star" several times a day, all fifteen copies were sold. It wasn't just [The] Buggles, and it wasn't just at Peaches, either. Everyplace Sykes ... went in Tulsa they heard similar tales; people were asking about acts like Squeeze, the Rubes, Billy Squier, Talking Heads, and the Shoes - none of which was being played on local radio in Tulsa, but all of which was being shown on MTV. Even the local radio stations were besieged. "Hey, could you play that song 'Tempted' by Squeeze?" kids would call in and ask. "I just saw in on MTV."[70]

The executives at Warner were astounded by the immediacy and intensity of the influence of MTV. Despite issues with lower-than-expected advertising revenues, MTV's veejays quickly became celebrities, and big-name rock bands began to

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[70] *Ibid*, p. 70.

support the fledgling network. In 1982, MTV began a new campaign, one that would see the channel become a household name across the nation. WASEC executives managed to get Peter Townshend, Mick Jagger, Adam Ant, Stevie Nicks and Pat Benatar to participate in the campaign, the effectiveness of which became evident in Dire Straits' 1984 hit single, "Money for Nothing," from *Brothers in Arms*. In the song, a "satiric diatribe against the rock and roll life told from the point of view of the average working stiff,"[71] guest vocalist Sting sings the now-iconic line, "I want my MTV." By the end of the year, Warner split MTV off into its own company, one that was showing a profit and had over 24 million viewers. As Jim Cullen succinctly states in *The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States*, "Radio had not been killed, but it had become a poor relation to the video colossus."[72]

While Warner may have been surprised by the immediate effect of MTV on record sales, few others in the industry were, as many networks were broadcasting video shows by the time Dire Straits released "Money for Nothing;" the term "colossus" was certainly appropriate. Regular programs such as *Night Flight*, a variety show on the USA Network and *Video Concert Hall*, a music video show on the same network, were in existence before MTV's debut in 1981. The advent of MTV, a channel devoted entirely to music clips and videos, had an enormous effect on the popularity among recording artists themselves, however. In 1981, at the time of MTV's launch, less than thirty percent of singles on the Billboard Hot 100 had accompanying videos; by 1984, that number had risen to seventy-five percent. Billy Joel was one of the first artists (and he was certainly not alone) to take advantage of this innovative and evolving medium in the late 70s and early 80s, recognizing MTV's potential for enabling him to reach new audiences. Videos exist for songs from *52nd Street* and *Glass Houses*, and even

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[71] *Ibid*, p. 137.

[72] Jim Cullen, *The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996), p. 263.

one for a performance of "James," a track from *Turnstiles*, Joel's fourth album. Most are of the simple promotional variety, wherein Joel and his band play the song and lip synch the words along with a recorded track. There are multiple camera angles, but no attempt to dramatize the material or to provide any sort of narrative. Exceptions to this pattern include clips intended to promote *52nd Street* and the video for "Sometimes a Fantasy." In the first case, Joel recorded some footage of him and his bandmates wandering the streets, wearing leather jackets and smoking cigarettes, looking like street toughs, all to the opening riff of "Stiletto." They enter a subway station, and emerge cleaned up and ready for a recording session, during which Joel plays "My Life." The transition from the soul feel of "Stiletto" to the pop-catchiness of "My Life" sounds awkward, but the video, taken in its entirety, shows Joel's interest in using video clips to promote an album. This material is also worthy of mention because, through the use of music from two different songs in one video, it shows Joel considering *52nd Street* as an album, rather than a collection of singles; the album was meant to be a tribute to the strong jazz tradition of 52nd Street, and Joel underscores the theme of the album with this promotional material.

"Sometimes a Fantasy" was Joel's first song to receive a more sophisticated video treatment, in that Joel and director George Gomes opted to provide a dramatic representation of the song in the video, rather than just taping Joel and the band playing the song. "Sometimes a Fantasy," a single from 1980's *Glass Houses* that achieved moderate success (reaching number 36), is an erotically-charged New Wave-inspired song, in the vein of The Cars' "Just What I Needed." In the song, Joel has called up his girlfriend on the phone (the song begins with the sound of someone dialing a touch-tone phone); he then proceeds to beg her for phone sex, including heavy breathing in the middle of the verses. The video reinforces the message of the song, featuring Joel, alone in a dingy hotel room, and his lover, dressed in a white negligee and lounging impatiently on her immaculately white bed, having a one-sided phone conversation (he pleads, she listens). As the song reaches a fevered pitch near the end, with the repeated lyrics, "It's just a fantasy

(it's just a fantasy), it's not the real thing (it's not the real thing)," the video alternates between shots of Joel's legs and his girlfriend's torso. The implication that the song is about masturbation is unmistakable here, especially in view of the convinced look on her face, and the satisfied look on his. Of interest in this video is the third character present; while Joel lies on the bed or worriedly paces the room, imploring the woman on the other end of the line to give in to his advances, he occasionally glances into the corner of the room, where a tougher-looking character stands, wearing a leather jacket, hair slicked tight to his head, smoking a cigarette. This character seems to represent Joel's more confident side, as he gives small nods of encouragement to Joel every time he looks over. This tough character is also played by Joel, reinforcing the contention that these two men represent two sides of the same character. The interesting interpretation of the lyrics and music, at odds with each other (the lyrics have a begging and pleading nature, while the music, with its relentless bass line and heavy percussion, expresses confidence and determination), was an encouraging sign, both for the Joel's future videos and the potential of the medium in the long run.[73]

Joel ramped up his creative efforts in terms of video making for songs from *The Nylon Curtain*, however. The main demographic for MTV, sixteen- to thirty-five-year olds, encompassed the demographic Joel had identified as his target audience in his interview with the Sheffs for *Playboy*. Indeed, Joel made videos for several songs on *The Nylon Curtain*, including "Pressure," "Allentown," "Goodnight Saigon" and "She's Right on Time." The success of this album can be attributed in some way to the success of these videos, especially those directed by Russell Mulcahy. Mulcahy, born in Australia in 1956, was one of the earliest and most innovative directors of music clips in the 1970s, beginning his career in Australia working for a music show called *Sounds*, which was broadcast on a

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[73] "Sometimes a Fantasy," with its New Wave edge and highly sexual nature, was an excellent fit for MTV and its target audience, and so the song went into regular rotation during the early years of the network.

Sydney-based television station. Mulcahy started out by filming footage for hit songs for which no clips existed; his talent quickly became evident, and he soon had direction credits under his belt for Australian bands such as AC/DC and Hush.[74] He moved to London in 1976 and made several successful clips over the next several years, including one for the hit song "Turning Japanese," by The Vapors, and "Video Killed the Radio Star," the aforementioned first video shown on MTV. Throughout his long career in directing, Mulcahy has made videos for Duran Duran, including the mega-hits "Rio" and "The Reflex," Elton John ("I'm Still Standing," "The One," and "Sad Songs (They Say So Much)", among others), Bonnie Tyler ("Total Eclipse of the Heart"), Queen ("A Kind of Magic"), Fleetwood Mac, Rod Stewart, Culture Club, and many others. Mulcahy made his film directorial debut in 1979 (the documentary *Derek and Clive Get the Horn*) and went on to direct the first two *Highlander* movies and many other fast-paced action films such as *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007).

Recording companies quickly took notice of the influence of MTV on record sales, and responded both by making efforts to enhance the visual appeal of acts in their employ and by signing acts whose look improved their chances of having success on MTV, groups such as A Flock of Seagulls, Men at Work and Stray Cats. Joel, who readily admitted that he was somewhat lacking in visual appeal (he once said, "I became a musician partially because of my physical limitations … I wasn't tall, I don't have Cary Grant looks"),[75] recognized the importance of making videos to promote his albums more effectively (even while calling most of his own "stupid"). The singles from *The Nylon Curtain* certainly provided Mulcahy with interesting material with which to work, from the violent language

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[74] "Clip Go the Years." *www.smh.com.au*. The Sydney Morning Herald, 26 February 2005. Web. 26 February 2010.

[75] Timothy White, "Billy Joel," *Billboard*, December 3, 1994, p. 15.

of "Pressure" to Joel's poignant narrative in "Allentown," and even the comic nature of "She's Right on Time."[76]

Mulcahy was quick to recognize the potential in each of these songs. He augmented the narrative of "Allentown" by placing Joel in the centre of the drama as the road-weary balladeer, telling the story of the tragedy as the industry collapsed around him, and then drew out Joel's comic nature for the clip for "She's Right on Time," creating a slapstick video in which Joel tries to create a romantic Christmas atmosphere in preparation for the arrival of his partner, but succeeds only in ruining the apartment. "Pressure" represented a different kind of challenge, however, as the narrative present in the song was more nebulous, less direct, than the other two. Mulcahy found inspiration instead in the hints of social criticism present in the lyrics and the forbidding nature of the torturous synthesizer theme, and created a video "filled with nightmarish scenes that were supposed to represent Joel's subconscious."[77] Mulcahy's videos typically were "more stylish and visually adventurous than anyone else's ... frequently featured slow-motion shots of water splashing or objects breaking or curtains blowing, as well as other evocative images."[78] Mulcahy's video for "Pressure" certainly fits the mould for his other music video efforts. Water plays an important role in the video, as do wind, objects (and people) flying around, and things breaking. Other themes in this video include the use of colour (especially red), light and pop culture references. The video reportedly cost over $80, 000 to produce, a staggering sum for a relatively early video, especially in view of the fact that MTV required recording companies provide the clips free of charge (as radio stations did with albums and singles).

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[76] Mulcahy did not direct the video for "Goodnight Saigon;" the video for this song, which will be discussed in a later chapter, was directed by Arnold Levine, who also directed several songs by Bruce Springsteen.

[77] McGrath, *MTV*, p. 88.

[78] *Ibid*, p. 88.

The video for "Pressure" is filled with symbolism (some subtle, some obvious), evocative images, and powerful themes. A scene-by-scene analysis of Mulcahy's video, as it relates to Joel's music and lyrics, reveals the power of the music video to alter the initial meaning of the song, or merely to provide the song with an alternate message. Mulcahy transforms Joel's song, with its originally-stated message regarding the pressures of songwriting, into a track that is at once more universal in its themes, but also more intimately rooted in the time when it was made. The video can be divided roughly into twelve scenes, each of which corresponds to a part of the song's structure and employs one or more of the important themes/elements of the video. (See table below)

Music	Setting	Themes
Introduction	Model town/Propaganda Room	Wind, flashing lights
Verse 1.1	Propaganda Room	Flashing images, television
Verse 1.2	On the bridge	Splashing water, slow motion
Verse 2.1	Bedroom	Red, splashing water
Verse 2.2	Party	White, splashing water
Bridge 1	Maze	Red, white, television
Verse 3.1	Futuristic room	Wind, flashing lights, television, red
Verse 3.2	Game Show	Red
Instrumental	Schoolroom	Television, splashing water
Bridge 2	Propaganda Room	Flashing images, television
Verse 4.1	Propaganda Room	All
Verse 4.2	Propaganda Room	All

Table 1: Description of Scenes in Video for "Pressure"

From this rudimentary structural analysis, one can see that the setting labeled "Propaganda Room" plays a vital role in the video, and, consequently, in conveying Mulcahy's desired message. This room, first seen during the instrumental introduction and the first half of the first verse, then again later at the end of the video, is a nondescript darkened space, containing only one piece of furniture, a metal chair, in which Joel sits. The floor is an industrial metal grate, and there is a projection screen hanging in space, seemingly floating in place. The video begins with a slow pan on a dark street, with a few buildings

that are lit from the inside; it is obvious that we are looking at a model, as a bolt of lightning illuminates the "sky" and stays lit for almost the entire shot (about five seconds), and the grass looks like artificial turf. The second shot of the video changes our perspective so that we are now zooming in on a window of one of the houses; the curtains part to reveal a man (who turns out to be Joel) sitting in a chair, watching the aforementioned projection screen in the "Propaganda Room."

The next twenty-five seconds (until the line "you've only had to run so far") contain the most visually evocative material of the video. In a scene reminiscent of Alex's "reeducation" in *A Clockwork Orange*, although without the restraints and "lid-locks" employed to force Alex to watch the "viddies" of ultraviolence, Joel sits and watches as he is bombarded by dozens of images. These include many pictures of war and violence, including photographs of General Douglas MacArthur, the landing on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, a frightened pilot in his fighter plane, and a uniformed corpse on a beach. Images of Hollywood stars flash by, usually alternating with images of war; the famous pinup photo of Rita Hayworth follows Sir Winston Churchill, and there are multiple images of Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra, as well as stock photos from movie musicals and a shot of dinosaur figurines that is reminiscent of Japanese monster movies. Representations of popular culture are present, including print advertisements for cigarettes and chewing gum, a photo of young people cramming themselves in a Volkswagen Beetle, comic book covers of "Superman" and "Voodoo," and society cartoons pulled from the pages of the *New Yorker*. Iconic photos such as Alfred Eisenstaedt's "V-J Day in Times Square" and that of Martin Luther King, Jr. giving his "I have a dream" speech are also present, as are images of death camps, crowds in art galleries, throngs of men in suits and Walter Cronkite delivering a news broadcast.

Of special interest are the occasional flashes of words in white capital letters on a black background, such as FRIENDS, FATHER, HATE, MOTHER, HAPPINESS, MONEY, LOVE and WORK, and multiple images of movie theatre crowds

wearing 3-D glasses. Each image flashes by too quickly for all to register (three to four frames each), but the words stand out, as do the images of the 3-D glasses, if only because there are so many (more than ten). Mulcahy wants us to watch, to be one of the crowd with the glasses, watching these images of love and hate, the extremes of violence and sex, that seem larger than life; we are rendered helpless, unable to tear ourselves away. Joel is not restrained, nor forced to watch, but he still cannot take his eyes off the screen without great effort; when he does finally succeed in looking away, the camera freezes on his face, twisted in fear and exhaustion, looking over his shoulder as if not completely free from the seductive allure of television. Thus, Mulcahy reveals the first reality-twisting element of this video. Rather than showing the viewer a typical suburban living room, as one might have expected, in view of the external view of the house, Mulcahy shows us a more demented version of the living room, one in which television controls the viewer, rather than the other way around, à la George Orwell's *1984*.

In the next seven scenes, following the freeze frame, Mulcahy shows Joel in a variety of mind-bending situations that grow increasingly surreal and bizarre. After the freeze-frame on Joel's face, the scene shifts to one of Joel standing on a bridge, in a suit, looking confused, as if he has been transported here from the propaganda room. It is unclear at this point if the following takes place in reality or in Joel's mind, but Mulcahy makes the point clear soon enough. In an homage to the crop-duster scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, a black car drives along the bridge and chases Joel off the road. As the car drives by, it stretches and slows, then drives through a large puddle, splashing water on Joel's new suit. The verse ends, and the transition to the synthesizer material occurs. At this point, and whenever this theme is present, Mulcahy places Joel in a "pressure" situation, immediately after the final line of each verse, which ends with the word "pressure." In this case, Joel runs along the bridge, fleeing some unseen danger, and stares at the water running off his shoes.

Water plays an important part in many of Mulcahy's videos, and this is no exception. Here, he uses the water dripping off Joel as a transition to the next scene, which begins with a close-up of a goblet full of water on a table beside Joel, sleeping restlessly in a red nightshirt. He flails in his sleep, knocking over the glass of water, and the room begins to fill up with water. Joel wakes up in a panic, looks at the door, from which emanates a bright white light, and which serves as a transition portal to the next scene, an upscale party. Joel looks out of place at this party, as all the guests are dressed formally, drinking martinis, while he is dressed simply in a dress shirt, sleeves rolled up and tie loose around his neck. With sweat on his brow, Joel notices a coffee cup with a lipstick stain on it, an uncouth sign amidst the refinement of this cocktail party. As the verse comes to a close, coffee inexplicably bubbles up and *out* of the cup. At the final iteration of "Pressure!" at the end of the verse, a man flies horizontally through the air towards a plate glass window, but instead of breaking the glass, the window becomes water and the man splashes through. It is at this point that the high pressure situation of this verse is revealed: Mulcahy now shows a shot of a Joel getting sucked off the couch and into the deep-pile shag carpet; fighting for his life, clinging to the couch, Joel is nonetheless dragged to his doom as the partygoers look on.

During the bridge material, we are introduced to a new character: Joel as a child. The fact that this child is Joel is made evident by the child's clothing (he wears red pajamas, similar to those Joel wore at the beginning of the second verse) and the fact that after the carpet envelops Joel, the child descends slowly into a white maze. The characters are one and the same; Joel descends further into the madness caused by the relentless barrage of propaganda from the first scene. The maze, all white walls with no doors, is a fitting actualization of the words of the bridge; there is "no place to go." Furthermore, Joel's reference to "Psych 1, Psych 2" is evocative of elementary psychology classes, which often use mazes to test spatial navigation and learning. The child in the maze, however, is distracted from the goal by a glowing television set embedded in one wall; he walks slowly

towards it, then is transformed into an old man in a wheelchair and back again. As he nears the television set, he is bombarded by symbols of media and popular culture (a reel of film and a bottle of Heinz chili sauce) flying around his head; as a look of concern crosses his face, the television exerts a vacuum force on the child, sucking him and the contents of the maze (mostly food, a common item used in mazes as rewards) through its screen. Joel questions the meaning of television ("All your life is Channel 13, Sesame Street, what does it mean?"), and television (which Mulcahy treats in an increasingly anthropomorphic fashion as the video progresses) responds by sucking Joel into the screen.

The third verse opens with an image of the child within the television, face pressed up against the screen from the inside, screaming for help. The television now rests on a step in a futuristic-looking room, filled with bundles of bound papers and, on top of a pedestal, the old man from the previous scene (presumably an older form of Joel), bound in a chair with an odd headpiece surrounding him, eyes wide as lights flash around him. The camera pans past the old man to reveal an "APPLAUSE" sign, flashing red, marking the transition to the next pressure situation, a television game show (decorated with red game pedestals and red carpet) in which Joel is a contestant. Joel defeats his two opponents and is congratulated by the game show host; the backdrop divides to reveal Joel's prize. Instead of receiving a prize, however, the bridge material recurs, and we see a scene involving the child-Joel again. During this instrumental section, the boy stands at the front of a classroom, incomprehensible writing on the chalkboard behind him as the class sits transfixed by a television set, upon which is a man pointing in the direction of the board. Television has become so pervasive that it is now teaching the children. Water begins to pour out of the desk of one of the students, and the child-Joel looks on in shock. As the second half of the bridge material begins ("All your life is Time magazine, I read it too, what does it mean?"), Mulcahy alters the perspective, moving the image of the shocked child onto the projection screen in the propaganda room, where Joel sits, transfixed by the images again.

It is now clear that the previous scenes, images from which flash by on the screen as Joel watches, transfixed, have taken place in Joel's head, as the false reality imposed by the screen in the propaganda room forces its way into Joel's consciousness. At this point, however, Joel asserts his independence, fighting against the machine; he addresses the faceless force behind the images personally, using the lyrics of the final verse as a passionate indictment of mass media and popular culture. The words take on new meaning as Joel aims these lyrics directly at the screen hanging ominously in front of him:

> I'm sure you'll have some cosmic rationale.
> But here you are with your faith, and your Peter Pan advice.
> You have no scars on your face
> And you cannot handle pressure!

Initially, Joel intended these lyrics for the studio executives who demanded new songs from him; through this transformation, however, the message becomes more powerful, more pointed, as if Joel speaks for all of us trapped within our own living/propaganda rooms, caught in the thrall of television, bombarded by advertisements and lost in the maze of our own alternate realities. Mulcahy endeavours to use Joel's words to strip away the shiny veneer of television ("You have no scars on your face"), to reveal the inanity of the messages streaming out of the "boob tube" ("here you are with your faith and your Peter Pan advice") and to show us all the dangers of trusting television over our own experiences. Ironically, of course, Mulcahy here is indicting the very industry that had made him rich and famous; without MTV, without mass media, Mulcahy would lose the medium for *his* message.

Mulcahy's video for "Pressure," this collection of "nightmarish scenes that were supposed to represent Joel's subconscious," seems either to have revealed a deeper meaning in Joel's lyrics or changed the meaning entirely. Thus arises a dilemma when considering the meaning of music videos and their relation to the songs they accompany: how great of a part does the artist play in the direction

and production of the music video? Are the video and album recording of "Pressure" two separate entities because of their quite disparate meanings, and because of the two different sources for those meanings? The answer must lie in the relationship of musician and director, and the extent to which the production of a music video is a collaboration between the two. When discussing music videos, it is quite rare to hear commentators remarking on the director of the video; rather, it is the musician who seems to get the credit for his or her videos. For example, in *The Madonna Companion*, a collection of essays on Madonna, one of the most influential practitioners of the music video in the 80s and 90s, Madonna is credited with "transmitting an avant-garde downtown New York sensibility to the American masses,"[79] and with the "incorporation of Hispanic culture and Catholic symbolism … with the music videos from the *True Blue* era."[80] Little mention is made of the directors of Madonna's videos, including David Fincher ("Vogue" and "Express Yourself") and Mary Lambert ("Like a Virgin," "Material Girl," and "Like a Prayer). Additionally, Michael Jackson, whose videos for songs such as "Bad," "Beat It," and the fourteen-minute mini-film "Thriller" continue to influence video directors today, is generally given credit for his videos. Directors for his videos include Hollywood icons such as John Landis, who directed *Animal House* (1978), *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) before collaborating with Jackson on 1983's "Thriller," and Academy Award-winner Martin Scorcese, who perhaps drew on his experience directing *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980) for his direction of the street fight scenes in "Bad." Jackson, known for his innovative dance moves as well as his singular pop style, did

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[79] Camille Paglia, "Venus of the Radio Waves," from *The Madonna Companion (*Allan Metz and Carol Benson (ed.)), (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999) p. 163.

[80]Santiago Fouz-Hernandez, "Crossing the border(line)," from *Madonna's Drowned Worlds (*Santiago Fouz-Hernández and Freya Jarman-Ivens (ed.)), (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) p. 145.

collaborate with choreographer Michael Peters on the dance sequences in "Thriller," but he did not direct the video.

Artists such as Madonna and Jackson have gone on record stating how interested they were in making videos and in breaking new ground in the rapidly growing industry of music videos. These artists evidently enjoyed making and watching videos, and thus participated in their production at a higher level than some. Joel, as has been stated previously, has often claimed quite the opposite, at least in terms of his appreciation of videos themselves. He once stated "We're talking about promo clips. This ain't the tail wagging the dog, or is it? Is that what's happening? Is Milli Vanilli being two cute guys deciding what's going to play on radio?"[81] He has, however, recognized their importance for promotional tools. During an interview with *Spin* magazine in 1985, Joel made his views on the matter quite clear:

> I hate them, I hate doing them. I only do them because I have to promote my records one way or another. It's part of my contract, but I never enjoyed it. Still, I'd rather do a video than go all over the country, meeting every rack-jobber and record retailer, visiting every little radio station that plays my records … So I just do a video and, bingo, my end of the bargain is kept. I know they've got to be done, though, so I do try to make them good.[82]

From this quotation, it seems evident that Joel made videos only because he was required to, and because it was the lesser of two evils for promoting his music in a post-MTV world. In this case, it seems as if "Pressure"'s new message has nothing to do with Joel; it came from Mulcahy's mind solely, and Joel merely showed up and played his part. Later on in the same interview with *Spin*, however, Joel revealed the part he can play in the production of videos for his songs: "I did one for 'She's Right on Time,' which is this sort of Christmas song

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[81] Wild, "Billy Joel," p. 39.

[82] Millman, "Billy Joel Talks Back," in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 213.

that, if I'd done it literally, would've been too cornball. So I tried to do it funny, which was ever worse. I should've left it corny."[83] The video for "She's Right on Time," as discussed here, does venture into the world of slapstick humour, which seems a departure from the lyrics of the song. It is evident from this quotation that Joel, not Mulcahy, made the decision to add this level of comedy to the video, which implies a certain level of participation by the songwriter at the production level. It is thus reasonable to extrapolate that Joel participated in the concept process for his videos, and that the new, more sophisticated message present in the video for "Pressure," that of an indictment of popular culture and mass media, was at least partially Joel's idea. Furthermore, when we consider the messages of the other songs on *The Nylon Curtain* that represent a certain level of departure from the norm for Joel, in combination with his stated intention for this album before its release (in his interview for *Playboy* magazine in 1980) and his feelings about media control evidenced in his statements regarding his experiences in Cuba, it seems logical that the message most commonly associated with "Pressure," that evidenced in (and by) the video, came about through a collaboration between Joel and Mulcahy. Joel may not have *liked* making videos, but the evidence suggests that, when required to make them, he involved himself in the design and production of said videos.

This point is vital if we are to include "Pressure" in this study. Without the video, "Pressure" is an autobiographical song of the type normally found on Joel's albums. The addition of a video, however, aids in changing the nature and the content of the message. Marsha Kinder expanded upon the ability of music videos to alter our perception of music in her article, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology and Dream":

> One of the most compelling aspects of rock video is its power to evoke specific visual images in the mind of the spectator every time one hears the music with which they have been juxtaposed on television.

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[83] *Ibid*, p. 213.

> The experience of having watched and listened to a particular video clip on television establishes these connections in the brain circuitry; by repeating the experience very frequently within a short period of time (a situation guaranteed by the repetitive structure of MTV), the spectator strengthens these associations in the brain. Thus later when the spectator hears the song … the presence of the music is likely to draw these images from memory, accompanied by the desire to see them again.[84]

In other words, the simple act of watching a music video (repeatedly, if one is a regular viewer of video programming such as that provided by MTV) irrevocably alters the content of the song for viewers, thus privileging the visual over audio. It is possible to separate the visual from the audio, but when we hear a song on the radio or a stereo after watching the video, we are likely to recall the images from the video, and to attach meaning to the song according to the nature of the images we have seen. As Kinder states, the opposite is not true: viewing the images without the music "can be achieved only through technical breakdown or through the spectator's intervention (turning off the sound while watching the images)";[85] we are also far less likely to recall the music in the latter case than the video in the former.

This is especially true with a video such as "Pressure," which is made up of a series of rapidly changing images and scenes, "a series of incongruous visual images stressing spatial and temporal dislocations [that] closely resemble dreams – the primary medium that weaves loose narratives out of chains of incoherent images."[86] This description is certainly fitting for Mulcahy's vision of "Pressure," one most likely endorsed by Joel, which Mulcahy saw as a bad dream, a collection of images out of Joel's subconscious. As Kinder hypothesizes, once a viewer sees the video for "Pressure," the meaning of the song changes to (if the

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[84] Marsha Kinder, "Music Video and the Spectator: Television, Ideology and Dream," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Autumn, 1984), p. 3.

[85] *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

[86] *Ibid*, pg. 5.

viewer had heard the song before) or is established as (if the viewer had never heard the song before the viewing) that which Mulcahy expressed in the video; the addition of the visual forever alters our view of the song. Evidently, Joel, too, was influenced by the new meaning revealed in this song through the addition of the music video, as the lyrics for "We Didn't Start the Fire," the partner to "Pressure" in this study, with their rapid-fire delivery and coverage of political, military, cultural and athletic events of the second half of the twentieth century, are the written equivalent of Mulcahy's "Propaganda Room" scenes.

Despite his dislike of making music videos, Joel had a hand in producing some of the most memorable videos in the early 80s. His experience working with Mulcahy on this video and the two others from the album on which the director and the songwriter collaborated ("She's Right on Time" and "Allentown"), in addition to the popular success he found through his new exposure on MTV, certainly helped to convince Joel of the importance of making videos, and of the potentially altering effect they could have on his songs. Whether or not the video for the song changed the meaning of "Pressure" in Joel's mind is, of course, complete speculation. It is clear, however, considering the links present between "Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire" (which will become more evident in the next chapter), a song that undoubtedly falls under the category of social commentary and historical criticism, that "Pressure" has the potential for deeper meaning than simply "the pressures of songwriting." Joel and Mulcahy saw potential, in the popular culture references present in the lyrics and in the relentless synthesizer theme that appears throughout the song, for producing a video that extrapolated Joel's personal pressures to include all of the pressures on Cold War America, creating in the process a disturbing image of a society drowning in excess while remaining ignorant to the threats all around it, both political and cultural. "Pressure" is generally regarded by critics as the most highly-charged rock number on *The Nylon Curtain*; in combination with the video, however, "Pressure" becomes an important example of Joel's earliest ventures in creating a song that addressed the "American experience."

Chapter 3
"We Didn't Start the Fire"

"It's one of the worst melodies I've ever written. I kind of like the lyric, though. I thought it was a clever one."[87] Billy Joel used these words to describe the smash number 1 hit from his 1989 album *Storm Front*, "We Didn't Start the Fire." Despite Joel's assertion regarding the poor quality of the melody in this song, "We Didn't Start the Fire" helped *Storm Front* to become one of Joel's highest-selling albums (Americans bought over four million albums, helping it reach four-time platinum status) and became Joel's third (and final, thus far) single to reach the top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. The song is somewhat of an oddity in Joel's songbook, given the songwriter's tendency towards narrative lyrical structures and dynamic musical form throughout his oeuvre. Instead, the lyrics for "We Didn't Start the Fire" are comprised of a rapid-fire litany of important political, scientific, pop culture and athletic events that occurred during Joel's lifetime, and the music is unambitious formally and highly repetitive, the melody "like a mosquito droning."[88] Despite these lyrical and formal shortcomings, however, "We Didn't Start the Fire" remains one of Joel's best-selling singles and most recognizable songs. This song, with its patter-style lyrics and subsequent staggering level of popularity, and its subsequent use as a vehicle for teaching American history, lent itself to parody. Indeed, "We Didn't Start the Fire" has been the subject of several: Otto Waalkes' "spirits anthem," "Wir haben Grund zum Feiern," in which the German comedian substitutes names of alcoholic beverages for twentieth-century events; "Here Comes Another Bubble," a humourous take on technology bubbles by The Richter Scales, an American a cappella group; and "They'll Never Stop the Simpsons," a description of possible plots for future episodes of *The Simpsons* from the 2002 episode "Gump Roast."

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[87] Bego, *Billy Joel*, pp. 251-2.

[88] *Ibid,* p. 251.

Joel has given conflicting reports of the genesis of "We Didn't Start the Fire." During an interview cited in Fred Bronson's *The Billboard Book of Number One Hits*, Joel recalled a conversation with a young friend that served as the inspiration for the song:

> The whole stimulus of writing it came from a conversation I was having with a guy who had just entered his 20s and was feeling a little depressed about the world situation. You gotta understand, this was '89, before the whole Iron Curtain came down. He was worried about AIDS ... pollution ... the situation in Red China. I said, 'Wait a minute, didn't you ever hear of Dien Bien Phu ... the Hungarian freedom fighters ... the Suez Canal crisis?' He never heard of any this stuff. I started jotting these images down, these flashes of newspaper headlines that occurred to me. I actually tried to write them down in chronological order, like it was a mental exercise. It wasn't meant to be a record at the time. I went home and checked my encyclopedia to see how close I was to the chronology of the events. As it turned out, I was almost dead on the money. I'd say about three or four changes came from reading the encyclopedia.[89]

Joel, however, gave another version of the story to Bill DeMain:

> I started doing that as a mental exercise. I had turned forty. It was 1989, and I said, "Okay, what's happened in my life?" I wrote down the year 1949. Okay, Harry Truman was the president. Popular singer of the day, Doris Day. China went Communist. Another pop star, Johnny Ray. Big Broadway show, *South Pacific*. Journalist, Walter Winchell. Athlete, Joe DiMaggio. Then I went to 1950, Richard Nixon, Joe McCarthy, big cars, Studebaker, television, et cetera, et cetera ... It was kind of a mind game.[90]

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[89] Fred Bronson, *The Billboard Book of Number One Hits* (New York: Billboard Books, 2003), as cited in Bego, p. 252.

[90] Bill DeMain, *In Their Own Words: Songwriters Talk About the Creative Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 119.

The two stories are obviously related; Joel used the lyrics for this song as a "mental exercise." He had reached a significant life milestone in the year he released *Storm Front*, turning forty years old. 1989 also served as a watershed year in terms of world history, as revolution swept across Eastern Europe, displacing Communist regimes in countries such as East Germany, Poland and the Baltic states. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Joel should have been inspired to take stock of his own life and the history that he had witnessed in his forty years. In so doing, he created a succinct summary of the trends in world politics, entertainment, technological development, athletics and economics during the second half of the twentieth century.

The song had a large impact on popular culture in the United States. Besides being the subject of several parodies, as noted above, "We Didn't Start the Fire" received special attention from critics. *Time* magazine wrote that the album contained "'We Didn't Start the Fire,' plus nine other effortlessly obnoxious ditties" and called the album "the musical equivalent of a sociology lecture by Ralph Kramden [the Jackie Gleason character on *The Honeymooners*]."[91] while *Blender* magazine compared the song to "a term paper scribbled the night before it's due," ranking the song number 41 on their list of the "50 Worst Songs Ever."[92] *Rolling Stone* magazine, however, gave *Storm Front* and "We Didn't Start the Fire" a glowing review, stating, "*Storm Front*'s propulsive first song, 'We Didn't Start the Fire,' sounds the alarm on a society that has lost its moral center and is spinning out of control."[93] Despite the largely negative critical response to it,

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[91] Andrea Sachs, compiler, "Critic's Voices: *Storm Front*." *www.time.com*. Time, 8 January 1990. Web. 20 June 2011.

[92] Aizlewood, John, Clark Collis et al. "Run for Your Life! It's the 50 Worst Songs Ever!" *www.blender.com*. Blender magazine, 1 April 2009. Web. 31 March 2011.

[93] John McAlley, "Billy Joel: *Storm Front*." *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 30 November 1989. Web. 20 June 2011.

some school teachers in the United States used Joel's song as a teaching tool. For example, students in a fifth-grade class in Wisconsin were required to pick one citation from the song and write a report about the significance of their chosen item. In response to such occurrences, CBS Records released forty thousand cassettes that included a recording of the song and a ten-minute discussion from Joel regarding the importance of studying history and treating it as a living discipline. The cassettes were distributed to schools along with educational publications such as *Junior Scholastic* and *Update*.[94]

In his commentary on the aforementioned recording, Joel states, "A lot of people tend to think history is just this drab series of boring names and dates that you just have to connect to pass the test. Really, history is a living thing. We are where we are today, and we are who we are today, because of our history."[95] A high school dropout, a student who had barely slid by with satisfactory grades when he managed to attend his classes, Joel nonetheless had shown a keen interest in the history of the United States and its role in the world. This interest manifested itself in some of Joel's earlier writing, particularly in songs from *The Nylon Curtain* (a point that will be made in greater detail during the examination of "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon"), but never had he so codified the history that was important to him as he did with the lyrics to "We Didn't Start the Fire." One of the reasons that the song became such an enormous hit for Joel is that he chose items for the lyrics that seemed to fit with the priorities of listeners across a broad spectrum of backgrounds. Summaries of the events mentioned by Joel proliferate on the Internet, including videos that show images of the events while the song plays in the background. Even authors writing about topics far removed from music commentary have found resonance in Joel's lyrics. Steven Ettinger, in his 2003 self-help volume *Torah 24/7: A Timely Guide for the Modern Spirit*, makes mention of "We Didn't Start the Fire" in his introduction:

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[94] Bego, p. 260.

[95] Associated Press, "Joel Lights a Fire in a Classroom," *Newsday*, January 19, 1990 (as cited in Bego, p. 260).

> In a song titled "We Didn't Start the Fire" singer-songwriter Billy Joel captured the major images, events, and personalities of this half-century in a three minute song … It was pure information overload, a song that assumed we knew exactly what he was singing about. Music, movies, science, revolutions, and wars. Liberation, equalization, assassinations, and plenty of sensation. Rock stars, movie stars, sports stars, and media stars. What was truly alarming was the realization that for the most part we, the listeners, understood the references.[96]

Ettinger was correct in his assessment that many listeners in Joel's audience, the twenty-five- to forty-year olds to whom Joel referred in his 1982 interview with *Playboy* magazine, knew, for the most part, exactly who and what he was talking about, even from such short descriptions delivered in a rapid-fire manner. Joel's intended audience, after all, had experienced the same history he had.

There are 119 references to "images, events and personalities" in the lyrics of the song, organized into nineteen stanzas.[97] For the most part, each stanza includes references from a specific year, although the first stanza represents the 1940s, while the final four stanzas bring the listener from 1964 to the present, with the events listed in chronological order by verse.[98] The liner notes for *Storm Front* make this level of organization abundantly clear, as each stanza has a year listed

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[96] Steve Ettinger, *Torah 24/7: A Timely Guide for the Modern Spirit* (Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2003), p. 2.

[97] For the full lyrics to the song, please refer to Appendix A.

[98] There is only one instance in which Joel alters the chronological order for the sake of the poetry in the lyrics. In the seventeenth verse, he lists "Begin, Reagan, Palestine, trouble on the airlines, Ayatollahs in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan" (perhaps to enable the catchy "Begin, Reagan" rhyme). Reagan, Palestine and the airlines refer to events of 1976, including Ronald Reagan's first run for the office of President of the United States, while Menachem Begin did not become Prime Minister of Israel until 1977. In the liner notes for *Storm Front*, however, Joel indicated the years for the final four stanzas (which include these references) to be "'64 - '89," while he had given exact years for every other stanza.

next to it (except for the final four stanzas, which have the title "1964-89" appended to them). The majority of references in the song concern events taken from world and American political history, including names of leaders or politicians (Harry Truman, Joe McCarthy, Joseph Stalin, Juan Peron) or significant events ("England's got a new queen," "Dien Bien Phu falls," "trouble in the Suez"); such items account for sixty-one of the 119 total references (twenty-eight are specifically American, while thirty-three are more global). Of secondary importance to Joel in his catalogue of world history from 1949 is social history, such as people or events in the entertainment world (Doris Day, *Psycho*, British Beatlemania); thirty-three of the items in "We Didn't Start the Fire" fall into this category. The remaining twenty-five references are split nearly equally between sports (eight, including Joe DiMaggio, Sugar Ray and Campanella), literature (seven, including *Catcher in the Rye* and *Peyton Place*) and science (ten, such as H-bomb, Einstein and Sally Ride).[99]

While many of the tags in this song leave little doubt about their referents, such as "Brooklyn's got a winning team," "trouble in the Suez" or "Sputnik," some are more ambiguous. For example, the inclusions of "television" in the stanza for 1950, "vaccine" in the stanza for 1952 and "Mafia" in that for 1959 do not refer to events that are exclusively related to those subjects. Televisions became more popular in the United States throughout the 1950s, especially with the advent of colour television in 1952; therefore, including television in the stanza for 1950 seems somewhat arbitrary. Similarly, Jonas Salk discovered the vaccine for polio in 1952, but this was just one important discovery in the history of vaccines. The Mafia held a series of important meetings in 1959 to get better organized, but

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[99] I have assigned the references according to categories created by myself, and thus there is certainly some overlap. For example, the opening of Disneyland in 1955 could be seen as an event in U.S. History, but it has instead been placed into the Entertainment category. The purpose behind assigning the references into categories is to see which types of events were more significant in Joel's mind, not to assert any definitive categorization.

there is little other reason to attach the Mafia specifically to 1959. In these instances, Joel attempts to make reference to subjects important to the *zeitgeist* of that time. Including a reference to the Mafia in the same stanza as Buddy Holly, Ben-Hur and Castro places it in a specific context that is unmistakable to Joel's audience; this is obviously a reference to the Mafia of the late 50s rather than that of the 1970s. The same applies to "television" (in the same stanza as Studebaker, Joe McCarthy and Marilyn Monroe) and "vaccine" (grouped with Eisenhower, Marciano and "England's got a new queen"). Therefore, we understand the references not only because of date-specific images, but also because Joel creates a clear context in which the more ambiguous references make perfect sense to us.

As Joel suggests, the interest in this song lies primarily in the catchy lyrics and their clever arrangement into rhyming couplets. Musically, however, "We Didn't Start the Fire" is not only one of Joel's least adventurous songs in terms of harmonic progressions, but also one of his most monotonous melodically. Joel's indictment of his own melody, describing it as akin to a "mosquito droning," becomes convincing upon closer examination of the song. "We Didn't Start the Fire" is straightforward formally, with highly repetitive verses containing simple melodies and predictable progressions towards the chorus. As stated above, each stanza represents one year (or span of consecutive years), and generally contains seven references, although some stanzas only have five or six; the number of references in the stanzas depends on the number of syllables in each reference. Each stanza is comprised of four measures of music in standard time, and the vast majority of the syllables in this patter-type song last for one eighth-note (there are no sixteenth notes in the vocal line, although there are several quarter notes). The maximum number of syllables possible in each verse, therefore, is thirty-two; the syllables in the lyrics in each stanza generally number between twenty-two and twenty-eight, however, depending on the stresses in each word. The stanzas can be broken down further into phrases; each stanza contains four

short phrases of six to eight syllables, with one or two references in each phrase. For the most part, ignoring slight ornaments consisting of upper or lower neighbor tones at the beginning of phrases, Joel sings each phrase on one tone, beginning with B for the first phrase, A for the second and third, and G for the fourth. These tones serve to outline the following harmonic progression: G major - D major - E minor – C major. The pitch set in the melodic line includes tones consistent with a major scale built on G; these chords thus suggest a I-V-vi-IV progression, which is a common progression in rock songs, including Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," U2's "With or Without You" and The Beatles' "Let it Be."[100] An interesting feature of this progression is that it does not end with IV; it must continue to the first beat of the next measure before finding resolution, even though the downward motion of the melody does give the G melody tone a sense of finality. The basic format of each stanza is outlined in the following table, using the first stanza as an example.

Lyric	Melody tone (s)	Chord suggested	Number of Syllables
Harry Truman, Doris Day	B	G maj	7
Red China, Johnnie Ray	A (B)	D maj	6
South Pacific, Walter Winchell	A	E min (add A)	8
Joe DiMaggio	G (A)	C maj	5

Table 2: Stanza Form in "We Didn't Start the Fire"

This format applies to most stanzas, but there are variations. For example, in the fourth stanza (beginning with "Eisenhower, vaccine") Joel uses the same progression (G-D-e-C) but different melody notes. He sings the first phrase on B, but instead of going down to A, he moves up a third to D, then continues this upward progression by singing the third and fourth phrases on E. This variant of

[100] This progression is so common, in fact, that in 2008, Australian comic rock group The Axis of Awesome produced a song called "4 Chords," which is a medley of thirty-six rock and pop songs that all use this chord progression. The song received airplay on BBC Radio 1, and subsequently went viral on YouTube, receiving millions of hits.

the melodic line, hereafter referred to as S_1, serves as a transition to the chorus material and is analogous to a pre-chorus. Another variant (S_2) features Joel's maintaining the initial melody note throughout the first three phrases before moving up to C for the final phrase; he uses this variation to heighten tension before continuing with a third variation (S_3) , one in which he sings a D for two phrases, then E for the final two phrases. Joel finally resolves the tension created through this ascending line by resolving downwards to D, which is also the first note of the chorus.[101]

The chorus contains the most varied melodic material in the song, despite its repetitive nature. Joel uses a G major pentatonic scale starting on D (D-E-G-A-B). The melody for the chorus, although it uses more melodic notes than the stanzas, achieves a more repetitive tone than the stanzas due to the arrangement of these pitches. Joel wrote a melody for this chorus that does not seem to have a firm ending. In a similar fashion to the harmonic device used in the verses, where the final chord of each stanza (IV) necessarily leads into the first chord of the next measure (I) in order to find resolution, the final note of the chorus melody always leads to a repeat of the chorus or to another section of the song because of the lack of resolution created by this soft ending. The melody has an asymmetrical arch shape, starting on D, reaching its highest pitch (A) on the word "fire," then again on "always," then trending downwards back towards G on the words "fight it." In the first phrase of the chorus (each chorus is comprised of two phrases), these melody tones suggest a harmonic progression that outlines a chord based on the fourth scale degree: G major – E minor – C major. Joel changes the progression in the second phrase according to which section of the song follows the chorus. If a standard form of the stanza material follows, then Joel uses the same progression for the second phrase as for the first; this is the

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[101] The first appearance of S_2 begins with "Einstein, James Dean, Brooklyn's got a winning team," while the first iteration of S_3 appears immediately after this stanza ("Bardot, Budapest, Alabama, Khrushchev").

case after the first hearing of the chorus. If, however, the bridge material follows the chorus, then Joel ends the chorus with an A minor seventh chord. In either case, the use of G as the final melody tone in the chorus (serving as the fifth of a C chord or the seventh of the A minor seventh) does not provide satisfactory resolution. Therefore, the conclusion of the chorus melody does not serve as an ending, but rather always as a transition to a new section. In fact, "We Didn't Start the Fire" does not have a firm ending. Joel instead utilizes the "repeat and fade" option for the conclusion of this song, allowing this endlessly repeatable chorus to turn "on and on and on and on," just as he suggests the fire will continue to burn. The chorus thus serves as the hook for the song: the rhythm, melody and lyrics are simple, direct, and memorable, especially through the feeling of belonging we experience when Joel includes us in his assertion that "we tried to fight it."

The final different section of "We Didn't Start the Fire" is the bridge, which occurs after the second iteration of the chorus. The bridge is ten measures long, and is comprised of two identical four-measure sections and a two-measure transition to the next chorus. Lyrically, the bridge section is identical to the verses; there are twelve references over the first eight measures spanning the years 1957-58. The melody of the bridge consists, in essence, of a pair of 6-5 appoggiaturas, each four bars in length, in the G major scale (E to D); the melody stays on E until the final beat of the fourth and eighth measures, respectively. Joel uses the E as a long-range appoggiatura to the note of resolution, D, as he moves through chords based on the fourth, second, sixth and fifth tones of the scale (C major, A minor, E minor and D major, or IV-ii-vi-V); the E melody tone serves as a suspension in the final chord of each half of the bridge (measures four and eight). This correlates with the rest of the melody, which, as I have illustrated, is quite simple and straight-forward. The V chord at the end of the first phrase in the bridge ("*Bridge on the River Kwai*") is left unresolved, as the next phrase starts on IV again; the melody line moves up a tone, while the bass

line descends a whole tone, a rather elegant use of contrary motion, but there is no sense of resolution between the two phrases. After the second phrase, however, Joel alters the role of the V chord to its more traditional use: a transition back to the home key. He does so through a short guitar and drum solo (two measures) over a D pedal tone in the bass guitar; the lead guitar has been given a distorting echo treatment while the bongos provide a kind of drum roll, leading back to G major. Joel sings a short "oh-oh, oh-oh" in the final measure of the bridge that also enables a transition to the beginning melody tone of the verse; this vocal transition serves as a musical and structural reference to Buddy Holly's hiccuping vocal style present in songs such as "Peggy Sue."[102]

The chord progression Joel chose for the bridge has some obvious melodic and harmonic attraction, including presence of common tones between the each pair of successive chords, as I demonstrated above. These common tones facilitate voice leading in the inner parts and can enable some graceful progressions. Despite these attractions, however, this is a relatively rare chord progression. A significant example appears in the catalogue of The Beatles in the form of "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" from their 1963 album *Please Please Me*. "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" uses nearly the same progression in its bridge as "We Didn't Start the Fire," except that the dominant chord at the end of the bridge is a minor v in this case, as opposed to the major V used by Joel. The song is primarily in E major, and so the chord progression in "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" is A major – F# minor – C# minor – B minor. The melody line is quite different from Joel's; it outlines an A major triad before settling on the third of the B minor chord (D natural). The structure of the bridge here is remarkably similar to Joel's, however. The bridge in "Do You Want to Know a Secret?" is twelve measures long. The first phrase, four measures long, is repeated exactly. At the end of the second iteration, however, the melody line continues its descent

[102] Joel makes a similar vocal reference in "All You Wanna Do is Dance;" the 'ooh la la la' is a clear homage to the Beatles "Nowhere Man."

from D to B, which then serves as the dominant in a transition back to the verse material and the tonic chord (E major). The Beatles used a four-measure transition back to the tonic, as opposed to Joel's two-measure transition, but the bridge structure is the same: a single four-measure phrase repeated, followed by a dominant pedal point serving as a transition to the tonic and a new verse.

Joel incorporates a clear element of societal critique in the song. He manages to deliver the references in the stanzas without editorializing, for the most part. There are only three clear examples of subjectivity in the manner in which Joel delivers the references in the stanzas. The most obvious is "JFK blown away, what else do I have to say." The final line of the last stanza, however ("Rock and Roller Cola Wars, I can't take it anymore"), implies a certain level of frustration and defeatism on Joel's part, while "Brooklyn's got a winning team" contains within it a sense of relief, especially from Joel, a Long Islander.[103] The lyrics of the chorus betray his motives for writing the song, however. First, Joel's choice of pronoun is significant. He uses the first person plural throughout the chorus (and in the title of the song), implying a sense of a togetherness and unity of purpose behind fighting this "fire." The "we" to which Joel refers is presumably Joel's generation and younger; by denying culpability in the lighting of the fire, stating "We didn't light it, but we tried to fight it," Joel perhaps lays responsibility for the fire at the feet of his ancestors, his and those of his entire generation. Simultaneously, however, he seems to remove blame from everyone, saying "it was always burning, since the world's been turning." The most important aspect of the chorus, therefore, is not who is to blame for the tragedies and disasters outlined in the song, but rather that there is a desire to fight against the flames that burn through history. Of course, not all of the historical references present in this song evoke negative events; most of the entertainment, scientific and

[103] Joel's baseball loyalties clearly lie with the New York Yankees today, but as a child growing up on Long Island, he may have been a Brookyln Dodgers fan.

sports references are positive, but, as the song progresses, the tone and colour of the references darkens and becomes more serious. As the tension in the music rises over the final stanzas, primarily due to the rising melodic line, Joel's choices for significant events trend towards the negative, betraying his opinion that the global situation, as he sees it, was worsening as of 1988. Joel's pessimism becomes clear in the final stanza, when he paints a dark picture of current affairs: "Wheel of Fortune, Sally Ride, heavy metal suicide, foreign debts, homeless vets, AIDS, crack, Bernie Goetz, hypodermics on the shore, China's under martial law, rock and roller Cola Wars." At this point, Joel seems incapable of maintaining his position as impartial observer and recorder of world history; his frustration finally boils over with the final line of the stanza, stating "I can't take it anymore!" There is a sense of irony present in this last line. The final verse deals with some serious issues, except for the reference to the battle waged between Coca-Cola and Pepsi in the late 80s (and continuing today). Joel's outburst at the end of the song perhaps indicates his annoyance with such a mundane event having such cultural significance; juxtaposing soft drink wars with AIDS and crack underlines this point (although this stanza has also been a lightning rod for criticism of the song, as I will outline below).

The nature of Joel's role in "We Didn't Start the Fire," whether as impartial narrator or impassioned critic, becomes clearer when we consider the contents of the video. Directed by Chris Blum, whose only other directorial credit came for "Big Time," a 1988 documentary about Tom Waits, the video follows an American family through the same time period laid out by Joel in the lyrics.[104] Set almost entirely in the family's kitchen, the video is filled with visual references to the items in the lyrics, as well as products, trends, fashions and events that occurred

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[104] The video bears a passing resemblance to that of an earlier patter-style song featuring a litany of pop culture and historical references, R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World As We Know It (and I Feel Fine)." At the end of R.E.M.'s video, the house featured in the video is revealed to be missing the fourth wall, as does the family home in Joel's video for "We Didn't Start the Fire."

during Joel's lifetime. As the stanzas progress, so the family expands and changes; we are witness to the manner in which the events detailed by Joel shaped the evolution of the American nuclear family. There are six distinct versions of the set through the course of the video, excluding that for the chorus, which will receive its own treatment below. Each set represents approximately one decade that Joel treats in the lyrics, starting with the late 1940s, continuing through the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s, and culminating with what appears to be a futuristic set. The video opens with a newlywed couple entering the home, the proud husband carrying his new wife across the threshold, spinning her around to show off their new home, while it ends with a future generation of the family in a sparsely-decorated, postmodern kitchen. Blum filled each set with icons from these time periods and changed the décor of the kitchen to reflect the styles of the time. As the family grows and the kitchen evolves, Joel is ever-present, watching the family and interacting with the environment while maintaining a position of observation rather than one of involvement, with one exception. During the first scene, set during the 1950s, the newlywed couple have had their first child. While the mother pulls a burning meal out of the oven, her husband absentmindedly pushes the carriage back and forth, reading his *Life* magazine. The baby begins to cry, and Joel walks over and shakes a baby rattle for the child, trying to soothe him while his parents, oblivious to their baby's distress, maintain their stereotypical 1950s roles.

The time represented by each scene becomes obvious from both general and specific details. In the opening scene, the new wife has bright red hair done in a Lucille Ball style; this reference to *I Love Lucy* is unmistakable. The style of furniture, lack of modern appliances such as a dishwasher and traditional oven make it clear that this scene is set in the 1950s. A closer look at the smaller details supports the viewer's initial conclusion. For example, the wife, clearly pregnant by the 12-second mark of the video, eats pickles while reading a

magazine called *Romance*.[105] Furthermore, a short shot of a hanging calendar clearly shows the date as August 1950. This scene also includes a shot of the father reading *Life* magazine (at 0:32); the cover photo is a portrait of baseball star Joe DiMaggio. This cover appeared on 1 August 1950, and Joel references DiMaggio in the lyrics of the first stanza. The second scene begins at 0:51 with an image of a young man reading a newspaper called simply *Daily Tribune*; the headline reads, "Elvis Joins the Army." Even without knowing the specific date on which Elvis joined the army (24 March 1958), this headline (from a fictional newspaper) creates an unmistakable allusion to the late 1950s, indicating a change of era. This scene is rife with period-specific products and allusions. The couple's child, now seven or eight years old, plays with Lincoln Logs (which were invented forty years earlier but remained a staple childhood toy in the 1950s), dresses like Davey Crockett, and wears a Richard Nixon mask (Joel mentions both Davey Crockett and Nixon in the lyrics, although the first reference to Nixon came earlier in the song). Meanwhile, the mother now has better appliances in her kitchen, including an electric stove, and opens the cupboard while cooking, revealing a can of SPAM luncheon meat and a box of Ritz crackers.[106] Additional clues as to the time to which this scene refers include a Lone Ranger lunch box and a hand-drawn picture of Mickey Mouse (Disneyland opened in 1955) on the 'fridge (which includes the name of the child: John Thornton), as well as a new flash camera and another calendar, this time reading January 1957. This scene contains the first examples of temporal inconsistencies in the video. The

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[105] Pulp magazines and comics such as this were common in the 1950s. Aimed at women between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, and read primarily by young married women, these publications included such titles as *First Romance*, *True Romance* and *True Confessions*, with articles such as "Hairdos You Can Do Yourself" and "I Couldn't Forgive My Brother-in-Law." *True Confessions* is still being published, now by Dorchester Media since it purchased Sterling/Macfadden in 2004.

[106] SPAM was first introduced in 1937 but did not achieve great popularity until after the Second World War. Similarly, Ritz crackers have been available since 1934, but became a household staple in the 1950s.

newspaper in this scene refers to an event from 1958 but the calendar indicates that it is 1957. Also, Nixon masks were not available until Richard Nixon's administration, and did not become popular until the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s. Since the lyrics for this section actually refer to events from 1953-1956, these inconsistencies are rather glaring, but only when considered in slow motion. Viewed at normal speed, the atmosphere generated by this scene and the rapid-fire succession of images seems to be temporally consistent. Joel seems to have been endeavouring to create a sense of reminiscence rather than one of historical accuracy, taking some artistic license with the inclusion of certain suggestive props.

After the second iteration of the chorus, the kitchen changes again, this time decorated with orange, yellow and red in a manner indicative of 1960s interior design. The family now has a second child, a daughter who appears to be around ten or eleven years old. She plays with her Barbie dolls (which were launched by Mattel, Inc. in 1959) while Joel observes through the doorway, now adorned with a beaded curtain instead of a door. As the scene progresses, the young girl plays with a hula-hoop (the hula-hoop fad began in the United States in 1958, with sales peaking two years later), while a distinctive yellow smiley face is seen pasted to one of the kitchen cupboards.[107] Approximately two minutes into the video, there is a short scene in which the daughter plays her violin while her mother, visibly distressed by her child's playing, opens a drug bottle and takes a pill; she subsequently appears with a dazed look on her face, absently playing the violin herself. This is probably a reference to the diazepam family of medications, first marketed in the 1963 under the brand name Valium. It is possible that Joel also makes a reference here to "Mother's Little Helper," the Rolling Stones song about the abuse of barbiturates by housewives. Released in 1966 on the album

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[107] The now-iconic yellow smiley face was invented by Harvey Ball in 1964 for State Mutual Life Assurance as part of their campaign to give the company a friendly face.

Aftermath, "Mother's Little Helper" serves as a cautionary tale, one echoed in the video for "We Didn't Start the Fire": "Mother needs something today to calm her down/ And though she's not really ill, there's a little yellow pill … And if you take more of those/ You will get an overdose/ No more running for the shelter of mother's little helper."

The second half of the 1960s scene, which appears after the third hearing of the chorus, shows the family in a much altered state. The references in this section are less time-specific, but rather refer to the general state of the times in the late 1960s. The daughter, now a teenager (or perhaps in her early twenties) and sporting a tie-dyed T-shirt,[108] takes off her bra, lights it on fire and drops it in the kitchen sink, dancing with rebellious joy. Bra-burning, although historians have debunked this action as a myth (there are no reliable accounts of anyone ever burning bras as part of a feminist protest),[109] alludes to a protest of the 1968 Miss American pageant, held that year in Atlantic City, NJ. During the pageant, a small group from an early women's liberation group called New York Radical Women threw "instruments of female torture" such as "bras, mops, girdles, pots and pans and *Playboy* magazines … into a garbage can."[110] The women reportedly wanted to burn the items in an effort to link their protest with the burning of Vietnam War draft cards but Atlantic City police would not let them, and so they used a garbage can instead. Subsequently, the act of bra-burning became a widely-accepted symbol of the women's liberation movement that gained great popularity and support in the late 1960s; the inclusion of such an event in Joel's video shows the power and significance of this symbolic act, despite its fictional status. Shortly thereafter, Joel includes another iconic

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[108] Tie-dying clothing became popular in the late 1960s as part of the hippie style.

[109] Nell Greenfieldboyce. "Pageant Protest Sparked Bra-Burning Myth," *Npr.org* National Public Radio, 5 September 2008. Web. 11 March 2011.

[110] *Ibid.*

symbol of the hippie movement; the daughter, in another act of rebellion, lights what appears to be a marijuana cigarette from a candle, sliding down the wall as she inhales. In the final shot of this scene, as Joel sings "JFK blown away, what else do I have to say," the older son burns his draft card for the Vietnam War.

After this line, the lyrical structure of the song starts to break down; where each previous stanza had referred to events from one specific year and each successive stanza described the next year, Joel groups the remaining events under the heading "1964-89." The scene structure in the video reflects this change in the pattern of the lyrics. The fourth scene, depicting the family in the 1970s, lasts only eight seconds (2:56-3:04); in comparison, the first scene lasted almost fifty seconds, the second scene approximately thirty, and the third well over a minute (although it is split into two scenes by a chorus). Despite the truncated nature of this fourth scene, Joel nevertheless includes several interesting details that link this scene to the 1970s. The scene opens with the father swinging a golf club, making reference to the increasing popularity and accessibility of golf during that decade. The son enters the room (as his father now polishes his bowling ball) carrying a portable television set, similar to the kind made popular in the late 60s and readily available in the 1970s thanks to companies such as Sony and Panasonic. Finally, the calendar on the wall flips forward, showing a date of October 1977. Of greater interest than the date, however, is the picture in the calendar for that month. The picture is of a chimpanzee, while the caption reads "Frank Inn – Trained Animals." Inn was an accomplished animal trainer whose career spanned several decades. He is most well-known, however, for training a small brown dog named Higgins, better known as Benji, from the movie of the same name released in 1974.

On the words "Ayatollah's in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan," the scene changes again to a 1980s kitchen, decorated for Christmas. The décor has changed from the brown wood paneling of the 1970s scene to a 1980s minimalist design. The

kitchen now has an island, and the floor and island seem to be made of some sort of stone. The only colour in the room comes from the Christmas decorations, as the floor, island, cupboards and counters are either black or white. The family has expanded to three generations, evidenced by two young children playing in the kitchen. The grandson plays with a small toy that moves on its own while his sister practises her ballet, complete with tutu and magical wand. The scene closes with a close-up shot of someone (presumably the patriarch) serving a turkey dinner. The time-specific references here are less obvious than in previous scenes, but the décor is unmistakably 1980s-influenced. The design style, intended to give a sense of wealth, precision and tightly-controlled emotion, is similar to that of Patrick Bateman's in Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*. In his book *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945-2000*, Brian Baker stated that Bateman's apartment "expresses his personality: consumerist, aspirational, yet devoid of the marks of comfort or homeliness [...] it is literally and figuratively empty."[111] Ellis, using Bateman's narrative voice, describes the apartment, not by the design or colour scheme, but rather by the *things* Bateman owns: "A glass-top coffee table with oak legs by Turchin sits in front of the sofa, with Steuben glass animals placed strategically around expensive crystal ashtrays from Fortunoff, though I don't smoke. Next to the Wurlitzer jukebox is a black ebony Baldwin concert grand piano."[112] In the film adaptation of the book, directed by Mary Harron in 2000 and starring Christian Bale in the lead role, Bateman's apartment is shown in a remarkably similar manner as Joel's 1980s family: black and white furnishings and straight lines dominate both, betraying the need to display environmental control and prosperity.

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[111] Brian Baker. *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945-2000* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 74.

[112] Brett Ellis Easton. *American Psycho* (New York: Picador, 1991), p. 24.

The 80s scene ends with family tragedy. The presentation of the turkey dinner is represented by someone pulling the cover off a silver serving dish, revealing the turkey underneath. Following this presentation, another cover opens, but now it is the cover of a coffin, and the patriarch of the family is revealed. The coffin is decorated with green holly and there are red candles burning in the background, providing another connection to the preceding scene: the Christmas decorations were all red and green. Furthermore, when the patriarch entered the room for the Christmas scene, he was carrying a wine bucket with a bottle in it, and the table beside the door was covered in alcohol bottles; immediately following the image of the coffin opening, we see the matriarch drinking a glass of wine, perhaps in memory, or perhaps to forget. As Joel sings "Rock and roller cola wars, I can't take it anymore," the grand-daughter grieves under her black veil, and someone places two coins on the patriarch's eyes: a final reminder of the family's wealth, and payment for the ferryman.

The final scene portrays the family in the future, and is thus the only scene during which we hear only the chorus material. Until now, the lyrics from the stanzas corresponded approximately to the era depicted in the video, but because this final scene is set in the future, there are no referents available for correspondence. There is ample evidence supporting the theory that this scene exists in the future. The fashion presented by the characters (there are three: an adult female, likely a mother character; an adult male, perhaps the new patriarch; and one younger female adult) appears to be deliberately divergent from the fashions that preceded them. The mother character wears two mismatched earrings (one dangles, while the other is a misshapen star) and a blue, formless robe, while the male wears something akin to pajamas: a buttoned shirt, not tucked in, with matching trousers. The younger female, presumably their daughter, is attired in a radically different style. Her face is almost entirely covered by a scarf, while the rest of her clothing shows various patterns and prints. She is also wearing long gloves with no fingers, a leopard-print bodysuit,

and her hair is wild and spiked.[113] The interior design of the kitchen is stark and largely featureless; the most prominent elements are the built-in stove and refrigerator, and the computer sitting on the island.

The presence of the home computer is perhaps the most telling evidence that Joel intended this scene to represent the future. At the time of this video, home computers were rare in the United States. As of 1988, only 10.2% of American households owned a computer.[114] Since earlier in the 1980s, however, experts had been predicting that soon every household would have a personal computer. In a 1982 *Time* article on the rise of the home computer, Otto Friedrich quoted Alvin Toffler's vision of the future, "in which the computer revolution has canceled out many of the fundamental changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution: the centralization and standardization of work in the factory, the office, the assembly line," replaced by "'the electronic cottage,' a utopian abode where all members of the family work, learn and enjoy their leisure around the electronic hearth, the computer."[115] Previously, the island in the kitchen was a social place, one reserved for domestic activity, such as preparing sandwiches or balancing the checkbook (in the 1970s scene), or for important symbols such as the Christmas tree in the 1980s scene. In this final scene, however, the island is dominated by a computer, in front of which the mother sits, hypnotized by the harsh glare of the screen. She is oblivious to events occurring around her, barely tearing her eyes

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[113] Ironically, in their efforts to portray the daughter in a futuristic style, Joel and director Blum actually made the daughter's fashion look similar to that of the mid-80s. This character's manic and eclectic style, with its variety of patterns and wild hair, is reminiscent of Cyndi Lauper's revolutionary look from her debut studio album *She's So Unusual* (1983), while her fingerless gloves recall a similar look made fashionable by Madonna after the release of her 1984 album, *Like a Virgin*.

[114] John Schmitt and Jonathan Wadsworth, *Give PC's a Chance: Personal Computer Ownership and the Digital Divide in the United States and Great Britain*. (London, UK: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002), p. 19.

[115] Alvin Toffler, as cited in Otto Friedrich, "1982 Machine of the Year: The Computer Moves In." *www.time.com*. *Time* magazine, 3 January 1983. Web. 16 March 2011.

from the screen to look around at her family. Toffler's electronic hearth has come to be; the glow of the monitor is as entrancing as the flickering flames of the family fireplace from decades past.

As this final scene progresses, the camera pans out for the first time, and we finally see the environment beyond the confines of the family kitchen. The kitchen is revealed as an artificial construct, as the rest of the house does not exist; rather, the kitchen is merely a stage upon which the multi-generational family drama has unfolded, just two walls and a floor, and surrounded by a bleak, post-apocalyptic landscape. There are piles of wreckage, including tires and a propane tank, and several fires burn around the kitchen. The lights of a city can be seen in the distance, but the immediate surroundings show all the hallmarks of war and destruction. The family seems oblivious to their environment, however, even as the constructs of their reality begin to fall apart too. The father figure removes something from the refrigerator and it spontaneously combusts; the daughter backs against the counter and begins to move in an odd manner, while her mother looks blankly around her before returning her gaze to the computer screen. At this point, the family regresses; Joel shows us the family history in reverse, interspersing shots from the final scene with the more dramatic moments from the previous scenes: the coins on the eyes; the burning draft card; lighting the marijuana cigarette; mother and her "little helpers;" graduation day; the baby crying. Finally, the newlyweds from the beginning walk out the door of their kitchen, leaving Joel alone at the table. He disappears, too, leaving us with a final shot of the bride's veil falling to the floor.

There are several recurring themes that play important roles in this video. The most obvious is the use of fire throughout, which is appropriate in view of the title of the song. At the beginning of the video, there are few occurrences of fire, however. In the opening scene, the mother pulls what appears to be a burning dinner out of the oven, although we only see smoke, suggesting the genesis of a fire. The 1950s scene does not include any references to fire, but the next scene is

rife with them. First, the mother drops another piece of burning cookware on the floor. Shortly thereafter, the daughter uses lighter fluid to set her bra on fire; then she lights her marijuana cigarette from an open candle. Finally, the son ignites his draft card and leaves the burning remains on a plate. The image of the burning draft card reappears in the 1980s scene (which also includes burning candles). The final scene includes a shot of the father taking something out of the refrigerator, which then bursts into flames, and when the camera pans out, we see several fires burning out of control in the wasted landscape.

The relationship between the human element of the video and the fires burning around them is also significant. The matriarchs seem either surprised or confused by the presence of combustion. In the first scene, the mother opens the oven to find that her dinner is smoking; she looks around, unsure of what to do, and then walks away from the oven to tend to her baby. Later, in the 1960s scene, the mother drops a pot of burning food on the floor. The father figures generally seem not to notice (or care about) the presence of fire. When the children rebel by burning important symbols in their lives (a bra, a draft card), the father finishes a drink; later, he practises his golf swing and polishes his bowling ball. In the final scene, the father does not seem to notice that the item he pulls out of the refrigerator lights on fire in his hands. Indeed, by this point, the entire family is ignorant of the fires burning around them. The world outside the protection of their kitchen has been destroyed, in ruins and on fire, but all the members of the family go about their routine, unconcerned.

The primary use of fire in the video for “We Didn’t Start the Fire” occurs during the chorus sections, however. It is in these sections, which serve as dividers between the scenes of the family, that Joel’s role becomes the most clear, and when we are witness to the effects of the fires that raged throughout the first forty years of Joel’s life. The family scenes show how history has unfolded in the United States from a sociological and popular culture point of view. Joel displays to us evidence of the passage of time through product placement, using consumer

products as temporal anchors. Ettinger claimed that we understand the references in the song, even if they seem vague or lack specificity when taken in isolation, because we automatically attach those references to a specific time in history; Joel achieves the same result with the placement of time-specific products such as SPAM, Mickey Mouse, hula hoops and valium, and with the use of interior décor and clothing that suggest a specific era or fashion. In the chorus sections, however, Joel shows us the darker side of this period of history through the use of iconic photographs. Here, we see Joel sitting at a table that is surrounded by empty chairs. He is wearing the same clothing as he does throughout the video: all black with heavy black sunglasses. The backdrop is dominated by photographs that reference specific events, usually events that relate to the time period (or to specific references) that occurred in the lyrics previous to the chorus. For example, the first picture (at approximately 0:48) is of a Studebaker automobile; Joel refers to the Studebaker in the second stanza. In the first chorus, a fire starts over Joel's right shoulder and spreads across the shot behind him; this fire burns throughout the video and gradually grows larger and more out of control. The first photo is fairly innocuous, as is the fire in its early stages; by the time Joel sings the chorus for a second time, however, the fire has grown into an inferno and the background photo is far less innocent. For this chorus, Joel chose "Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching," a picture that first appeared in the photograph exhibition *The Family of Man*, a collection of over five hundred photographs first shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955. Taken anonymously in 1937, the disturbing photo shows a young African-American man tied to a tree with ropes and chains. By the end of this chorus, the flames have begun to roar out of control, consuming the photograph completely. The next chorus shows a picture of the execution of Nguyễn Văn Lém during the Vietnam War; the fourth, the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby in 1963. The final photograph, first seen as Joel sings "I can't take it anymore!", is of Oliver North, the former National Security Council officer charged with diverting funds during the Iran-Contra Affair, a scandal that became public in 1986. At this point, Joel shows his first real emotion of the

video, flipping over the table at which he had been sitting. It is of interest that the previous images (except that of the Studebaker) showed instances of brutal violence that shocked the world, but Joel's final photographic choice was of a smiling, waving North. Joel's frustration and disgust with the events of the world around him is clear at this point in the video, both through his actions and the lyrics; for Joel, North's smiling face perhaps became symbolic of the United States' continuing interference and meddling in the affairs of foreign countries (and his country's seeming lack of shame in doing so).

A further important thematic element in the video for "We Didn't Start the Fire" is the increasing evidence of wealth through the chronology of the nuclear family. At the beginning of the video, the newlywed couple enters an apartment that is fairly spartan in appearance. There are limited furnishings, the food is basic, and there is little in the way of luxury items; the inclusion of a radio on the kitchen counter is treated as a momentous occasion: the husband places it carefully and deliberately in its place. As the family progresses through history, however, luxury items become more common and the kitchen becomes more extravagantly furnished. In the 1950s scene, the son has many toys, from Lincoln Logs to a Slinky; his parents are well-dressed, father in a suit and mother in a fine dress. There are cupboards and wallpaper on the walls. The next scene shows further evidence of increasing wealth, including the first sign of hobbies, as the father builds a large model ship. The daughter is shown practising her violin, indicating that the family has money available for music lessons. The 1970s scene includes shots of the son carrying a portable television set and the father swinging golf clubs, while the 1980s scene is a portrait of opulence, including lavish decorations, a well-stocked liquor cabinet, and an elaborate Christmas dinner. In the final scene, the family has a computer, which, as was shown above, was rare in the late 1980s, partially due to their high cost, but more likely due to their limited usefulness outside of home programming and accounting.

The United States Census Bureau's statistics on personal income and how people spend their money supports Joel's efforts to show how Americans' lives have changed due to increasing disposable income in the video. A table entitled "Personal Income and its Disposition" clearly shows an increase in personal spending to go along with increasing family income.[116] Adjusted to 2005 dollars, the per capita income (gross domestic product) in 1960 was $15,661. By 1970, per capita income had increased to $20,820; by 1975, it was $22,592. By the time Joel made this video, the number had reached $28,717 (1985), and it would top $30,000 by 1990 ($32,112). At the same time, disposable personal income (the amount of money left available after paying personal taxes) also increased dramatically, from $10,865 in 1960 (again, adjusted to 2005 dollars) to $17,091 by 1975 and $23,568 in 1990. Reflected as a percentage of per capita income, the increase is less dramatic but still of consequence. In 1960, the average American had 69% of their income available in disposable income; by 1985, this had increased to 75%. Discretionary income (the amount of money available after taxes and necessities, such as rent, food and clothing) also increased over this time period. These statistics indicate that, over the period of time outlined in "We Didn't Start the Fire," the average American made more money, had a greater percentage of income available after paying taxes, and had more money to spend on discretionary items such as those seen in the video for this song.

As I showed in the study of "Pressure," videos have the capability to change or augment the meaning of the song from its original audio version. The video for "Pressure" altered the nature of the song from that of a lament about the difficulties of songwriting to a scathing critique of popular culture and the power of mass media. The same occurs here with "We Didn't Start the Fire." When Joel set out to chronicle the important events that helped shape the course of global history during his lifetime, he placed great importance on people, places and events. The lyrics of "We Didn't Start the Fire" suggest that, in Joel's mind at

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[116] "Table 677: Personal Income and its Disposition: 1990-2009." *www.census.gov*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011. Web. 25 March 2011.

least, the history of the latter half of the twentieth century was defined by the people and events that powered the headlines of newspapers and magazines. When Joel thought about making a video for the song, however, he seems to have come to the conclusion that the American perspective on history, his perspective, was driven not by political or military events, but rather by social and economic developments. The accumulation of *things* and displaying them as a show of wealth seems more important to this family than the events occurring around them. Indeed, the use of a single set, enclosed by walls and seemingly isolated from the outside world, suggests that the family history unfolding throughout the video is at least as important as that occurring *outside* the safety of the family home. There are several examples of the outside world invading the sanctity of the home, including magazines, newspapers and television sets, but for the most part, Joel decided to show his viewers history unfolding from a sociological point of view. Joel thus strengthens his critique of American society that he began with the album cover for *The Nylon Curtain*. The nuclear family to whose life we are privy in this video could live in one of the wanly-lit homes from the album art of *The Nylon Curtain*; their life is on display in "We Didn't Start the Fire;" we see into their nightmares in the video for "Pressure." Joel's conclusion, his answer to the question posed at the end of "We Didn't Start the Fire" ("And when we are gone/ Will it still burn on, and on, and on?") is not an optimistic one. The fire that rose out of the ashes of the Second World War will continue to burn, and we, with our obsession for the trappings of wealth and inability to think globally, are culpable.

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Joel has been accused of complacency and insensitivity because of the lyrics and his choices for "We Didn't Start the Fire." For example, *Blender* magazine criticized Joel for positioning the Tiananmen Square protests ("China's under martial law") alongside rock stars promoting soft drinks ("Rock and roller Cola wars"), stating sarcastically, "No way does conflating Tiananmen Square with

Michael Jackson selling Pepsi trivialize a massacre."[117] It is also true that the 1950s and 60s receive more in-depth treatment than the 70s and 80s; the years 1949-63 each receive their own stanza (fifteen in total, including the two in the bridge), while Joel sums up the events of 1964-89 in only four stanzas, seemingly giving short shrift to events more contemporary in his life. Accusations of insensitivity do not take into account the strong possibility that Joel intended to make a comment about how we attach importance to historical events with this juxtaposition. Michael Jackson getting burned during the filming of an advertisement for Pepsi received extensive media coverage at the time, while his co-writing credit on "We are the World," a song that made millions of dollars for famine relief, is often overlooked. Considering Joel's history of avoiding the press and his refusal to accept celebrity promotion deals (he claims to have turned down large deals from both Pepsi and Coca-Cola), it is logical to assume that Joel intended pairing these two events to be shocking.

Furthermore, this song, and the video in particular, create a sense of reminiscence; perhaps Joel intended to make a statement that the events of our formative years, from our childhood to early adulthood, are more important in our consciousness than those of more recent times. This would explain the reason that the first fifteen years of Joel's life received a more thorough treatment in the song than the next twenty-five. Additionally, it has been suggested that the lyrics of the chorus show Joel denying responsibility for the troubles of the world and absolving himself (and, by proxy, his generation) of the need to do anything about said troubles: "We didn't start the fire./ It was always burning since the world's been turning." There is a sense of defeatism in the second phrase of the chorus (No we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it."), but Joel meant for this song to be neutral rather than pessimistic. When speaking with Fred Bronson on the topic, Joel made clear his intentions for the only lyrics in the song that display any sense of personal involvement (other than "I can't take it anymore!"):

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[117] Aizlewood et al, "Run for Your Life!"

> What I wanted to do lyrically was sum up at the end of these years of names and faces and say, 'Hey, we didn't start this mess, we certainly did our best to make it better. It's not something we started and it's probably not something we're going to be able to finish. For the foreseeable future, this kind of craziness is going to go on and on. That's how life is.'"[118]

On the cusp of his fortieth birthday, Joel evidently felt the need to take stock of his life, as it were, to examine how the world had changed around him. Taken on its own, as an audio recording, "We Didn't Start the Fire" shows Joel flexing his rock & roll muscles (producer Mick Jones stated that the song "needed a good kick in the ass to get away from the pseudo-intellectual type of recording"[119] that this type of patter song could have become) while rattling off a simple checklist of significant events, people and places from the forty years of his life. The song's catchy chorus, memorable lyrics and rock & roll edge pushed the song up the charts and gave him his third number 1 album (after *52nd Street* and *Glass Houses*). He did not forget the lessons he had learned from *The Nylon Curtain*, however. After seeing the potential for reinvention that music videos had on his music and that of others, after witnessing how a powerful video could alter or strengthen the meaning of his songs, Joel seemed to realize that many of the references that he could not include in the lyrics could find a place in a video. His lyrics give us a glimpse into the events that he felt were important on a national and global scale, but the video offers a window into the soul of the family. His view of the transformation of the American family, as it evolves from the heady days of post-World War II optimism to the rebellion and hope of the 60s, is initially encouraging. His parting shot, however, as the camera pans out on the family members, now distant and disengaged from each other, is of a world caught up in fires of its own making, both literal and figurative. The social commentary here is far less subtle than in "Pressure," but the message becomes

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[118] Bronson, cited in Bego, p. 252.

[119] *Ibid*, p. 252.

that much more powerful when Joel forces us to consider our own role in how the fires of our history burn.

Chapter 4
"Goodnight Saigon"

Despite being born in 1949, Billy Joel never served in Vietnam; perhaps for this reason, he arrived on the scene of war-related music fairly late. From the beginning of the Vietnam War, artists in North America and the United Kingdom produced innumerable songs related to the war in some way, or the hostile atmosphere that the war and subsequent peace protests and anti-war rallies produced. These songs seem to fall into five categories: songs that promote peace in a general manner; anti-war protest songs; pro-war rallying songs; songs that deal with more specific themes, such as the effects of the war on soldiers on the front or back at home; and songs written after the end of the war in 1973. The first category includes songs such as John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance," (1969) and 1971's "Happy Xmas (War is Over)," and Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind," which, although Dylan released it in 1963, before the United States had committed to open conflict in Vietnam, became an anthem for peace and American withdrawal from Southeast Asia in the '60s and '70s. Although songs such as these were clearly inspired by increasing tensions and, subsequently, the escalation that led to the Vietnam War, they tend to take a less aggressive approach to protest than do their close relations, the anti-war protest songs. Songs in this category include Eric Burdon & The Animals' "Sky Pilot," Chicago's epic "It Better End Soon," Edwin Starr's 1970 number 1 hit "War!" and Country Joe and The Fish's satirical and disturbing "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag." These songs often contain shocking and inflammatory lyrics, or treat difficult themes and discomforting concepts. For example, in "Sky Pilot," a war chaplain blesses fighter pilots, knowing full well the futility of his job: "He mumbles a prayer and it ends with a smile … but it won't stop the bleeding or end the hate." He also shows an awareness of the devastating irony inherent in what he is required to do: "In the morning they returned with tears in their eyes/ The stench of death drifts up to the skies/ A young soldier so ill looks at the Sky Pilot/

Remembers the words 'Thou shalt not kill.'" "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" takes a more aggressive approach with lyrics such as "Well there ain't any time to wonder why / Whoopee! We're all going to die," or "Come on fathers and don't hesitate/ to send your sons off before it's too late/ and you can be the first ones on your block/ to have your boy come home in a box."

The other side of the anti-war song category is the pro-war rallying song. This can take the form of songs that support the army in general, such as "The Ballad of the Green Berets," by Sgt. Barry Sadler, which charted at number 1 in February of 1966, or songs that respond directly to war protesters, like Merle Haggard's "The Fightin' Side of Me," which also peaked at number one (7 February 1970). Sadler's paean to the Green Berets is the subtler of these two songs. While it heralds the bravery and dedication of the Green Berets ("Fighting soldiers from the sky, fearless men who jump and die/ Men who mean just what they say, the brave men of the Green Berets."), he never alludes to, or mentions directly, the Vietnam War at any time. Haggard, on the other hand, has no time for anyone who might criticize the American government or protest the war: "If you don't love it, leave it/ Let this song I'm singin' be a warnin'/ If you're runnin' down my country man/ You're walkin' on the fightin' side of me!" This type of war song was quite popular in the United States during the war, although Sadler only scored one more top thirty hit in his short recording career ("The A-Team," 1966); Haggard's music, in particular, seemed to resonate with the conservative element in the United States (his previous hit, "Okie from Muskogee," also charted at number one). Country artists such as Haggard have traditionally supported American wars, a trend that has continued today with songs such as Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning?"), released a mere six weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001, "American Soldier," by Toby Keith ("When Liberty's in jeopardy I will always do what's right/ I'm out here on the front line/ So sleep in peace tonight."), and the unfortunately-titled "Iraq and I Roll," a fervently pro-military song by Clint Black. Black makes his

opinion about American protests of the war in Iraq, which have often been compared to those during the Vietnam War, abundantly clear:

> Now you can come along
> Or you can stay behind
> Or you can get out of the way
> But our troops take out the garbage
> For the good old U.S.A.

This sentiment is remarkably similar to Haggard's, a thinly veiled threat to anyone who gets in the way of American aggression, whether they be Viet Cong, Iraqi insurgents, or even American citizens.

The fourth category has provided some of the most haunting songs regarding the effects of the Vietnam War. Some songs, such as Glen Campbell's 1969 hit "Galveston" and "To Susan on the West Coast Waiting," a minor hit for Donovan in the same year, addressed the issue of soldiers with families back at home. Many American men, keen to sign up for the war, discovered, in the harsh realities of Southeast Asia, that war was not as glorious as they had initially hoped it would be. Donovan's narrator, a soldier in Vietnam (who, it appears, was a draftee, not a volunteer), writes a letter home to Susan: "I'm writing a note beneath a tree/ The smell of the rain on the greenery./ Our fathers have painfully lost their way." Campbell's lyrics refer less directly to Vietnam: "Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea waves crashing/ While I watch the cannons flashing, I clean my gun and dream of Galveston." More poignant are the songs about the difficulties many soldiers encountered upon returning to the United States after their tour of duty. Reviled by the anti-war element and largely abandoned initially by the Department of Veteran Affairs, often crippled by injuries or psychologically scarred by their experiences at war, some Vietnam War veterans became active anti-war demonstrators. Others dealt with situations such as that of Kenny Rogers' "Ruby Don't Take Your Love to Town," from 1969.

In “Ruby,” a Vietnam veteran has returned home to his wife, paralyzed from the waist down, and he is losing his wife over his debilitating condition:

> It’s hard to love a man whose legs are bent and paralyzed
> And the wants and the needs of a woman your age really I realize.
> But it won’t be long, I’ve heard them say, until I’m not around.
> Oh Ruby, don’t take your love to town.

These songs addressed the war in more visceral, realistic terms than the previous categories. Rarely do these songs make grand declarations for or against the American government, nor do they often make unilateral statements about the merits of the war. Of course, the subject matter of these songs, the suffering of war veterans and soldiers on the field of battle, makes it fairly clear that these are anti-war songs, but they tackle the issues in a different manner.

Finally, there are the songs that appeared after the war finished, after the Americans pulled the last marines out of Saigon in 1975 and began trying to forget the atrocities and mistakes that plagued the conflict in Vietnam. President Gerald Ford, in a speech to students at Tulane University on 23 April 1975, as North Vietnamese troops marched on Saigon and the world waited to see how Ford and the American military would respond, expressed his desire to move forward with the following words:

> Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by re-fighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned. As I see it, the time has come to look forward to an agenda for the future, to unify, to bind up the Nation's wounds, and to restore its health and its optimistic self-confidence.[120]

Even as Ford made this speech, however, in which he urges not only the students in attendance at Tulane, but the entire nation, to look forward and rediscover

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[120] Ford, Gerald. “A War that is Finished.” *www.historyplace.com*. The History Place, 4 July 1996. Web. 1 October 2008.

American confidence in future plans, thousands of Vietnam War veterans returned home to a country that had been sorely shaken by the experience of losing a war. Many of these veterans bore scars from their experiences, physical ones from wounds taken in battle, psychological ones from the terror of fighting an invisible foe in dark jungles thousands of miles from home. Many had debilitating wounds and amputations, or had become addicted to drugs such as marijuana, cocaine or heroin during their tour of duty. For these soldiers, and for the victims of the war at home, such as those killed or wounded during the shooting at Kent State in 1970, Ford's words rang false. The feelings of abandonment, disillusionment and anger felt by soldiers, draft dodgers and protesters alike spilled over into the arts, and fueled a new wave of anti-war songs that still has momentum today. These songs, while sometimes dealing with similar themes as those from the second and fourth categories examined here, often have a slightly different tone; the point is not to protest the war, which had ended, but to bring to light the fact that the horrors of war do not end when troops pull out and treaties are signed, and to remind listeners that moving forward, restoring "health and … optimistic self-confidence" takes more than simple words from a president.

The United States has never had an outstanding track record when it comes to proper treatment of war veterans. For example, in 1932, during the Great Depression, the Bonus Expeditionary Force, or "Bonus Army," a group of over ten thousand World War I veterans marched on Washington, D.C. to demand a veterans' bonus that had been promised. When Senate denied this bonus, the veterans staged a sit-in that was eventually dispersed by the military on the orders of President Herbert Hoover. Infantry and cavalry cleared out the veterans, leaving two dead and many injured.[121] Following the Second World War, despite the desegregation of the army during the war, black veterans were continually denied the same rights and benefits as their white compatriots, while

[121] Richard Norton Smith, *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 138-40.

women, known for years as the "invisible soldiers," were also denied benefits and recognition until after World War II. While most veterans of the Second World War enjoyed increased rights and benefits upon their return home, including financial support from the Department of Veterans Affairs and low-interest, no-down-payment loans from the American government as promised in the G.I. Bill of 1944, Vietnam War veterans had a very different experience. The Second World War was popular at home, and the fight seemed just and honourable. The Vietnam War, however, had become highly unpopular by the time that the United States declared that hostilities between the U.S. and North Vietnam had concluded in 1973. Returning veterans, already vilified by students and war protesters across the country, often had difficulty adjusting to civilian life, especially due to the prevalence of a new illness amongst those returning from Vietnam: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Frequently misunderstood and misdiagnosed in the 1970s, soldiers with PTSD found themselves outsiders in the country whose values they had been fighting for. In 1984, Huey Lewis & The News attempted to address some of these problems with "Walking on a Thin Line," a moderate hit from their smash second album, *Sports*. This song details the experiences of a soldier, returning from the war, who tries to re-enter his life as a civilian. The bridge and chorus material outline his difficulties and the poor treatment he is given by his neighbours:

> Don't you know me I'm the boy next door.
> The one you find so easy to ignore.
> Is that what I was fighting for?
> Walking on a thin line, straight off the front line,
> Labeled as freaks loose on the streets of the city.
> Walking on a thin line, angry all the time,
> Take a look at my face, see what it's doing to me.

The pain, disillusionment and anger are evident here. Interviews with American soldiers on the fronts in Vietnam often revealed that the soldiers did not know what exactly they were fighting for, and any hope of real answers that they might have had upon their return home were quickly dashed, especially in the face of

being labeled as “freaks” and marginalized by American citizens. Lewis gives us a stark vision of the ostracized war veteran: ignored, confused, “loose on the streets,” and worsening rather than healing, the effects clearly visible on the faces of the ignored. Lewis and his band also express this soldier’s instability and anxiety musically. The song begins with a slow fade up on a distorted bass plucking out a steady eighth note pattern, almost unpitched; a lower, synthesized bass line, outlining a descending triad on beats one, four and eight. This disconcerting syncopation continues throughout the introduction and first verse (and returns during instrumental interludes), in which the protagonist suffers through the darkness, praying for light, and curses “the tears and the sweat” that are constant reminders of his traumatic experiences. Even the lead guitar solo, after reiterating some of the chorus material, takes on a mocking tone in its upper register, taunting the suffering soldier who is trapped by his experiences, forever scarred by being under fire on the front lines. The music and lyrics together create an atmosphere of tension, frustration and derision.

Charlie Daniels’ “Still in Saigon,” which charted in 1982, expresses some similar sentiments, again written from the standpoint of a Vietnam War veteran after his return home. “Still in Saigon,” while more comprehensive than “Walking on a Thin Line” in its treatment of Vietnam War issues, as it spans a soldier’s experience from getting drafted to his return after a tour of duty, is less effective musically. Daniels’ song covers a wide range of themes. He first sings of doing his duty as an American, stating that he “could have gone to Canada” or “stayed in school,” but he was “brought up differently.” His experience, however, left him paranoid and suspicious: “When I got home I stayed alone and checked behind each door.” The symptoms of his PTSD are starkly clear, from the conflicting sensations (“The ground at home was covered in snow, and I was covered in sweat.”) and feeling of displacement (“Every summer when it rains I smell the jungle, I hear the planes.”) to the flashbacks of traumatic events (“All the sound of long ago will be forever in my head/ mingled with the wounded cries and the silence of the dead.”). While the poetry is vivid, dark and disturbing, the music is

straightforward and unmoving. Other than a brief attempt at an allusion to Asian music with a pentatonic riff in the lead guitar during the introduction, there is very little that sets this song apart from Daniels' other country-rock songs. "Still in Saigon" does little to differentiate itself musically, with its simple melody, basic structure (verse x 2, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, solo, verse, chorus x 2), and unadventurous guitar solo, but its vivid lyrics make it worthy of analysis in this study.

Stephen Holden, a contributor to *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and currently on the staff of the *New York Times*, provided a term for this category of Vietnam War song in his review of *The Nylon Curtain*: the epitaph. While an epitaph normally refers to a physical commemoration to the dead, such as an inscription on a tombstone, it can also be a piece of writing, and it is this sense of the word that Holden intended when he described "Goodnight Saigon" as a "pop-music epitaph to the Vietnam War." Holden believed that this song was the epitome of the category at the time of its release, calling it "the ultimate pop-music epitaph to the Vietnam War."[122] (Presumably, Holden meant the word "ultimate" in its more colloquial definition, meaning the best achievable of its kind, rather than the traditional meaning, final.) Indeed, as I will demonstrate, Joel included many of the dramatic musical and lyrical elements already discussed here, which made these songs effective vehicles of protest, in order to create such a poignant and successful elegy for the war in Vietnam. The fact that Huey Lewis' and Charlie Daniels' songs, written on the same subject and treating many of the same themes, achieve such varied success in terms of effectively conveying a moving lyric musically, and that Joel's effort in this category could lead Holden to make such an unequivocally supportive statement led to the question, what specifically makes a song such as this effective? What elements, and in what combination, did Joel use to create this "ultimate epitaph"?

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[122] Holden, "*The Nylon Curtain*."

As I stated earlier, Joel never actually served in Vietnam, though, being born in 1949, many of his peers did. Although he did not graduate from high school as expected in 1967 (he was one credit short of graduation – Joel missed an English exam due to sleeping in), he was given an exemption from service because he was the sole provider for his mother and sister (his father moved back to Austria following his parents' divorce in 1960). It does not appear that any of Joel's early bands, which included The Echoes, a British Invasion cover band (1964-67), The Hassles (1967-69), a pop band modeled after The Rascals with whom Joel recorded two albums while under contract to United Artists, and the jazz-metal organ-drum duo Attila (1969-70), recorded any songs related to the Vietnam War, although if any of them had, it probably would have been Attila. Attila's only album, *Attila*, widely considered one of the worst rock albums of all time, features Joel on an organ, accompanied only by percussion. Joel himself called it "psychedelic bullshit," and the album's failure allegedly led him to attempt suicide. The album has a cult following who liken Joel's singing to that of Robert Plant and the overall effect as coming close to that of Deep Purple, but the songs are mostly about the heavy metal holy trinity: booze, women and rock. An interview with Joel on the back of the album does contain a reference to the Vietnam War. He claimed "he only 'sweated' two things – perfecting his sound and the war in Southeast Asia."[123] Perhaps Joel felt that the appropriate outlet for expressing his feelings about the war was not his lyrics but the genre, instead.[124]

The question that arises, naturally, is why, after having several opportunities in the late 60s and early 70s to write some form of Vietnam War song, whether in support or not, while numerous other bands were doing so, did Joel suddenly

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[123] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Billy Joel: Biography." *www.allmusic.com*. AllMusic, n.d. Web. 21 October 2008.

[124] Joel's other albums that appeared during the Vietnam War (*Piano Man* and *Streetlife Serenade*) do not include any songs that deal with the war in any of the ways discussed here.

decide to write an epitaph song in 1981? This is actually a two-part question: first, why not earlier, and second, why include one on *The Nylon Curtain*? The former is more difficult to answer than the latter. Very little is known about Joel's early compositional impetus. We know about his background – where he grew up, some of his family history, his early exposure to classical music through his father and his short career as a boxer – but not very much about the early bands, mostly because of Joel's embarrassment with his early efforts and because of the critical focus on his later, more mature works (all of his music is publicly available, but Joel has not commented publicly on his early work to any great extent). We know so little that it is actually difficult to determine on which side of the war Joel might have come down in the late 60s; the only evidence lies in the interview on the back of *Attila*, but even that does not indicate Joel's opinion definitively. On the one hand, he showed an early interest in the arts, came from a family that placed a value on education and culture, and used his exemption to avoid service in the war. On the other, he came from a community of manual labourers, mostly fishermen and dock-workers; typically, many volunteers for American wars have come from the lower classes, especially those that worked in more physically demanding industries such as fishing, automotive and steel. A recent study on the demographics of recruits by Tim Kane, a visiting fellow and former director at the Center for International Trade and Economics (CITE), indicates that a disproportionate percentage of recruits for the United States military come from urban areas, and most from families that fall into income brackets below the national median.[125] This study is somewhat distant from the Vietnam War, as Kane did his study on 1999 recruits, but research conducted by Richard K. Kolb, editor and publisher of the VFW magazine, supports Kane's numbers. Kolb found that, by the end of the Vietnam War, 76% of American

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[125] Tim Kane, "Who Bears the Burden? Demographic Characteristics of U.S. Military Recruits Before and After 9/11," 2005. *www.heritage.org*. The Heritage Foundation, 7 November 2005. Web. 21 October 2008.

soldiers had come from working-class or lower income families.[126] Joel thus came from a community that likely contributed many soldiers to the war in Vietnam; Hicksville, NY was highly urban and dominated by the working and lower classes. Since Joel seldom discusses his early years, however, any thoughts on whether or not he would have signed up for the war had he not been the sole provider for his family are purely speculative. The fact that few of his direct influences and contemporaries, such as Paul McCartney and Elton John, participated in writing Vietnam War-inspired songs, may have contributed to his early avoidance of the topic, but Lennon and Dylan, both significant influences on Joel's style, both wrote songs about war and Vietnam, so this only partially explains his reluctance.

The second half of this question is answered more easily, as there exists a plethora of information concerning *The Nylon Curtain*, particularly in the form of album reviews, most of which discuss "Goodnight Saigon" at length. Even those that do not, such as Stephen Thomas Erlewine's review in *All Music Guide*, discuss Joel's motivation for writing an album such as *The Nylon Curtain*, an album that represents a departure from his previous efforts. Erlewine claims that *The Nylon Curtain* is "where Billy Joel went serious, consciously crafting a song cycle about Baby Boomers in the Reagan era,"[127] and that, after his attempt at writing a harder album (*Glass Houses*), it was time for him to return to his pop roots to attract a more mature, adult audience. More telling, however, is the interview that David and Victoria Sheff conducted with Joel for *Playboy* magazine in 1982, first discussed in the chapter on "Pressure," particularly the section regarding Joel's inspiration for writing the album. It is prudent to reiterate the relevant section of the interview, conducted before the release of *The Nylon Curtain*:

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[126] David M. Halbfinger and Steven A. Holmes, "Military Mirrors a Working-Class America." *www.nytimes.com*. New York Times, 30 March 2003. Web. 21 October 2008.

[127] Erlewine, "The Nylon Curtain."

> Sheff: By the time this interview appears, your new album will probably be out. You're calling it Goodnight Saigon. Is it a political statement?
> Joel: No, but it is a serious album. It's about the stuff kids in my age group have gone through, about our attitudes, not our politics. People my age, 25 to 40, who grew up as Cold War babies, we don't have anybody writing music for us. There's a lot of chainsaw heavy metal aimed at the 14-year-old market, and there's stuff at the other end of the spectrum – Barry Manilow, Neil Diamond, Barbara Streisand. But the music business seems to be writing people my age off. So, in a way, this is an album dealing with us, with our American experience: guilt, pressures, relationships, the whole Vietnam syndrome.[128]

This portion of the interview reveals much about Joel's inspiration for writing this album, the topics that he treats in the songs, and an important aspect of his mid-career evolution. First, Sheff indicates that, prior to its completion, Joel considered calling the album *Goodnight Saigon*. Joel's albums most often were named for a track on the album, such as *Piano Man*, *The Stranger* and *An Innocent Man*, and so this is not surprising. This would, however, have been the first time Joel considered naming an album for a track not intended to be a single (in 1989, the title track of *Storm Front* was not released as a single). Sheff's question does give an indication of how important Joel felt "Goodnight Saigon" was for the integrity of the album, however.

Sheff's initial reaction to this title is to assume that Joel intended a political angle for this album, something that he had not done previously, but Joel quickly corrects the interviewer's mistake by stating that this is not the case, but that it is indeed a "serious" album. Prior to *The Nylon Curtain*, Joel's albums focused on the events of his life and his immediate surroundings; by the time of this interview, however, he had grown up and felt the need to write on themes that he

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[128] Sheff, "Playboy Interview."

considered more important. Rather than petulantly claiming to forget his early band's name and "sweating" perfecting his sound, as he indicated in the interview on the back cover of *Attila*, Joel had now come to identify himself with an age bracket (albeit a rather large one) and to recognize that his listeners in this age bracket had worries of their own. In other words, Joel began, perhaps for the first time, to think about the world around him, to consider the effects of his music, and to conceptualize his albums on a much grander scale. Erlewine goes so far as to call *The Nylon Curtain* a concept album (or an attempt at one, at least), implying that Joel had a higher artistic purpose for the album; he argues that the end result, however, due to Joel's "lyrical shortcomings," is that "the songs paint a picture without arriving at any insights."[129] If we accept the definition of a concept album as being one wherein the tracks are unified by a musical or lyrical theme, then *The Nylon Curtain* is indeed such an album. Joel stated that this was to be an album about the experiences of his generation, and Erlewine and other reviewers immediately recognized the Baby Boomer theme inherent in the album. Joel even went so far as to conclude the final song, "Where's the Orchestra?" with a simplified version of the theme from "Allentown," the first song on the album, creating a sense of bookends for the album.

Joel also expressed recognition that he had become part of a demographic that had little representation on the charts at the time, and so he deliberately wrote an album that aimed at Baby Boomers in hopes of filling the void that he perceived. A quick scan of the Billboard charts in the early '80s reveals that Joel's analysis of the musical market hit fairly close to the mark. In 1980, many of the top selling singles were in the pop/disco category, such as Olivia Newton-John's "Magic," Captain & Tennille's "Do That to me One More Time," and "Funkytown," courtesy of Lipps Inc., hard rock, such as Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall," or progressive rock (Styx's "Babe"). The "other end of the spectrum" from heavy

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[129] Erlewine, "The Nylon Curtain."

metal is presumably adult contemporary, which also finds representation on the charts in the early '80s: Bette Midler's "The Rose," Kenny Loggins' "This is It," and "With You I'm Born Again," the Billy Preston-Syreeta duet, all claim positions in the top thirty. These trends continued in 1981, with artists such as ABBA, Air Supply, Neil Diamond, Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton and Sheena Easton dominating the charts.[130] Until this time, Joel had had some difficulty nailing down an audience, finding a genre in which he felt most comfortable. He expressed some desire to be a punk rocker (perhaps a holdover from his Attila days), and attempted to produce a punk sound on *Glass Houses*, but he found little critical success with this effort. His previous hits came close to the adult contemporary genre with which he did not want to be associated; singles such as "Just the Way You Are," (from *The Stranger*, 1977) "My Life" and "Honesty" (both from *52nd Street*, 1978) charted higher on the Billboard Adult Contemporary charts than they did on the Hot 100. Joel reversed this trend with "It's Still Rock 'n Roll to Me" and "You May Be Right" from *Glass Houses*; also, he won a Grammy for Best Male Rock Performance in 1980 for *Glass Houses*, while he won for Best Pop Vocal Performance, Male, for *52nd Street*. The Grammy nominating committee is certainly not the final word on generic categorization, but this evidence does indicate that Joel varied his sound on the albums from the late 70s and early 80s.

Joel's endeavour to write an album for his demographic led him to consider the important issues for people around his age, and he listed those issues in his interview for Playboy: "guilt, pressures, relationships, the whole Vietnam syndrome." Examples of each are immediately evident on the album. Guilt rears its head in the twisted love song "Laura," in which the protagonist finds himself

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[130] Artists whom Joel admired or with whom he might have identified also found success, such as Queen, Paul McCartney and Elton John, and Joel's own "It's Still Rock 'n Roll to Me" was the number 9 hit in 1980 and reached number 1 that year, but the majority of the artists on the charts in the two years prior to the release of *The Nylon Curtain* fall into the hard rock, disco and adult contemporary categories.

inextricably tied to a manipulative woman (his mother, as noted earlier) and feels guilty for wanting to leave her since he thinks she needs him ("I've done everything I can/ what else am I supposed to do … How do you hang up on someone who needs you that bad?"). Pressure is self-evident: one of the most successful tracks on the album was "Pressure," and several of the other songs deal with relationships, including those of the romantic variety ("She's Right on Time" and "A Room of Our Own") and those relating to family ("Surprises"). Finally, Joel dealt with the "whole Vietnam syndrome" in two different ways. In "Allentown," Joel examines a specific segment of American society, the Pennsylvania steel industry, and its history. In the process, he addresses the effects that the Vietnam War had on steel workers who went off to war searching for the same honour and glory that their fathers found in the Second World War. Of course, the most direct statement about the American experience in Vietnam appears in "Goodnight Saigon." It seems nearly inevitable that Joel would have to tackle the Vietnam War in order to address his generation's American experience successfully, hence his decision to write a song about the war at this point in his career.

Holden made "Goodnight Saigon" the focal point of his favourable review of *The Nylon Curtain*, calling it the album's "stunner" and devoting almost half of his review to the song. In his description of the song and its effects on the listener, Holden hits on some key points that are of utmost importance for an effective analysis of the song and its importance in the war song genre. First, he discusses Joel's lyrical choices, and how in this song, Joel's "'we' becomes every American soldier, living and dead, who fought in Southeast Asia."[131] Like most of the war songs I have discussed here, "Goodnight Saigon" is told from the first-person perspective; this makes the story more effective and convincing. The fact that Joel did not serve in Vietnam is irrelevant; the power of good storytelling lies in making the listener/ reader *believe* the words, regardless of their veracity or our

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[131] *Ibid.*

ability to authenticate the details. Joel accomplishes this feat not only through disturbing, visceral allusions to the fates of many Vietnam soldiers, ("We came in spastic like tameless horses/ We left in plastic as numbered corpses") but also by referencing details about the life of a Vietnam soldier that seem authentic. These details include prevalent drug use, ("We passed the hash pipe") the appearance of American celebrities in Vietnam to provide entertainment, ("They gave us Bob Hope") and elements of popular culture of the late 60s and early 70s. ("They gave us Playboy … We … played our Doors tapes"[132]) This is not to say that the details Joel includes *are not* authentic; stories of rampant drug abuse are certainly true, as are the references to provisions of American entertainment for the soldiers in Vietnam. The mere inclusion of these details, however, makes Joel's narration seem more authentic.

Second, Joel varies the accompaniment throughout the song in order to communicate different atmospheres and sentiments. Joel plays the initial figure, a four-note ascending motive in parallel thirds, on the piano, with descending octaves outlining a $Gmin^7$ chord. This progression creates a sense of instability, as the resolution, double Gs in the bass underneath an F-A dyad in the right hand, is unsatisfactory, and the ascending figure loops back on itself without attaining a sense of closure. In fact, Joel concludes the song in the same manner, repeating and fading out on the first four bars, endlessly looping on themselves, symbolizing the futility of this unwinnable war. As Joel sings the first words, however, the piano fades out, replaced by an acoustic guitar, strummed simply. Joel thickens the texture gradually as the story takes on a more universal tone, adding a bass line and bringing the simple percussion (a hand shaker) more

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[132] The reference to The Doors may serve double purpose here. One of the more provocative songs protesting the Vietnam War was 1968's "The Unknown Soldier," which includes a firing squad-style execution in the middle of the song. Lead singer Jim Morrison seemed to take some perverse pleasure in acting out this scene during live performances, with guitarist Robby Krieger using his instrument as a rifle in the macabre reenactment. The inclusion of the reference to The Doors in "Goodnight Saigon" may be a form of *homage*.

forward in the mix (the percussion starts before the piano, but is quite subtle at first). In the first half of the first verse, for example, Joel sings of the protagonist's pre-war experiences, always in the first-person plural "we," of training in the Marine Corps Recruit Depot on Parris Island, while limiting the mix to acoustic guitar and shaker. As the story takes on a darker tone in the second half of the first verse, Joel strengthens the sound with the added bass line. At the end of the first verse, there is a short instrumental interlude of three bars (plus single beat pickup) that alludes to the opening sequence, but this time the ascending pattern is allowed to escape from its four-note restriction, straining upwards before descending at the beginning of the second verse. In the second verse, Joel thickens the texture again, combining piano, acoustic guitar, bass and percussion (only a shaker, still) as he relates more of the soldiers' experience on the front lines. This musical combination, layered gradually in this manner, provides an acoustic, "unplugged" feel to the beginning of the song, as if the song were almost improvisational in design.

Joel finally disperses this casual atmosphere by adding a full percussion set during the second half of the second verse, including bass drum, snare, toms and ride cymbal. The tension increases at the end of the second verse as Joel's vocal tone changes and a snare roll, played on a field snare by Bill Zampino,[133] heralds the arrival of a verse extension in which Joel sings of the fraternity of soldiers that is born out of fear, desperation and confusion:

> And we held onto each other, like brother to brother
> We promised our mothers we'd write.
> And we would all go down together.
> We said we'd all go down together

[133] A field snare is a drum that is typically associated with American military history and designed to be performed outdoors. Snare drums of this type usually have a strap that enables the drummer to move while playing, and have a larger, fuller sound than their smaller, drum kit relatives.

Yes we would all go down together.[134]

Joel extends the ascending line, heard earlier with the lyrics "And we were so gung ho …" and "Our arms were heavy," and the accompanying descending gesture is eliminated, delaying resolution until the word "write," at which point the most dramatic textural changes occurs. Here, on the line "And we would all go down together," Joel's single voice is joined by a chorus of male voices, the refrain taken up by the plural "we," the brothers in arms putting their lives on the line for each other.[135] During this oath, sworn in unison, the bass line yearns upward, slipping backwards after each iteration of "together," until it loses all momentum and descends to the Gmin^{7} chord heard earlier on the final line of the refrain. At 3:40, the texture thins to that of the opening melodic gesture, and the repeating ascending gesture in the right hand of the piano returns, eliding the refrain with the beginning of the next verse.

The third verse is far more reflective lyrically than the previous verse, and shortened to accommodate the move to the bridge. In this abbreviated verse, our narrator takes on an elegiac tone, evoking the names of lost comrades ("Remember Charlie, remember Baker/ They left their childhood on every acre") and mourning their loss.[136] Joel also reiterates a sentiment often heard from soldiers on the front lines: "And who was wrong? And who was right?/ It didn't matter in the thick of the fight." Joel uses the same ascending theme from the end of the second verse to underscore this sentiment of futility and confusion, with its lack of proper resolution and extension into the upper reaches of his vocal range. The ensuing ascending thirds in the piano sound as if they are

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[134] See Appendix A for the full lyrics.

[135] The mix here also includes strings and horns, arranged by Dave Grusin, and Joel's full band.

[136] Joel's choice of names here is intriguing. "Charlie," of course, is the name American soldiers gave to the Viet Cong (Charlie being the radio alphabet word for the letter C), while Baker was the name of a 1967 operation whose main goal was to clear one of the main highways in South Vietnam.

serving the same function as before, a movement to a new verse, but instead of descending from G to F, the bass line ascends to A for the beginning of the bridge. (Joel used a similar gesture in "Allentown," the opening song of the album, where the bass line, instead of descending as it had several times previously, ascends to support a new tonal centre at the beginning of the bridge.) The bridge has a different tone from that of the verses, with its stripped down mix, lower vocal range, and simple but prominent percussion. Joel uses an unusual combination of piano, electric bass and snare drum in the bridge, relying on the bass mainly for support while the snare beats out an ominous, muffled death knell in the breaks between Joel's broken lyrics: "We – (snare) – held the day – (snare) – in the palm – (snare) – of our hands." The piano provides the remainder of the harmonic and melodic support in the eight-bar bridge, which features Joel using the lowest part of his vocal range (in fact, the low B on the word "palm" is the lowest note that Joel sings on the entire album) in his hushed assessment of the delicate balance between the American and Vietnamese forces. In the second half of the bridge ("They held the night, and the night seemed to last as long as six weeks"), Joel replaces the dotted rhythm of the muffled snare with hard hits on the backbeat, reinforcing the fear and desperation in the lyrics.

Joel elides the bridge with the next verse lyrically; the melody notes on "as long as" are the same as the three introductory notes earlier in the song (on "We met as …" and "We came in …"). He also makes a connection with an earlier reference, singing that the night lasts "as long as six weeks on Parris Island," the military boot camp where the soldiers met in the first verse. This second reference underlines the fearsome reputation of Parris Island as a brutal shaper of soldiers, a reputation that Stanley Kubrick later reinforced in his 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket*. In the first act of this movie, Kubrick focuses on the savage methods used by instructors to create American Marines at Parris Island. In the climactic scene of the Parris Island section of the movie, Leonard Lawrence (Vincent D'Onofrio), an awkward and out of shape recruit nicknamed "Gomer Pyle" by drill instructor Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (played by R. Lee Emery),

shoots and kills Hartman and then sits on the toilet in the barracks and kills himself his with rifle as a horrified "Joker" (Matthew Modine) looks on. It is this environment of intense physical and psychological training to which Joel alludes with his reference to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at this moment in the song; the soldiers' treatment at Parris Island is of a kind with the fear they feel in the night in Vietnam. At this point, Joel begins the final verse, but, as he often does, this verse begins halfway through. He also uses this structure in two other songs on this side of the album, "Pressure" and "Allentown." The intention behind this device is to lessen the temporal space between more dramatic moments in the song. Here, the harmonic structure at the beginning of the song is quite repetitive, allowing Joel to add layers to the mix without changing the underlying harmonies. The harmonic structure of the verse does not change until the end of the second verse, when Joel's vocal movement to the high A on the word "night" provides momentum for the verse extension that enables the movement to the chorus, the most dramatically effective section of the song. After the bridge, during which Joel sings of the psychological pressure under which soldiers in Vietnam suffered, a full iteration of the verse structure would have been counter-productive, as the repetitive nature of the verse could have caused the song to lose momentum. Also, one of the functions of the extended verse length had been to give room for changes to the mix, a dramatic effect that would be less effective a second time around. Joel thus returns to the second half of the second verse in order to shorten the length of time between the end of the bridge and the return to the climax of the song, the stirring chorus of unison male voices.

A third significant point that Holden makes in his review refers to Joel's vocal choices, a musical element not always relevant in previous discussion of songs of this type. Holden refers to Joel's vocal quality as "tight, wound-up ... higher and tenser than usual ..." and then, later, "so fragile it almost breaks, and on *knives*, it suddenly jabs in sharp, strobelike echoes [likely produced by measure tape delay]

… he continues, again hesitant and sounding all of about nineteen."[137] Indeed, Joel uses a variety of vocal timbres in "Goodnight Saigon," fluctuating in strength, placement and quality. At the outset, he uses the simplest tone possible, employing his delicate head voice, verging on falsetto for the highest notes on "sharp" and "knives" in the first verse, an appropriate accompaniment for the instrumental mix (an acoustic guitar) and the subject matter (inexperienced soldiers in training). As the mix thickens, Joel's voice gains strength and confidence, altering his tone to create a more chest-based timbre in the second verse. On the line "And it was dark, so dark at night," Joel adopts an aggressive tone, using his full chest tone on "dark," while on "night," his voice shatters and splinters, fading into the darkness, in Holden's "strobelike echoes." As he ramps up into the chorus, Joel sings in full voice, but the resultant strength and confidence is insufficient. His narrator must rely on the voices of his comrades in order to survive the traumas of Southeast Asia, hence the collective voices for the chorus, pledging their support for their fellow men-at-arms. Finally, in the bridge, Joel changes his tone once again, using the lower part of his range for the first time in the song. Usually known for his flexibility and purity of tone in the vast upper reaches of the tenor range, Joel adopts a breathy, muted tone for this section, reinforcing the hesitant and vigilant nature of the narrator in this section; he almost whispers the words "of our hand," as if anything louder than this might alert the enemy. As previously noted, Joel sings the lowest note on the album in the bridge (a B a ninth below middle C) and uses a tone not usually associated with songs in his *oeuvre*. In fact, in the first three albums of the 1980s (*Glass Houses*, *Songs from the Attic* and *The Nylon Curtain*) Joel only sings one lower note: the final note in *Glass Houses*' "Don't Ask Me Why" is a B-flat, but it is a lower harmony note for the more audible F natural, a perfect fifth above; it is also the last note of the song. The low B in this song serves more of a dramatic purpose. In "Goodnight Saigon," Joel launches from the low B to A, a minor seventh above, to describe the grip over the night held by the Viet Cong;

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[137] Holden, "*The Nylon Curtain*."

also, in the second line of the bridge, which is nearly identical to the first tonally, the expected movement to the B at the end of the phrase is thwarted by a repeated C, changing the supporting harmony from E major to G major, providing a retransition to the verse material.

Finally, Joel uses atmospheric sounds, sometimes referred to as "found sound,"[138] to reinforce the message of this song further. This technique is a common one in songs meant to evoke a certain time, event, or place, and several of the songs discussed here have included in the mix either recorded atmospheric sounds or imitations of such on standard instruments. For example, the extended instrumental section in the middle of Eric Burdon & The Animals' "Sky Pilot" is intended to symbolize the air battle in which the pilots have engaged, after the protagonist, the military chaplain, blesses them and their mission. In this section, guitarist John Weider imitates the sound of fighter planes with his guitar. In addition, there are sounds of battle including gunfire, an air strike, and voices. This extended portion of the song, which comprises over two minutes of the seven and a half minute track, is complicated and confusing, with many layers built into the mix; there is even a recording of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards playing "All the Bluebonnets are Over the Border" on the bagpipes, adding to the feeling of pitched battle. "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" also incorporates a recording of battle sounds; at the conclusion of the song, after the oddly out-of-tune final chord, there are twenty-nine seconds of gunfire and fighter plane flyovers. The effect of this conclusion is especially jarring in consideration of the satirically upbeat nature of the preceding music. Finally, Huey Lewis includes the sound of a gunshot after the lyric "Taught me how to shoot to kill" in "Walking on a Thin Line." This sound is artificial, but effective in its placement after this lyric about military training.

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[138] The principle behind "found sound" is the same as that for "found art," in which objects that would not normally be considered artistic are included in works of art.

Joel similarly creates an atmosphere suitable for his subject matter through the use of ambient sound effects in "Goodnight Saigon."[139] The opening chords do not arrive until fifty seconds into the song. Previous to this, Joel sets the scene for the song, using the same principle as Eric Burdon & The Animals. The first audible sounds, a combination of authentic "found sounds" and artificially created effects, are those of the jungle at peace: frogs, crickets and bird calls (recordings), and the tinkle of falling rain (percussion). Twenty-two seconds in, the sound of helicopter rotors, perhaps in reference to the use of helicopters in Francis Ford Coppola's iconic "Apocalypse Now" only two years earlier, disturbs the pastoral setting, getting louder to simulate getting nearer, and then a high chord on synthesized strings (0:30) and a slow shaker beat (0:32) is added to the texture. This synthesized string sound progresses through a series of chords that achieve their ultimate resolution in the first piano chord, which arrives at 0:50. In this manner, Joel sets the scene for "Goodnight Saigon;" the stillness of the jungle at night is broken by the ominous approach of the instruments of war. The simplicity of the opening melody, one of Joel's simplest, with its repetition and relatively narrow range, mirrors the calm of the pastoral setting while the rotors pass overhead. As the helicopter disappears into silence, the narrator feels safe enough to begin his story. Once the tale is told, Joel establishes a level of symmetry by reintroducing the ambient sounds from the introduction. After the final iteration of the chorus, during which the sound of men shouting commands and exhortations can be heard deeper in the mix, the simple piano melody from the beginning returns (5:52), accompanied by the shaker beat and a militaristic snare roll. The helicopter sounds return at 6:10; as they fade into the distance, the ambient jungle sounds return. For almost thirty seconds, the only sounds in the mix are the tinkling percussive rain sounds and the chirp of crickets; Joel thus creates an arch structure for the song, beginning and ending with the sounds

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[139] This is not the only example of the use of atmospheric sound on *The Nylon Curtain*. In "Allentown," Joel included factory sounds such as a hammer hitting metal (presumably steel) and made machinery sound effects with his voice in order to create a greater sense of authenticity.

of nature, unsullied by man and his military machinations; in Holden's words, "the song fades back into the night on a whir of retreating rotors, into the jungle, leaving the memory of that chorus of hale and hearty ghosts."[140]

The story goes that Joel was approached by a group of Vietnam War veterans who asked him to write a song about the war; Joel hesitated, protesting that since he had not served in the war, he could not write a suitable tribute to the war and its victims. The veterans countered that since he did not serve, he would not be hampered by the trauma of having been in Vietnam; consequently, Joel listened to their stories and wrote a song that they approved of, "Goodnight Saigon." So important was this song for his upcoming album that Joel initially intended naming the album after this elegiac tribute to American veterans and fallen soldiers. Joel's first endeavour to write a song about issues larger than those of his own life was largely successful, in part because of his use of the elements of effective war songs discussed here. Such elements include establishing a strong narrative structure by limiting the scope of the tale to that of an individual, employing ambient and "found" sounds to create an authentic atmosphere, one immediately recognizable to the audience, using a first-person narrative, and manipulating the mix in order to emphasize and underscore the lyrics. Audience response and critical reviews of the track are almost exclusively positive. Many commentators laud Joel for treating a controversial subject with objectivity and sensitivity, stating that he neither criticizes the futility of the war nor blindly supports the government line that American soldiers were in Southeast Asia to preserve peace and protect democracy. With this song, Joel realized that simplicity was of utmost importance for treating American struggles with respect. Perhaps his most important decision regarding "Goodnight Saigon" lay with his setting of the chorus as a statement of fraternity, sung by a group of men, allowing his own voice to be swallowed up. Joel does not often perform this song, one of his most enduring and critically successful, in concert, but when he does,

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[140] *Ibid.*

he ensures that the power of this chorus, mixed so masterfully in the studio for the album, is not lessened in its live format. He does so by inviting Vietnam War veterans to gather around the piano and sing the chorus with him; in fact, the video for "Goodnight Saigon" is nothing more than a series of still photographs of soldiers in Vietnam interspersed with a video of Joel playing the song in concert. On the chorus, a group of veterans, arms around each other, passion and pain equally present on their faces, sing along with Joel; finally, as the snare drum rolls enter after the final chorus, a shot of the names of fallen soldiers on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. appears over the final image of Joel on the piano. Joel never forgot for whom he wrote this song; through the song, he made sure that the collective sacrifice of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who served in Southeast Asia remained the main focus of the song. Perhaps for this reason most of all "Goodnight Saigon" deserves Holden's accolade of "ultimate pop music epitaph to the Vietnam War."

Chapter 5

"Leningrad"

The United States participated in two major conflicts during Joel's lifetime leading up to the release of *Storm Front*: the Vietnam War and the Cold War.[141] Although it may seem that the former had a greater affect on Joel's life, since it occurred during his youth and took the lives of some of his friends, it was the latter that had a more direct effect on him, as evidenced through his song-writing. *Storm Front*, released in 1989, addresses the end of the Cold War and the fallout from the collapse of Soviet Russia in two songs: the album's chart-topping first single "We Didn't Start the Fire" and the lesser-known "Leningrad." The former is one of Joel's most popular and enduring hits, but "Leningrad" is buried deep on *Storm Front*, and was not even released as a single in the United States (it peaked at number 53 on the United Kingdom charts). It has, however, become symbolic of Joel's drive to be the first rock & roll artist to tour in the U.S.S.R and of his groundbreaking tour of the Soviet Union in 1987, which included concerts in Leningrad (since renamed St. Petersburg). "Leningrad" occupies a position of great importance for Joel, as evidenced in his own words about the song:

> You have to understand this is the defining political aspect of my life and everyone else who grew up in the Baby Boom; the Cold War was almost our whole life. We all thought we were gonna, you know, blow up, in a hydrogen bomb explosion. And then this war ended for me … and that's really what this song is about.[142]

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[141] Joel, born in 1949, lived during the Korean War, and so he was not immediately aware of it, nor did it seem to have had any lasting impression on his childhood.

[142] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video*. Dir. Andrew Morahan, Chris Blum, Derek Horne, Ernie Fritz, Howard Deutch. Perf. Billy Joel, Ray Charles. Sony, 1998. DVD.

The nature of the Cold War changed drastically for Joel during the band's tour of the U.S.S.R, when he met a man named Viktor in Gorky Park, Moscow. Joel's experience with this man, a former Red Army clown who made Joel's daughter Alexa laugh, had great effect upon Joel's view of the Cold War and his subsequent approach to *Storm Front*, and provided the initial inspiration for "Leningrad."

"Leningrad" also offers perhaps the most compelling evidence that this album and *The Nylon Curtain* occupy parallel positions in Joel's *oeuvre*. As a nation born of violent revolution, the United States has often defined its history by the conflicts in which it has participated. The Vietnam and Cold Wars contributed greatly to how the United States and Americans defined themselves. Not coincidentally, these wars occurred after the United States emerged as one of the world's superpowers in the aftermath of the Second World War. Intent on proving itself on the world stage, the United States devoted staggering amounts of resources to these conflicts, both in terms of money and human life. By one estimate, the United States spent a total of $13.1 trillion during the Cold War (1945-1996), averaging nearly $300 billion per year,[143] while various studies put the cost of the Vietnam War at somewhere between $150 and 500 billion. Additionally, nearly 90,000 Americans lost their lives in Vietnam, in battle or otherwise, and another 53,000 were killed in the Korean War (the only active conflict of the Cold War).

In consideration of the enormous costs to the United States during these conflicts, along with the constant state of readiness for nuclear war in which Americans found themselves for most of the latter half of the twentieth century, it is not surprising that someone like Joel, born in 1949 and raised during the

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[143] "U.S. Military Spending, 1945-1996." *www.cdi.org*. Centre for Defense Information, 1996. Web. 3 February 2010.

height of the Cold War, would find inspiration for some of his most meaningful and powerful music in the conflicts that embroiled his nation. Although Joel first tackled the Vietnam War with "Goodnight Saigon" on 1981's *The Nylon Curtain*, he was not inspired to write about his more personal experience with the Cold War until eight years later. The characteristics that the other pairs of songs on these two albums share are more ideological and less personal than those present in this pairing. In "Leningrad," for the first time, Joel combines the elements that define the other two pairs of songs discussed here, social commentary ("Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire") and historical documentation ("Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'"), with the other, more prevalent element in his songwriting: autobiography. The result is one of Joel's most meaningful songs, especially to the songwriter himself, and a perfect foil to its partner in this study, "Goodnight Saigon."

This study will revolve around three main aspects of "Leningrad." First, as discussed above, I have discerned five major categories of war songs, at least in terms of songs written during, shortly after, or about the Vietnam War. The categories include songs that focused on the effects of war on a smaller, more specific scale, thus making a statement about the conflict without so aggressively demanding an end to it (but written while the war was still being waged); and songs written after the end of a specific war. With this examination of "Leningrad," I intend to show how the song fits into these two categories simultaneously (except, of course, that it concerns the Cold War). It seems somewhat contradictory to be able to write a song about a conflict both while it is happening and after it has ended, but this song manages that feat because, as of 1987 and his meeting with Viktor in Moscow, Joel's personal Cold War had ended. The Soviet Union did not collapse until 1991, however, and so in 1989, when Joel released *Storm Front*, the Cold War was still in progress. It will also be important to examine other songs from this period that belong to each of these categories to put "Leningrad" into greater context.

Second, by comparing "Leningrad" to "Goodnight Saigon," we are able to contextualize the song better in terms of authenticity, lyrical structure, form and intention. For example, Joel sings the entirety of "Goodnight Saigon" in the first person; while he does the same for much of "Leningrad," he also makes efficient use of third-person narrative, telling the stories of both Viktor and other Americans like himself, trusting in the group narrative rather than focusing on the individual. He also begins "Leningrad" with Viktor's story, as if telling his American listeners that the stories of the Soviet people and their experiences during this war are as important as their own, if not more; there is no such attempt to create empathy for the enemy in "Goodnight Saigon." Formally, there are points of contact that these two songs share with many other popular songs: extended instrumental introductions that repeat at the end, forming bookends around the lyrics and choral sections in both songs, which thicken the texture and add emotional weight. Finally, Joel continues his attempts to create authenticity in these songs, although his efforts in "Leningrad" are more subtle than in "Goodnight Saigon," or even "Allentown" or "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," for that matter. While he used the sounds of the jungle and references to popular culture (Bob Hope and The Doors) in "Goodnight Saigon" and electronic seagulls in "'Alexa'," here Joel works to conjure up images of militaristic U.S.S.R. through clever use of rhythms and melodic contours that evoke the music of the Soviet Union.

The subtle use of suggestive material brings up an aspect of Joel's compositional process in this song that is relatively unusual in his oeuvre: the use of art music idioms such as standard "classical" chord progressions, traditional key hierarchies and perfect authentic cadences. In the analysis of popular music genres such as rock, blues and pop, the use of art music terminology can become problematic. For instance, the perfect authentic cadence (V-I) is not as common in popular music genres as IV-I. The standard 12-bar blues progression, for

example, privileges a chord built on the fourth note of the scale over one built on the fifth, and thus most closing gestures in the blues are IV to I, rather than V to I. Also, pop songs that use major or minor scales tend to avoid chords built upon the seventh scale degree, while focusing on a third-based relationship in chord progressions.[144] For example, the instrumental introduction to "We Didn't Start the Fire," which is ostensibly in G major, emphasizes the chords built on the fourth and sixth scale degrees (C and E), while there are essentially no chords built on the seventh scale degrees (F#). A quick survey of other songs from Joel's catalogue reveals similar characteristics. From time to time, however, Joel appears to have made a conscious decision to include progressions and chords from the art music tradition. "Leningrad" is one such case; another, "The Ballad of Billy the Kid," appears much earlier in Joel's career. It is fairly unusual for pop musicians to write in this fashion and so it is likely that Joel wanted to create some sort of special effect with this sort of writing in "Leningrad." This study will explore Joel's possible motivations for doing so at this late stage of his career.

Finally, "Leningrad" gains much of its emotional weight from the story Joel tells in the narrative, and this story is underscored by the video Joel provided. While admittedly not a fan of the music video (he once stated, "Music is the antithesis of the visual"),[145] Joel remains one of the most important early practitioners of the medium. As we have seen, videos such as the one for "Pressure" stands out as an early example of the potential of this relatively new form of musical communication, despite Joel's reluctance to make or appear in them. The videos that accompany songs from *Storm Front* are good examples of how videos can support and reinforce the messages present in recordings, none more so than

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[144] The flat-seven chord, of course, plays a significant role in most blues and rock & roll; the natural seven chord, however, occurs rarely in these genres. Furthermore, the previous statement is not intended to diminish the importance of V during turnarounds at the end of 12 bar blues, which often include V chords in prominent positions.

[145] Wild, "Billy Joel," p. 39.

that for “Leningrad.” At its heart, “Leningrad” is the story of two men growing up concurrently in worlds that are both similar and vastly different; Joel’s video captures that feeling, including both archival footage representative of both sides of the Cold War and video taken during his Russian tour and subsequent meetings with Viktor. It is perhaps the most intensely personal of all Joel’s videos, and it underscores the assertion that “Leningrad” combines the social commentary and historical documentation present in the other songs in this study with the autobiographical element inherent in a great part of his output. This study will thus conclude with an analysis of the video to examine how it supports these claims.

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Joel’s approach to and experience with the Cold War differed vastly from the Vietnam War. When he began to consider writing a song about the Cold War, he did not feel the same reluctance he had felt when the group of Vietnam War veterans approached him to write a song about their experiences, nor did he have the luxury of time and perspective that he had with writing “Goodnight Saigon.” Joel wrote this song approximately five years after the official cessation of hostilities, and so he was able to interview veterans and broaden his knowledge of the details of the war. He enjoyed no such luxury when he decided to write a song about the Cold War; nor, however, did he have the same concerns about a lack of involvement in this conflict. The Cold War affected the life of every American between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. Additionally, all Americans were made to feel as if they were personally involved in the battle against communism and the Soviet Union, through everything from participating in air raid drills in school to enduring the constant bombardment of anti-communist propaganda. It is no surprise, therefore, that Joel, especially in view of the remarkable success of his previous effort at writing about an American war, should have been inspired to write a song about his experiences as a “Cold

War kid in McCarthy time."[146] The resulting song probably would not have been nearly as effective, however, if Joel had told only his own story in "Leningrad." Although "Leningrad" did not register on the American Billboard charts, it remains a favourite of Joel's; he even included it on his *Greatest Hits, Volume III*, released in 1997.

It would not have been possible for Joel to meet Viktor, the Russian Army clown, and to learn his story, if not for the gradual thawing of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union under Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, which was widely interpreted as "freedom of speech," but was initially intended to reduce corruption and make government activities more transparent, helped to create an environment in the Soviet Union that was less antagonistic towards Western ideas, philosophies, arts, culture, media and music. Under *glasnost* and its gradual loosening of censorship laws, Soviet officials became more amenable to bringing Western entertainers to their country, in a kind of cultural exchange. At the Geneva Summit in 1985, the first of four annual summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachev, the two super-power leaders signed a general cultural agreement that would allow "a framework for the exchange of visit by, say, the Bolshoi Ballet and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and also an exchange of scientists and students."[147] This was not the first such agreement between the two nations, as President Eisenhower and President Khruschev had signed a similar two-year agreement in 1955 that was sporadically renewed over the three intervening decades, but none had the far-reaching effects nor the political will of the 1985

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[146] This, of course, is a reference to Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose work with the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1950s spawned the term "McCarthyism," and a lyric from "Leningrad."

[147] *Associated Press*, "Arms Control Not Only Issue at Geneva Summit." *Time Daily* 16 November 1985: p. 10A.

agreement that was necessary to cause meaningful cultural exchange.[148] The success of these agreements depended largely on the intentions of the leaders signing them. In the 1950s and 60s, some of the American objectives were to

> broaden and deepen relations with the Soviet Union by expanding contact between people and institutions; involve the Soviets in joint activities and develop habits of cooperation with the United States; end Soviet isolation of inward orientation by giving the Soviet Union a broader view of the world and of itself; … and obtain the benefits of long-range cooperation in culture, education, and science and technology.[149]

The Soviets, on the other hand, seem to have been interested in the following:

> to obtain access to U.S. science and technology …; [to] support the view that the Soviet Union was the equal of the United States by engaging Americans in bilateral activities; [to] promote the view that the Soviet Union was a peaceful power seeking cooperation with the United States; [to] demonstrate the achievements of the Soviet people; … and [to] earn foreign currency through performances abroad of Soviet artists.[150]

The above quotation suggest that Americans were suspicious of Soviet motives for sending scientists and artists to their country; the opposite was also true. At a conference in New York State in 1969, Georgi A. Arbatov, a Soviet Americanist, stated "One underlying U.S. policy is the so-called "erosion" of our social system."[151] With differing goals and mutual suspicion on both sides, it is not

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[148] Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003), pp. 14-16.

[149] *Ibid*, p. 3, cited from National Security Council Directive 5607.

[150] *Ibid*, p. 4.

[151] *Ibid*, p. 4.

surprising that the early agreements were less than successful and ultimately failed to bring the two countries together. Exchanges imply some level of reciprocity, trust and equality, none of which was evident in the 1950s. The success of these exchanges also depended in large part to the nature of U.S.-Soviet relations; thus, in the years surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, then later during the Vietnam War, both sides cut back their involvement in cultural and scientific exchanges. In the late 80s, by the time of the last of the annual summits between Gorbachev and Reagan (and the single summit between Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush in 1989), however, relations had warmed to the extent that the two countries could afford to extend a more significant level of trust and respect to each other.

It was in this atmosphere of change that Billy Joel found himself while he was planning the world-wide tour for *The Bridge*, released in 1986. When he heard that it might be possible to play concerts in the Soviet Union, Joel made it a goal to do so. One of the first events held in the Soviet Union that featured American musicians was the so-called "July Fourth Disarmament Festival," with James Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, the Doobie Brothers, Santana and several Soviet groups.[152] Shortly thereafter, Joel put on a series of six concerts – three in Moscow (July 26, 27 & 29) and three in Leningrad (August 2, 3 & 5) – at the end of the tour for *The Bridge,* at his own expense. Joel and his band also performed an unscheduled concert at the Tbilisi opera house in the Soviet Republic of Georgia. Joel's Russian concerts have almost become the stuff of legend. One of the concerts in Moscow provided the stage for one of Joel's most infamous on-stage tantrums. Joel had hired a film crew in the hopes of creating a documentary about his Soviet tour; during a performance of "Sometimes a Fantasy," the crew turned their lights on the crowd members, who froze, intimidated and fearful of trouble from security. According to reports of the concert, Joel flipped over an electronic piano and swung a microphone into the floor, then proceeded to berate fans close

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[152] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 232.

to the stage for looking as if they did not want to be there. Joel's outburst confused fans in Moscow and received extensive media coverage back in the United States, but did little to dampen the general enthusiasm generated by the series of concerts.[153] The feedback from then Columbia Records president Walter Yetnikoff was overwhelmingly positive:

> I went to Billy's big concert at the Olympic Sports [arena]. Billy rocked. In fact, he rocked harder than the Soviets wanted him to rock. They told him no encores, but he did seven. He sang 'Back in the U.S.S.R.,' and the crowd went wild. Fans rushed the stage. American rock & roll ripped up the Iron Curtain. Billy's non-stop performance so angered members of the Soviet Central Committee that Billy's tour manager [Rick London], fearing arrest, hid in the men's room after the show. Moscow was never the same.[154]

Camera crews, both those hired by Joel to document the tour and those of several press agencies, followed Joel's every move during his time in the Soviet Union. The resulting footage generated two video documents in particular that merit mention. The first came from film that Joel's own camera crew captured. In an attempt to recoup the near $2 million of his own money that Joel had spent on the Soviet leg of the *Bridge* tour, Joel intended to sell his crew's footage as a television special, and he found a buyer in HBO. *Billy Joel from Leningrad, USSR* aired October 24, 1987, and received favorable reviews from the popular press, including *TV Guide* ("Billy Joel demonstrates that rock & roll needs no translation")[155] and *People* magazine ("It's *glasnost* rock behind the heavy-metal curtain … Here's diplomacy you can dance to").[156] The second film was a 90-

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[153] Associated Press. "Billy Joel Has a Tantrum." *New York Times* 28 July 1987. Print.

[154] Walter Yetnikoff with David Ritz, *Howling at the Moon* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), pp. 216-7. Print.

[155] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 234 (from *TV Guide*, 24 October 1987).

[156] *Ibid*, p. 234 (from *People*, October 26, 1987).

minute documentary called "A Matter of Trust: Billy Joel in the U.S.S.R.," which aired on ABC on June 15, 1988. ABC's special revealed Joel at his best, focusing on Joel's personal time with his family (then-wife Christie Brinkley and daughter Alexa Ray, who was not even two years old) as much as his time on stage. In his review for the *New York Times*, John O'Connor suggests that the film reveals an exuberant, passionate and charismatic Joel:

> When not performing, he is preparing to perform. When not being a curious tourist, he is giving press conferences or appearing on Russia television ... In public, he kisses elderly women and gives his St. Christopher medal to a young rocker. On television, he tells his adoring audience that "what's going on in your country now is very much like the 60s in my country." ... Leaving the Soviet Union, Mr. Joel talks about Russian faces: "I have dreams about them; I'd like to see them again."[157]

Perhaps most surprising is Joel's awareness of the similarity of the lives of ordinary people in his own country and the U.S.S.R. "We think of the Russians as a monolith. We don't think of them as individuals," Joel states in the documentary.[158] This level of sensitivity and appreciation for the realities of the Cold War, that it was essentially a long-distance arms struggle between the supreme leaders of two super-powers, rather than a conflict fought in the trenches between foot soldiers, came as somewhat of a surprise to observers of the Soviet leg of Joel's *The Bridge* tour; as O'Connor wrote, "The enthusiasm is also infectious ... It beats speeches about evil empires."[159] In his commentary for the video of "Leningrad," Joel was better able to put his thoughts about the tour into words:

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[157] John O'Connor, "Documentary Chronicles Billy Joel's Soviet Tour." *www.nytimes.com*. The New York Times, 15 June 1988. Web. 23 June 2011.

[158] *Ibid.*

[159] *Ibid.*

> When we went to Russia in '87, it was still the Soviet Union; in America they still considered it the Evil Empire, and it was, you know, a very, very moving moment for me to go there and meet people who were very warm, very emotional, affectionate, welcoming. And this one man in particular, ... who was always in the front row, he was a clown with the Gorky Park Circus, and met my daughter and she was thrilled with this guy."[160]

The man to whom Joel refers here, of course, is Viktor, the "Red Army clown" from the lyrics of "Leningrad."

The Soviet tour, which has since become known as *КОНЦЕРТ*, from the Russian word for "concert" (as the live concert album released in October of 1987 bears this name), still holds a place of great significance for Joel, and not necessarily because of the concerts themselves, but rather for the individual experiences that he had with Russian citizens. In an interview with David Wild for a *Rolling Stone* article in 1990, Joel recalled giving his leather jacket to a translator, and later finding out that the man never wore the jacket, but instead framed it and hung it on his wall; Joel has a reminder of the tour hanging on *his* wall, too: a framed tour poster in a "place of honor." He also felt that at the time the Cold War thawed for him, stating "the Cold War ended a lot sooner for me than it has for everyone else."[161] Joel's bandmates echoed these sentiments. When Joel took a side trip to Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia, he left behind most of the band, but he took along his longtime drummer, Liberty DeVitto. DeVitto had his own preconceptions of the Soviet Union: "I thought I was going to get off of the plane and see three-headed dragons breathing fire, which was 'the enemy.'" Instead, he met people who had nothing to give, but still shared of themselves.

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[160] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video.*

[161] Wild, "Billy Joel," p. 39.

"That's when I realized that it's not people against people, it's government against government."[162]

The most significant event of this tour, at least for providing Joel with inspiration for writing about his experience with the Cold War, was his meeting with Viktor, the protagonist of "Leningrad" and foil to Joel's narration in the song. As mentioned above, Joel met Viktor during the tour, while visiting Moscow's famous Gorky Park.[163] Viktor came across Joel and his family and made Alexa Ray laugh, an incident that served as the catalyst for a conversation, by way of interpreter, between the Joel family and Viktor. All that is known about Viktor has emerged through Joel's own recollections and the story told in "Leningrad." Contrary to the details provided in the song, Viktor was not "born in '44"; according to Joel, Viktor was a few years younger than he. The remainder of the biographical details in "Leningrad" are relatively factual: Viktor did join the Red Army, but was more interested in entertaining children than fighting in wars, and so he became a clown after serving out his time. The two entertainers had immediate rapport with each other, and Viktor proceeded to follow Joel around Russia, attending all six concerts. Footage of the two together appears in the video for "Leningrad," including the two sharing photographs of their families. Joel and Viktor exchanged letters after their last meeting at the airport in Moscow, but have since fallen out of contact.[164] Viktor's story remained vitally important for Joel's understanding of the Cold War, however, and of how the actions of their respective governments had changed both of their lives, irrevocably and in similar ways.

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[162] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 235.

[163] In all of his various interviews on the topic, Joel does not seem ever to have provided Viktor's last name.

[164] *Ibid*, p. 254.

By the time he decided to write a song about his experiences in Russia and with the Cold War, there already existed a large catalogue of Cold-War inspired music, songs either about the fear of nuclear war or, more specifically, about the effects of the Cold War. These songs can be sorted into the same five categories as those written about the Vietnam War. The first category listed here is the most straightforward: the general plea for peace. These songs could apply to any conflict; therefore, songs such as Lennon's "Happy Xmas (War is Over)" and Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" continue to resonate with peace activists today; they know no specific era or conflict. The second category, songs that protest a specific conflict, is generally the largest in regards to any conflict, and the Cold War was no exception, especially in view of its length, from the end of the Second World War to President George H. W. Bush's declaration of a cessation of hostilities at the Malta Summit in 1989 (although the U.S.S.R. did not officially cease to exist until Christmas Day of 1991).

Early reactions to the Cold War emerged primarily in the music of Bob Dylan. While other anti-war musicians wrote about Vietnam, Dylan wrote about nuclear holocaust, being taught to hate Russians, and the folly of the United States' seeming insatiable appetite for war. Dylan's protest songs more specific to the Cold War and nuclear war include "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," "Masters of War," and "Talkin' World War III Blues" from his second album, *The Free-Wheelin' Bob Dylan*, and 1964's "With God on Our Side," later made famous by Joan Baez. "Talkin' World War III Blues" is a darkly comic "talkin'" blues song, a parody of earlier songs of this type such as Woodie Guthrie's "Talkin' Dustbowl Blues." In this song, Dylan's narrator sees a doctor about a disturbing dream that he had about the fallout from a nuclear war, and subsequently is told that he is insane. As he tells the doctor about his nightmare, the details reveal some of the prevalent streams of thought in the United States at the time, such as the Red Scare. When Dylan tries to strike up a conversation with a fellow survivor "at the corner by a hot-dog stand," (thus invoking a great symbol of American popular

culture) the man screams and runs, afraid that Dylan is a Communist. Later, the doctor reveals that he has been having the same dreams, except that he is alone in his dreams; Dylan here comments on the sense of isolation felt by those who opposed the build-up of nuclear arms. He concludes by paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, stating that "all the people can't be right all the time," suggesting that perhaps the United States did not possess the moral authority in the Cold War the way that it did in the Second World War.

While Dylan's songs did not attack the Cold War on as visceral a level as parallel songs about the Vietnam War, such as Country Joe and Fish's "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," they nonetheless made bold and aggressive statements about the absurdity of escalating nuclear weapon stockpiles and the futility of fighting a static war that had the potential to erupt into a truly global conflict. In the 1970s, musicians interested in protesting the United States' continued involvement in world conflicts primarily focused on the Vietnam War because American soldiers were actually dying in that conflict, but in the 1980s, some musicians took up Dylan's mantle and began to address the fears of nuclear holocaust anew. The complexities of the Cold War were far more difficult for many people to grasp, as it was largely fought by guerillas and secret forces. Also, during the latter half of Leonid Brezhnev's time in power (1964-1982), a period of *détente* occurred, during which Brezhnev and President Richard Nixon met to discuss arms limitations, the result of which was the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-I) and a proclamation of a new era of peaceful coexistence.[165] The two superpowers worked to strengthen economic ties during this period, and so helped to relax global tensions and stabilize conditions in Europe.

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[165] Brezhnev held various positions of power between 1964 and his death in 1982, including First Secretary of the Communist Party (1964-1966), General Secretary of the Communist Party (1966-1982), and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (1960-1964 and 1977-1982).

In 1979, however, revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua, both of which saw the deposition of corrupt and despotic but thoroughly anti-Communist leaders who were friendly to the United States, as well as the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, caused a renewal of hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union, highlighted by Jimmy Carter's failure to persuade the U.S.S.R. to sign SALT-II. Dubbed "the second Cold War" by some historians, the period of time between the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Geneva Summit in 1985 saw heightened tensions and fears of an all-out nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Accordingly, there appears to have been an increase in the number of songs written about the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war, beginning in the late 70s and continuing until the end of hostilities between the two superpowers.

One of the earliest examples of such music appeared on Ozzy Osbourne's first solo album after being fired from Black Sabbath, *The Blizzard of Ozz* (1980). "Crazy Train," perhaps Osbourne's most enduring and successful single from his solo career (the song has been covered numerous times and is used by several professional sports teams to excite fans), is about the effects of continuing hostilities and the fear of ultimate authority being held in the hands of very few. Osbourne also addresses the role of propaganda in promoting the war against Communism, a common theme in poetry or lyrics critical of the Cold War: "I've listened to preachers, I've listened to fools/ I've watched all the dropouts who make their own rules/ One person conditioned to rule and control/ The media sells it and you live the role." Osbourne adds to the confusion inherent in the lyrics ("Heirs of a cold war, that's what we've become/ Inheriting troubles I'm mentally numb") through his trademark heavy metal stylings: heavy vocal mixing and echoing; disturbing effects on lead guitar in the introduction (provided by the late Randy Rhoads) and distorted strumming during the main body of the song; relentless heavy drumming throughout the song; and maniacal laughing with dissonant, klaxon-like sounds in the guitar as the song fades. The "sound"

produced by heavy metal bands proved highly effective for the production of anti-nuclear war songs. Bands such as Iron Maiden ("2 Minutes to Midnight", 1984), Styx ("Cold War", 1983), and Def Leppard ("Gods of War," which included voice-overs of Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, from 1987) found inspiration for hard-rocking numbers in Cold War politics.

Several mainstream artists in the pop-rock world tackled the genre of Cold War criticism, such as Sting ("Russians," which may have served as a source of inspiration for Joel, considering its themes of understanding and acceptance: "What might save us, me, and you/ Is if the Russians love their children too") and Genesis ("Land of Confusion"). One of the most enduring and popular songs from this period, however, emerged not from heavy metal or rock, but European pop/punk. In 1983, Nena, a New German Wave singer from West Germany, achieved worldwide chart success with "99 Luftballons," a surrealistic song about world powers overreacting to confusion over 99 children's balloons floating in the sky, triggering a worldwide nuclear apocalypse. "99 Luftballons" reached number 1 on the charts in several countries, including West Germany, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and it topped out at number 2 on the American *Billboard* Charts.[166] Nena's guitarist, Carlo Karges, found inspiration for this song when he saw some balloons rising above a Rolling Stones concert in Berlin, and noticed that they seemed to change shape as they ascended. The lyrics detail a deadly escalation of events as world leaders fire their nuclear arsenals at what appear to be "UFOs," leaving behind a devastated landscape. In the aftermath of nuclear holocaust the narrator walks through the charred landscape where there are no victors ("99 Jahre Krieg Liessen keinen Platz fuer Sieger") and no jet planes firing missiles ("Und auch keine

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[166] Ironically, an English-language version, titled "99 Red Balloons," did not garner the same level of success in English-speaking countries. Nena and her band never were happy with the translation, feeling that the it was not as effective as the original German.

Duesenflieger"). The narrator finds a single balloon and thinks back to happier times ("Hab' 'nen Luftballon gefunden, Denk' an Dich und lass' ihn fliegen.").

Nena used the medium of the music video to great effect here. During the first verse, the camera focuses on her, providing numerous close-up shots as she begins her story. It is not until the first instrumental break that the rest of the band is revealed; as the break progresses, coloured smoke, blue and white, billows behind, as if flares had been lit. Each verse shows an increasingly charred landscape. In the second verse, Nena walks through a field covered in felled trees, and the close-up shots from the first verse are conspicuously absent. The third verse, in which jet planes piloted by warriors who think they are Captain Kirk, the captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise from *Star Trek*, ("Jeder war ein grosser Krieger, Hielten sich fuer Captain Kirk") features thickening smoke as Nena wanders through an increasingly dark landscape, kicking balloons aside as she winds her way through what appear to be fenced trenches. Day turns to night for the third instrumental break as balloons float by and spontaneously burst in the air; at the beginning of the fourth stanza, Nena joins her band for the first time. The final instrumental break reaches apocalyptic levels in both the instrumental parts and the visuals: massive explosions rock the landscape behind the band and leave behind mushroom clouds of fire as the band feverishly repeats the main instrumental theme. Finally, Nena provides a calm, pensive denouement as she wanders aimlessly through the blackened forests. She picks up a single balloon and lets it fly; as it fades in the darkened sky, one sees the odd change in shape that inspired Nena and her band to produce this cautionary tale.

Examples of the third and fourth categories of war songs are more difficult to find. The third category, the pro-war song, is virtually nonexistent with regard to the Cold War. Any songs of this type written in the 70s and 80s tend to be about either the Vietnam War or the Second World War. The next major conflagration of pro-war rallying songs appeared, predominantly in country music, in the late

90s and the early years of the twenty-first century; these songs focus on American conflicts in the Middle East, including the Persian Gulf War of 1991 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The fourth category includes songs written about specific aspects of a war, while the war is being fought, often regarding soldiers' experiences in fighting the conflict, or their difficulties in readjusting to life at home upon their discharge. The Cold War was not fought by combatants on the battlefield, but rather by governments from the relative safety of their own territory. Lives were lost during the Cold War, of course, but the vast majority of these came during guerilla warfare or covert operations. The men and women who experienced the Cold War in this fashion did not generally make their stories public, thus making it difficult for musicians to create representations of the war that would fit into this fourth category of war song.

This type of song reveals a sentiment common among citizens of the United States (and, as Joel indicates, the Soviet Union), that they all participated in fighting the Cold War, through their decisions, their actions, and their patriotism. This hypothesis suggests that the Cold War, because of its nature as a static war with no definable battlefields or combat zones, was fought in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the warring nations; this is a natural result of a war such as this, one that was fought ideologically as much as militarily. Even so, songs of this nature are relatively rare. The vast majority of songs regarding the Cold War fall into the second category detailed here, those that openly criticize and decry the war, in a general manner. Songs that tackle more immediate issues, personal experiences and specific effects of the war appear less often. One such example is, of course, Joel's "Leningrad." Earlier examples, however, include songs such as Midnight Oil's "Put Down that Weapon," (1987) which protested the Australian government's decision to allow American vessels laden with nuclear weapons to put in at port, and ABBA's "The Visitors," a chilling

account of secret police officers tracking an Eastern European dissident to his home released in 1981.

"The Visitors" is the title track from ABBA's final album, a serious, lavish effort that was never intended to be their final collaboration. The song features an ominous ostinato in the low keyboard register, accompanied by a heavily distorted vocal track provided by Frida, and represented a distinct change in style from ABBA's better known lighter, disco-influenced music. Both the song and the album received only lukewarm reviews. "An occasionally bouncy chorus and still-on-target singing can't disguise the fact that the boys and girls of ABBA are in a slump. Synthdrenched, mellow-dramatic balladeering seems to have supplanted almost entirely the perky pop that first made these Swedes Croesusrich."[167] The album, however, was eventually banned in the Soviet Union and "The Visitors" remains one of the best examples of experience-specific music related to the Cold War. In his review for *Allmusic*, Bruce Eder described "The Visitors" as "a topical song about Soviet dissidents that also manages to be very catchy."[168] The band successfully captured the paranoia present in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, when dissidents feared the arrival of secret police at their doors. "I hear the doorbell ring and suddenly the panic takes me/ The sound so ominously tearing through the silence/ I cannot move, I'm standing number and frozen." These sentiments are closer to fearful confession than the light fare typical to earlier ABBA albums. This type of experiential lyrics are rare in American music, perhaps since American songwriters were further removed from the immediate physical threat posed by Soviet secret police on the prowl in Eastern Europe.

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[167] Connelly, Christopher. "ABBA: The Visitors." *www.rollingStone.com*. Rolling Stone. Web. 5 February 2010.

[168] Eder, Bruce. "The Visitors: ABBA." *www.allmusic.com*. AllMusic, n.d. Web. 5 February 2010.

The final category of war-related popular music is composed of songs that appeared after the end of the war, and these exist in abundance with regard to the Cold War. Common to these songs is an overriding sense of melancholy and sadness that accompanies any feelings of joy and relief; the post-Cold War world was an uncertain one, and the wounds from nearly fifty years of conflict would prove difficult to heal. The Scorpions provided one of the most poignant of these songs, with their 1990 smash hit "Wind of Change." Written after the fall of the Berlin Wall and President Bush's declaration of the end of hostilities at Malta (both in 1989) but before the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the complete collapse of the Eastern European Communist Bloc, "Wind of Change" exhibits all the aforementioned characteristics. The song was also staggeringly popular, perhaps because it so accurately captured the prevailing thoughts of the day.[169] Musically, the song is fairly unremarkable, save for the catchy tune and the iconic whistling that occurs during the introduction and conclusion of the song. It is a rather straightforward hard rock song, with the requisite vocal mixing and harmonies typical of the genre. It is in the lyrics, however, that "Wind of Change" moves from run-of-the-mill to the extraordinary, where the song achieves the poignancy that has made it one of the most moving and memorable tributes to the Cold War. The lyrics of the bridge present the essence of the song's message: "The wind of change blows straight/ Into the face of time/ Like a stormwind that will ring/ The freedom bell for peace of mind/ Let your balalaika sing/ What my guitar wants to say." The inevitability of change and the power of ordinary people to manifest that change is evident in these lyrics; even time cannot stand before "the wind of change," and the power of the movement towards change emerges from the music of the people (hence the reference to a Russian folk instrument, the balalaika). The opening lyrics, however, are less optimistic, more melancholy:

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[169] "Wind of Change" reached number 1 on charts in Austria, Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, and topped out at number 4 on the American *Billboard* Hot 100; it was certified gold (500,000 sales) in the United States on 9 April 1991 and platinum (300,000) in Germany in the same year.

I follow the Moskva down to Gorky Park
Listening to the wind of change
An August summer night, soldiers passing by
Listening to the wind of change
The world closing in, did you ever think
That we could be so close, like brothers
The future's in the air, I can feel it everywhere
Blowing with the wind of change.

The band was inspired by a visit to Moscow in 1989 to write the song, hence the references to the Moskva (the river that flows through Moscow) and Gorky Park (one of Moscow's more famous landmarks). The reference to soldiers passing close by to them is a reminder of the ever-present military threat posed by the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War, while the "world closing in" seems to be an indication of the lead vocalist Klaus Meine's feeling that the war was coming to an end; his optimism is tempered by caution and incredulity ("did you ever think that we could be so close"), however. Of course, the greatest sense of melancholy present in "Wind of Change" occurs during the aforementioned whistling, which immediately sets a pensive and mournful tone for the song.[170]

"Leningrad" belongs in both of these final two categories; it exists simultaneously as an experiential song written during the Cold War (like "The Visitors" or "Put Down that Weapon") and as a song written about the war after the end of the conflict (like "Wind of Change"). The two categories seem to be mutually exclusive, but the nature of the Cold War, its inherent difference from the Vietnam War (among other conflicts), served to allow Joel to write about it while it was still being fought, in a manner that suggests that the war was over, at least for him. "Leningrad" possesses the characteristics common to both types of

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[170] The accompanying guitar solo is reminiscent of the eerie and atmospheric instrumental opening of "Brother is Arms," the title track of Dire Straits' fifth studio album from 1985, a song that also decried needless fighting and conflict.

songs. It relates personal experiences with specific events, similar to the fourth category of war song described here, and Joel wrote the song while the Cold War was still active, but it also relates similar experiences typically found in songs from the fifth category, such as hope and relief, melancholy and uncertainty. A direct comparison to "Goodnight Saigon" will further reveal how "Leningrad" seems either to fall into two categories simultaneously, or into a new category all its own.

At first glance, "Goodnight Saigon" and "Leningrad" seem to be quite similar. Both songs include sparse introductions, "Saigon" with its extended prologue intended to set the scene in the Southeast Asian jungle, and "Leningrad" with its solo, homophonic piano solo. The mix for both songs remains fairly simple through the opening verses: acoustic guitar and shaker for "Saigon," piano, bass and simple percussion in "Leningrad."[171] Both songs evince a gradually thickening texture, allowing Joel to build to a textural, aural and lyrical climax during the critical moments of both songs: the bridge/chorus of "Saigon" ("And we held on to each other …") and the bridge of "Leningrad" ("I was born in '49 …"). Joel also makes use of vocal ensembles in both songs. In "Saigon," he includes a group of male voices during the choruses, adding to the sense of fraternity to which to Joel makes reference throughout the song; as previously stated, Joel often asked Vietnam War veterans to join him on stage during live performances of this song to add to the *gravitas* of the moment. The more subtle use of additional voices in "Leningrad" achieves a different effect from that in "Saigon." Joel reached into his own past to find a suitable ensemble for this song, and found it in the Hicksville High School Chorus, directed by Chuck Arnold. Arnold was Joel's music teacher in high school; having Arnold appear on

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[171] A bass guitar joins the mix for the second verse of "Saigon," followed by a complete drum kit at the beginning of the fourth verse, just prior to the bridge/chorus. Joel adds strings for the second verse of "Leningrad."

his album was Joel's way of paying homage to someone who believed in his musical ability at an early age:

> Mr. Arnold went out on a limb and encouraged me to consider a career in music at a time when music wasn't considered a viable path to choose. But I knew that I loved music and the mere fact that a teacher thought it could be a real possibility for me encouraged me to follow my dreams.[172]

The Hicksville High School Chorus first makes an appearance in the bridge section, highly mixed and almost indiscernible from the synthesized strings providing harmonic support. The effect of added voices in "Goodnight Saigon" is one of reinforcing the brotherly bond between soldiers: "We held on to each other, like brother to brother … And we would all go down together." The sentiment produced through this mass unison singing is evident in the faces of the men singing along with Joel in the moving video for the song. Although they certainly add emotional weight to the song, the voices in "Leningrad," however, are used to more subtle effect. Joel uses the extra voices not as backup singers, nor does he reinforce the melody; instead, he uses them as they are listed in the liner notes, as a vocal chorus. In the bridge, the voices double instrumental parts in the background, marking a falling line through each of the two phrases of this section, descending from the fourth scale degree to the first. In the concluding section of the song, however, the chorus doubles the upper line of the piano. This seems similar to Joel using the unison male voices to strengthen the melody in the chorus of "Goodnight Saigon," but the effect here is quite different. The conclusion of "Leningrad," with its texture made thicker than that of the introduction by the addition of guitar, percussion and chorus, begins to resemble more of an anthem, or perhaps a hymn, in its sweeping grandeur.

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[172] Diane Ketcham, "If Only You Knew Them in High School," *The New York Times*, 28 September 1997. Web. 1 March 2010.

Joel adds another element to the introduction and conclusion of this song that enhances the ceremonial feeling that pervades these sections. Very rarely in his career did Joel reach into his background as a classically trained pianist to aid his songwriting; the vast majority of his songwriting is firmly entrenched in the rock-blues idiom that privileges different harmonic progressions and formal structures from the world of "art music." Here, however, Joel seems to borrow from the idioms of art music, especially in the sections that bookend the song. It is not unusual for pop musicians to borrow directly from the world of classical music. For example, Eric Carmen borrowed heavily from the second movement of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto for the primary melody of his 1975 hit "All By Myself," from Carmen's debut solo album.[173] Paul Simon based "American Tune," from his second solo album *There Goes Rhymin' Simon* (1973), on J. S. Bach's chorale from *St. Matthew Passion*, while more recently, British pop star Mika confirmed that he used the melody from "Largo al factotum," Figaro's famous tune from Gioachino Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* for his 2007 single "Grace Kelly." As noted earlier, Joel himself paid homage to his favourite classical composer, Ludwig van Beethoven, in one of the songs from *An Innocent Man*. Joel borrowed the melody for the chorus of "This Night," a non-charter in the United States, but a minor hit in the United Kingdom and Japan, from the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor ("Pathètique").[174]

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[173] Evidently a fan of Rachmaninoff, Carmen again borrowed from the Russian composer for another song on the album. Carmen derived the melody for "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again" from the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony.

[174] It is not surprising that Joel borrowed from Beethoven. He frequently references Beethoven's life and works in interviews, especially when making analogies to parts of his life with which he struggles. In fact, an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 1994 bore the title "After the Storm/Billy Joel Turns to Beethoven for 'Dreams'."

Less obvious, however, is the tendency for songwriters to use the idioms of art music in newly composed pop music. This style of songwriting is far more common among classically- trained, piano-based composers than with those who are guitar-based, or those who did not receive classical training, but most instances occur early in a songwriter's career. The most obvious reference to art music in Joel's catalogue arises on his first album, *Cold Spring Harbour*.[175] "Nocturne," the penultimate song on the album, betrays its inspiration in the title. Joel was heavily influenced by the music of Frederic Chopin, as evidenced by much of the "classical" music on his foray into the world of art music, 2001's *Fantasies & Delusions*. The use of the term "nocturne" traditionally indicated a single-movement character piece for piano, as popularized by Irish composer John Field and subsequently legitimized by Chopin. Nocturnes are characterized by lyrical melodies accompanied by arpeggiated chords in the left hand; Joel's "Nocturne" is no different. It is also a purely instrumental solo piece for piano, further evoking the nineteenth century solo piano genre. Joel's next album, *Piano Man*, contains one song that fits into this category, as much for its style of writing as its harmonic progressions: "The Ballad of Billy the Kid." Although the verses and chorus of "Billy" fall firmly within the idioms of rock & roll, the instrumental interlude between verses three and four represents Joel writing in a different tradition entirely. In his attempt to write a "cowboy" song, as I will discuss in greater detail in the chapter on "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," Joel seems to have turned to the music of Aaron Copland for inspiration, as this instrumental interlude is reminiscent of Copland's music for *Rodeo*. Joel had great respect for Copland and his music; Billy Zampino, a childhood friend of Joel's, recalls listening to Copland's music at his (Zampino's) house, and Joel stating, "Maybe I could do something like that."[176] The interlude music for "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" displays several characteristics idiomatic of Copland's "American," or

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[175] For a more detailed list of classical references and art music idioms in Joel's music, see Walter Everett's 2000 article in *Contemporary Music Review*, "The Learned vs. the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel."

[176] *Ibid*, p. 27.

populist style: crisp rhythms; frequent use of unison writing; straightforward melodic writing that features frequent skips and leaps; and predominantly tonal arrangements that experiment with dissonance and atonality.[177]

The idioms of art music abound in "Leningrad," including tonal cadential gestures, the use of choral writing, and allusions to classical genres. Joel also assigns different styles of writing to the two narrative aspects of the song; the sections during which he tells Viktor's story rely more heavily on art music traditions, such as homophonic writing and perfect authentic cadences (IV-V-I), while the bridge material, wherein he tells his own story, tends towards rock idioms. For the most part, this inclusion of classical idioms is another endeavour by Joel to achieve some level of authenticity in his storytelling. As I discussed above in reference to "Goodnight Saigon," Joel showed interest in using "found" sounds in an endeavour to "set the scene;" he believes that conjuring up the appropriate atmosphere would facilitate his narrative.[178] It seems only logical, given the generic similarities between "Goodnight Saigon" and "Leningrad" (both songs about war) that Joel would try to achieve a similar effect in a comparable manner here. "Leningrad" offered a new challenge for Joel, however, as the story of the Cold War provides a far more sweeping narrative and a more varied battleground than that of "Saigon." Therefore, Joel could not use such environment-specific sounds as he did for "Saigon;" he would have found it difficult to allude directly to a specific scene or location considering the narrative he intended to set in "Leningrad." Joel solved his problem by creating allusions

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[177] Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 529-30. Print.

[178] Incidentally, Joel does not limit himself to using "found" sound in these types of songs. For example, he uses the sound of squealing tires in "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)," the tones from a touch-tone telephone in "Sometimes a Fantasy," the final phrase of "The Star-Spangled Banner" on a television set at the beginning of "Sleeping with the Television On," and, famously, the sound of glass breaking at the outset of the album *Glass Houses*, to start the hit "You May Be Right."

to the culture and musical language of Russia; his product is, therefore, more subtle, less obvious, in its attempts at authenticity, but perhaps more meaningful in the end.

When he started writing this song, Joel made a conscious decision to ground it in the Russian experience, rather than his own; hence the title "Leningrad," rather than the name of an equivalent American city. One can hear evidence for this claim in the opening bars of "Leningrad." The piano arrangement in the first six bars of the song is homophonic, almost chorale-like. The chord changes occur regularly on the first and third beats of each measure, and nearly all the chords are in root position (the one exception falls on the third beat of measure three, where a first-inversion tonic chord occurs). Joel makes ample use of suspensions in the fourth and fifth measures, providing a stepwise downward motive for the melody. The closing gesture of this first phrase is a textbook authentic cadence: the melodic line ends on the first degree note (D); the bass note moves from the dominant (A) to the tonic; and the melody contains a descending passing motion from the third scale degree through to the first, although it subsequently descends to C# and returns to the tonic D. The use of common practice-era harmonic progressions does not, of course, immediately suggest Russian music. With the melody and its chorale-like homophonic piano accompaniment, Joel does allude to Russian music melodically and rhythmically, and to one piece of music in particular.

Joel uses a distinctive dotted rhythm in measures one and two that immediately suggests a march. In view of the militaristic feel that often accompanies marches, and the general shape of this melody, it is possible to feel an affinity between this opening melody and that of the Soviet national anthem. This anthem, composed by Alexander Alexandrov and accepted in 1939 as the Anthem of the Bolshevik Party, has evolved throughout the history of the Soviet Union and Russia. The original lyrics mentioned Stalin; these references were removed after Stalin's

death in 1953, and the anthem was played without words until the approval of new words in 1977. Russia declared a new anthem following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but Sergey Mikhalkov, the author of the original text, penned new lyrics in 2000, when the music was readopted as the official anthem of Russia. This stirring piece of music is known for its crisp, martial rhythms and soaring melody; recordings of all-male Russian choirs singing their anthem still evoke images of Communist Soviet Union today.[179] The melody of the introduction to "Leningrad" is quite similar. Joel uses the same crisp rhythms to create a martial feel, while the contours of the two melodies are somewhat congruous. While Joel's melody and that of the Soviet anthem are certainly not exactly the same, the similarities to other characteristics of the Russian anthem, as well as the grand chorale feel of both works, certainly suggests that Joel intended to evoke similar images of Soviet Russia as does the anthem itself. The addition of choral music to the conclusion of "Leningrad," which is essentially a fleshed-out repeat of the introduction, this time in A major, with a four-bar extension (the first four bars are repeated, creating a ten-bar phrase), contributes to the "Russian" feeling; the combination of the common practice era harmonic writing, the inclusion of a choral part, the martial rhythms and the contours of the melody set this music apart from the rest of Joel's rock-inspired catalogue.[180]

The narrative structures of these two songs also display significant differences. Joel narrates the entirety of "Goodnight Saigon" in the first person; he tells the

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[179] *The Hunt for Red October*, a 1990 film directed by John McTiernan, starring Sean Connery and Alec Baldwin, and based on John Clancy's book of the same name, features a scene of Russian submarine sailors singing the national anthem in a moment of nationalistic pride as they successfully engage their new, silent propulsion system. It is a chilling reminder of the Cold War arms race, and one of the movie's more dramatic scenes.

[180] In his article, "The Learned vs the Vernacular in the Songs of Billy Joel," Walter Everett suggests that the inspiration for this opening melody was the second theme from the first movement of Robert Schumann's A Minor Piano Concerto.

story of this nameless soldier in Vietnam in his own voice, and often slips into the first person plural, reemphasizing the fraternal nature of being a soldier at war. As we have seen, however, Joel did not present his *own* story. His protagonist's stories and recollections came from the memories of others, but Joel felt he could best communicate his version of the war if he used the first person, to great effect. Joel had two reasons not to approach his tribute to the Cold War in a similar manner. First, this was a war with which he had personal experience; he thus felt able to tell his own story rather than rely on the stories of others who had had more intimate experiences with the Cold War. Second, meeting Viktor changed Joel's attitude, not only towards the Cold War, but also towards the Russian people themselves. Joel's experience with the Russian people during his 1987 tour left an indelible impression on him, one that changed drastically his view of the Soviet Union, its citizens, and even his own country and, more generally, the Cold War.

Joel made a bold statement about his intentions for the song when he chose to begin "Leningrad" with Viktor's story; he spends the first two verses telling the tale of Viktor's youth. Viktor's story is somewhat fictionalized here, as the Russian man was actually younger than Joel, but the lyrics state "Viktor was born in the spring of forty-four" (Joel was born in 1949); Joel fudged the dates somewhat in order to include the lines "and never saw his father anymore/ A child of sacrifice, a child of war/ Another son who never had a father after Leningrad."[181] Taking advantage of one of the most immediate associations with the name "Leningrad," Joel here refers to the disastrous Siege of Leningrad, a battle that endured for three years, from 1941-44. Taking Leningrad was a significant part of Adolph Hitler's Operation *Barbarossa*, both because of the city's economic importance as a seat of industry and its symbolic importance as the former capital and site of the Russian Revolution. The battle for the city cost both sides a total of over 1.5 million lives, mostly due to starvation; it was the

[181] For the complete lyrics, see Appendix A.

third most costly battle behind Stalingrad and Berlin. Nearly 1.4 million people were evacuated from the city during the siege, which meant that many children like the semi-fictional Viktor were separated from their families. The second verse shows Viktor as a young man, joining the army and learning to "drown the hate" with vodka; with these opening verses, Joel endeavours to create a level of sympathy for Viktor, one of the "enemy."

"I was born in 1949; I was a Cold War kid all my life. I thought we were going to get blown to hell any day."[182] This is how Joel described his early years in an interview for *Newsday* in 1989, and how he begins his own story in the bridge of this song, after the second verse. Joel makes a change in tessitura here, shifting into his high voice, and changes the key from D major to D minor. In the opening lyrics of the bridge, Joel shows us the brash, tough, confident kid that he hoped to be ("Stop 'em at the Thirty-eighth Parallel, blast those yellow reds to hell/ Cold war kids were hard to kill, under their desks in an air raid drill."), but this confidence is undone by the bewilderment he displays at the end of the bridge, which trails away both vocally and musically into a transition back to D major for the third verse: "Haven't they heard we won the war, what do they keep on fighting for?" The third verse shows Viktor finding meaning in his life after serving out his time in the Red Army: he became a circus clown, bringing joy to children in Leningrad. In the subsequent iteration of the bridge material, Joel then contrasts this brief moment of happiness with images of American children, living in family housing developments (such as Levittown, where Joel spent part of his childhood), fearful for their own safety: "But children lived in Levittown and hid in the shelters underground/ 'Til the Soviets turned their ships around, and tore the Cuban missiles down." These lyrics are particularly striking in that they show Americans in a position of weakness and confusion, while children in Leningrad find happiness in Viktor the circus clown.

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[182] Wayne Robins, "Just the Way He Is," *Newsday*, August 2, 1989, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 17.

In some of his most poignant lyrics, Joel reiterates the confusion of the first bridge: "In that bright October sun, we knew our childhood days were done/ And I watched my friends go off to war, what do they keep on fighting for?" With these words, Joel shatters the image of the United States and her citizens most commonly projected to the world. Gone is the brash confidence Americans experienced in the wake of the Second World War and presented to the world throughout the Cold War; in its place, Joel finds vulnerability, fear and uncertainty. Joel finally brings together the two stories in the final verse, in which Joel and his family go to Leningrad and meet Viktor, "eye to eye and face to face." There is laughter, and an embrace, and Joel discovers a new friend in an unexpected place, amongst what he had previously only known as the enemy. Joel's final message ("We never knew what friends he had until we came to Leningrad") is one of hope; he implies that in order for there to be peace, one must meet one's enemy "face to face." Joel's epiphany during his tour of the Soviet Union reinforces Lester B. Pearson's oft-quoted line from his 1957 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech: "How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?"[183] It was in the moment of knowing his enemy that Joel began to understand him, and Joel said to himself, "I'm not going to be in a war with this guy. I'm not going to kill him, he's not going to kill me. The war is over. There's no Cold War."[184]

Despite Joel's obvious attachment to the song, the decision was made not to release "Leningrad" as a single in the United States; Joel made a video for the song regardless. Directed by Kathy Dougherty, in her directorial debut, this video follows the stories of Joel and Viktor through archival footage, including film taken during Joel's meeting with Viktor during his Russian tour. In his

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[183] Lester B. Pearson, "Acceptance Speech Upon Presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957," *www.unac.org*. UNA-Canada, 2002. Web. 2 March 2010.

[184] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video.*

commentary on the song and video on *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III, The Video*, Joel asserts that for him, "It was a metaphor at the time ... the name 'Leningrad' screamed Soviet Union, Lenin."[185] It is fitting, then, that the first images (other than a simple shot of Joel playing the piano) are of Leningrad during the Siege of Leningrad in the Second World War. Stark black and white images of burned-out buildings, army vehicles, and a young boy leading a cart full of weeping children, presumably during the evacuation of Leningrad, their meager belongings wrapped in a sheet, accompany the first verse. During the second verse, the scene shifts to a city, in colour this time, with Russian soldiers marching in time through a city square (to the lyrics "Followed the rules, and drank his vodka straight") while a small child follows them, mimicking their exaggerated steps. The city has been rebuilt, the soldiers proud and straight-backed, but the images of war are everywhere, from the stiffly-held bayoneted weapons to a shot of a small boy holding a toy gun; this is Soviet Russia, the Cold War being fought by every citizen. The bridge material, in which Joel introduces his own tale, includes images shocking because of their contrasting nature. The first image we see is a mother and son in their backyard, hanging laundry on the line. This is an idyllic image compared to the opening images in the first verse: there are no mothers and sons in Leningrad, no hanging sheets on the line; parents and children have been forcibly separated by the evacuation, and sheets are used for holding together one's possessions during flight from the Nazis. This idyllic image of post-war America does not last, however; a shot of Senator Joseph McCarthy replaces the mother and child, then images of soldiers marching through the barren landscape of Korea and propaganda-type shots of "those yellow reds" shatter the peace of suburban America that opened the bridge, as Joel sings "Stop 'em at the thirty-eighth parallel," in reference to the line that separates North and South Korea. Joel effectively balances the militaristic Russian scenes with footage of children diving under their desks at a whistle from their teacher, followed by crying wives and mothers as their

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[185] *Ibid.*

husbands and sons go off to another war. Joel's underlying message in the song and video, that we are not so different, hits home through this juxtaposition.

The third verse shows the first signs of optimism in this narrative. Here, we see Viktor smoking with his comrades in uniform, then putting on his clown makeup as he literally makes the transition from soldier to entertainer, shedding his uniform for a costume. Children laugh and smile as Viktor finds his calling. At this point, Joel makes the bold statement that perhaps his own life was not so much better than that of his counterpart in the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the bridge material this time, the comforting scene of mother and son hanging laundry gives way to a shot of Levittown, with its cookie-cutter houses and miniscule front yards. A disturbing cascade of images follows: a nuclear missile emerges silently from a silo; bombers fly overhead; a family rushes into a bomb shelter; news of the Cuban missile crisis flashes as nuclear vessels sail and Khrushchev embraces Fidel Castro; President Kennedy strides through the Oval Office to give a speech on the balcony of the White House; and American troops fight in the jungles of Southeast Asia as a new war against Communism rages. As the final verse begins, the perspective switches from archival and news footage to that of Joel's tour in Russia. Joel and his family enter the scene, looking like casual tourists; Joel in blue jeans and wife Christie sporting a USA T-shirt and holding a camera, while Alexa Ray, their young daughter, toddles along in a "J Club" shirt. Viktor again puts on his clown makeup as he prepares to entertain, and then we see Viktor enter Joel's dressing room with a bouquet of flowers and a promotional Billy Joel poster. The two men sit together on a couch and look at snapshots together, sharing smiles and laughs, acting like old friends, rather than combatants on opposite sides of a decades-old conflict. Gone is any sense of struggle or strife, any cultural or ideological differences forgotten in the camaraderie of the moment. This is the moment of Joel's epiphany, caught on film; it is at this moment that the Cold War ends for both men.

In the closing moments of "Leningrad," when the militaristic introduction material returns in its fully orchestrated version, images of war flash by again: marching soldiers, propaganda signs ("If You Wouldn't Tell Stalin, Don't Tell Anyone," "Every Communist is Moscow's Spy"), waving flags, and victory parades. Amid the quickly-flashing images, it becomes difficult to tell Russian and American troops apart, especially as they march along dusty roads in crackly black and white footage; Joel again reinforces the underlying message of "Leningrad," that we are all the same, that there is no right and wrong. "What do they keep on fighting for?" asks Joel, expressing both his intense desire for peace and a longing for recognition that, deep down, we all want the same things: family, security, and to protect our home. The futility of this conflict is brought home in the final images of the video. As the music wends its way to its final cadence, footage from the end of the Second World War shows officers from both the American and Soviet armies shaking hands in front of a sign that reads, "East Meets West," with depictions of soldiers holding the American and Soviet flags together. The final shot is also one of peace, forty years later, as Joel and Viktor shake hands and embrace at an airport.

Worthy of mention are the clips of Joel playing the piano that occur regularly throughout the video. Joel sits at the piano, wearing a simple black shirt. As he plays, he either stares at his hands or blankly off into space, showing virtually no expression or emotion at any time in the video. He looks defeated and fatigued, and it appears to take some effort to play this song; Joel plays the piano heavily and deliberately, with thick chords. Joel evidently felt the need to play his part in a dispassionate manner, or in a manner that showed his frustration and sadness over this story. Also relevant is the lighting in the scenes of Joel playing. During the verses about Viktor, there is a red cast to the light, partly because of a tattered red curtain hanging across one side of the room. When Joel sings of his own story, the light is blue. The symbolism may seem a little heavy-handed, red for Russia, blue for America, but the lighting change is still effective. Finally, at the

end of the video, the camera pans down across the piano, beside Joel, and we see the blue light and the red curtain simultaneously for the first time.

Until this point in his career, Joel had largely refrained from telling his own story, at least in terms of the larger issues in his life. He readily wrote about the women in his life, his family, his job and his background, but usually on a fairly superficial level. Songs such as "Just the Way You Are," "Temptation" (written about his desire to spend more time with his baby daughter), "Piano Man" and "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant" reveal little about Joel's character and almost nothing about his politics.[186] While he did show his willingness to make statements about the collapse of important American industries with "Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" (both of which, as we will see, contain political messages, whether intended or not), these songs did not have the added emotional weight of his own experience behind them. With "Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire" Joel showed that he was willing to tackle social issues; again, however, these songs stand as more abstract commentaries than personal reactions. With "Leningrad," for the first time, Joel found an issue with which he had personal experience and upon which he felt comfortable commenting through his songwriting. The result was perhaps the first post-Cold War song written, as he wrote it before the Cold War ended. It combines his desire to write social commentary and historical songs about the American experience, and serves as a more mature and thoughtful discussion of American involvement in the wars of the late twentieth century than his previous effort, "Goodnight Saigon." What makes "Leningrad" such an important song to both critics and fans, and to Joel himself is that he managed, for the first time, to find a way to reveal his nation's history, not by telling the stories of others, but by revealing his own.

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[186] Although he has acknowledged his left-leaning tendencies, Joel has generally tried to stay out of politics, rarely discussing his views openly, and even refusing to participate in the No Nukes concerts of 1979.

Chapter 6
"Allentown"

The Nylon Curtain inspired *Rolling Stone* magazine to state that Joel was "on higher artistic ground than ever before,"[187] perhaps due to his attempts to illustrate the American experience, as he did so successfully with "Goodnight Saigon." For the opening track of the album, however, Joel turned to the lives of blue-collar workers upon which the industrial and military machine of the United States relied for her continuing global superiority. While "Goodnight Saigon" has often been recognized as the most emotionally evocative track on the album, the music, lyrics and, especially, the video for "Allentown" combine to form a moving and effective portrait of the tragedy that was the disintegration of the American steel industry. In his review of the album for *Rolling Stone* magazine, Stephen Holden was effusive in his praise for Joel's efforts on this album, and with "Allentown" in particular, stating "there are … songs in which Joel's blue-collar smarts, Broadway theatricality and rock attitude blend perfectly. 'Allentown,' his portrait of a crumbling Pennsylvania mining city in which the American dream has died hard, could be a scene from *The Deer Hunter* put to music."[188] An analysis of *The Nylon Curtain*'s most successful track, with particular emphasis on the interplay of music and lyrics and the depiction of the story of American steel in the video, will provide a greater appreciation of Joel's deep understanding of the nature of this industrial catastrophe.

Allentown, the third-largest city in Pennsylvania, was once one of the most important manufacturing cities in the United States, particularly in the realm of iron and steel production. The largest of the three cities that lie in the Lehigh Valley (Bethlehem, referenced in the song, and Easton are the other two),

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187 Holden, "*The Nylon Curtain*."

188 *Ibid.*

Allentown is still a major centre of silk production and a significant transportation hub, but its fortunes have long mirrored that of the steel industry. Bethlehem Steel, once the second largest producer of American steel, behind only Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel, was headquartered nearby until its bankruptcy and subsequent closure in 2001. The most important industry and biggest employer in the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem Steel employed 110,000 people in several states at its peak of production in 1975. However, due to a combination of several factors, including competition from foreign imports, the industry's unwillingness to upgrade equipment in order to increase efficiency and production and reduce costs, the federal government's reluctance to intercede on behalf of the industry that 'built America,' and the success of the unions in winning inflated wages and cushy benefits packages for steel workers, the steel industry was in major trouble by the 1980s. In 1980, the number of people employed by Bethlehem Steel was down to 83,800, then to 48,500 in 1984.[189]

It is somewhat curious that Joel chose Allentown for the name of the song. The name "Bethlehem" was more synonymous with the steel industry in Pennsylvania in the 1980s, but Joel chose the less common "Allentown" for his tribute to the history of the steel industry. Joel was certainly familiar with all of the cities of the Lehigh Valley; he had played in the area extensively early in his career, making stops at Lehigh University and the Roxy Theatre at Northampton Community College, among other venues. In 2007, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the release of "Allentown," Joel gave an interview to *The Morning Call*, a daily newspaper based in Allentown, in which he described the genesis of the song in great detail. His description of how the song came about reveals much about his inspiration for writing about the steel industry, as well as the reasons for calling it "Allentown," as opposed to "Bethlehem." When asked to discuss how the song evolved over time, Joel indicated that "Allentown" had started as a song about where he grew up:

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189 John Strohmeyer, *Crisis in Bethlehem: Big Steel's Struggle to Survive* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler Publishing, 1986), p. 159. Print.

> Well, it started out, actually, called "Levittown," because that's where I grew up. Problem is, there was nothing to talk about. And the lyric went, "Well we're living here in Levittown, and there's really nothing much around," and it went on like that. I had a melody and a rhythm and chords, but nothing to talk about. I remember reading about how the decline of the steel industry had been affecting the Lehigh Valley, and I decided that's what I was going to write the song about.[190]

Joel continued by discussing the various venues in the Lehigh Valley in which he and the band had played, and then he expanded on why he decided to write a song about the area. He related a story about an encounter with a young man in the area just prior to writing the song, an encounter that had a profound effect on his song-writing choices for *The Nylon Curtain*. According to Joel, the man came up to him after a concert and stated "You're never coming back here." Joel detailed the remainder of the conversation and his reaction:

> I said, "Why do you say that?" He said, "Well, you're probably gonna become a big star. Nobody who ever becomes big comes back here." And I felt so sad for this kid, he seemed so bitter about it. I said, "Well, I'm coming back, no matter what."[191]

Joel discussed how he had noticed the area declining over time, observing "not a sense of futility but … a kind of wearing on the area from what had happened in the steel industry." His impression of the people was not one of capitulation, but rather of a people that were "wanting to go someplace else, but they were going to stay."[192] This feeling inspired Joel to include what he termed an "optimistic note" at the end of the song: "It's getting very hard to stay. We're living here in Allentown."

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190 Len Righi. "Billy Joel Revisits 'Allentown'," *www.chron.com*. The Houston Chronicle, 30 November 2007. Web. 23 June 2011.

191 *Ibid.*

192 *Ibid.*

By the time Joel began writing "Allentown," he had been touring the United States on and off for a decade and had seen most of the country; he felt that it was time he began to write about his experiences and the people he had met. He stated "What I was really writing about … was Bethlehem, not so much about Allentown," but that the latter city "just had a name that was very American … the name Allentown worked for me as a heartland name."[193] Allentown may have resonated for Joel, too, because of the assonance the name shares with Levittown, Joel's original choice for the title of the song. Bethlehem would not have fit the cadence of his chorus line in the same way that Allentown does. Unfortunately, when "Allentown" was released as a single, there was some controversy. Some listeners criticized Joel for stereotyping an industry in which Joel had no experience and a region in which he had never lived. Others interpreted his lyrics too literally; for example, Joel sings "Now they've taken all the coal from the ground," although there was never any coal mining in the Lehigh Valley. Reaction was so negative in some circles in Pennsylvania that, during his tour for the album, a writer for *The Morning Call* (ironically, the same newspaper that interviewed Joel twenty-five years later) advised Joel to "skip the Lehigh Valley on this tour."[194] Despite the hostility, Joel went out of his way to include the area on his new tour, booking a concert at Stabler Arena in Bethlehem for 27 December 1983, between concerts in East Rutherford, NJ and Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, NY. The arena was much smaller than the venues Joel was accustomed to playing (by this time, Joel had been on three world tours and had played to numerous sold-out crowds at Madison Square Garden in New York), but he felt it important that he return to the Lehigh Valley. Joel recalled his conversation with the young man who was convinced that Joel would never return and thought, "Well here it is. Here's the opportunity." He played to a sold-

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193 *Ibid.*

194 Cable Neuhaus. "He Sang of Their Troubles, But Grateful Citizens Say Thank You Anyway to Billy Joel," *www.people.com*. People, 10 January 1983. Web. 9 June 2011.

out crowd of over 6,000, received a long standing ovation when he made "Allentown" his third and final encore, and was given a key to the city by Mayor Joseph Daddona during the show. In a moment of modesty rarely seen from the consummate showman, Joel stated, "I just wrote a song. I'm not Thomas Edison. Let's not blow this out of proportion."[195]

Part of the criticism leveled at Joel and "Allentown" related to the fact that by some standards, Allentown was in better shape than other cities in the Rust Belt, the area of the United States most affected by the downturn in the steel industry that included parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, West Virginia and New York. The city's unemployment rate was near the national average, and layoffs in the city had been less harsh than in nearby cities such as Bethlehem. Regardless, Joel's lyrics resonated with the people of the Lehigh Valley. The steel workers of cities such as Allentown, Bethlehem, and the residents of the Monongahela River Valley keenly felt a sense of being abandoned, not only by the industry, but also by the government, and even by the unions, which were forced to ask the membership to accept pay and benefit cuts in negotiations of the early 80s. By the 1970s and 80s, many steel workers were second- or third-generation workers. They had grown up secure in the knowledge that the mill would always be there, as it always had been for their father, uncles, grandfathers and older brothers. The industry had always provided: schools, libraries (Andrew Carnegie alone presented 1679 libraries in 1412 communities across the United States, many with pools, baths, bowling alleys and performance halls),[196] churches, sports sponsorships, town maintenance and numerous other benefits. Wartime had seen especially prosperous times in the mills. The works at Homestead, at their peak during World War II, employed over 20,000 people to produce armour for the American navy and helmets for her soldiers, and the Korean War

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195 *Ibid.*

196 William Serin. *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1992), p. 363. Print.

provided great need for sturdy American steel, too. Few boys of the Pennsylvania river valleys, be it the Allegheny, the Monongahela or the Lehigh, felt the need to go to college, or even finish high school, as the mill would always be there to provide well-paying jobs that would finance their houses and feed and clothe their children. The disillusionment that accompanied fighting the Vietnam War, far from the glorious fight that was the Second World War, and the return of veterans from Southeast Asia, hardly the jubilant homecoming that their fathers received after victory over the Japanese and Germans, was soon worsened by the news of mill closures throughout Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. By the early 80s, upwards of 150,000 steel workers found themselves unemployed and unemployable. It is this environment of despair, desperation and disappointment that Billy Joel captured in "Allentown."

The lyrics of the song serve as a timeline for the story of steel in Allentown.[197] While most of the lyrics are fairly straightforward in nature, a closer analysis, especially of some of the more specific references, will be useful in deeper analysis. The first verse serves as somewhat of a prologue, in which the narrator, perhaps a present-day out-of-work steel worker or a folk singer, laments the current situation. The pronoun use is significant; for most of the song, the narrator says "we," as though speaking for the collective. The steel workers have often been likened to a large family; they worked together, took care of each other, and participated in extracurricular activities together. They also shared in the difficulties of life, supporting one another through numerous strikes, on-the-job injuries, and personal loss. Although he, as part of the collective "we," is living in Allentown, he is not working; the factories are all closing down. The workers in Bethlehem are now applying for unemployment or participating in retraining programs, "filling out forms, standing in line." The second half of the first verse begins the history of the steel worker, in which he describes, with a sense of nostalgia, the honour the previous generation felt fighting the Second

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197 See Appendix A for the full lyrics.

World War. The war, and the accompanying surge in steel production, brought these men vacations on "the Jersey Shore," as Joel puts it, dances with young women, and the resources and opportunity to start families. These were the glory days of the steel industry, during which time the unions had recovered some of the power lost at the end of the nineteenth century when the industry, under the guidance of Andrew Carnegie, had broken the unions up and down the Monongahela. Pay was up, production was up, and American steel reigned supreme. The lyrics that link the first and second verse, which I will call the transition, segue between the narrative about the older generation and that of the present. The meaning here is less clear, but it seems likely that, as the narrator speaks of "restlessness," he is probably describing the feeling that inspired the previous generation to sign up and fight in the European or Pacific theaters. Steel workers were a tough, red-blooded bunch, and, as such, were always eager to sign up for war. That enthusiasm was "handed down" to the sons of veterans, who jumped at their own chance to fight for their country in Korea or the jungles of Vietnam.

The second verse concentrates on the personal story of the narrator, how he is "waiting," waiting for the Pennsylvania that was promised to him, the future that seemed so certain when he was in high school. Even those who graduated from high school likely took jobs in the steel industry, where they learned what was real: "Iron and coke, chromium steel." The sense of bitterness is clear here: these are promises that have not been kept. The jobs that once seemed permanent, the paychecks that would always come, the comfortable homes, even the honour that would be accorded a returning soldier: everything the steel industry promised began to crumble in the 1970s. Now, rather than living in Allentown, they are waiting in Allentown. The next set of transitional lyrics reiterates these feelings of abandonment: the supply of coal, one of the key elements of making steel, ran dry, and the workers felt that the unions "crawled away" as soon as the situation

in the industry turned sour.[198] The situation in the late 70s and early 80s was more complex than this, however. By this time, the steel workers' unions had been so successful in their negotiations that their members were earning more than any other industrial sector, enjoying great benefits, and accruing enormous amounts of vacation time.[199] As a result, steel corporations were paying inflated sums of money for labour, and needed to cut back. Many unions agreed to a pay cut in sets of negotiations, but the members usually voted down their proposals. These factors contributed to the closure of many mills, a fact that steel workers often blamed on the unions.

The tension created by the frustration of these words spills over into the bridge, in which the confusion and resentment, simmering until now, boil over in an angry indictment of the industry and, it appears, the government. The meaning of the lines "Something happened on the way to that place/ They threw an American flag in our face" is unclear. It is possible that the "American flag" refers to getting drafted into the Vietnam War. This war, as mentioned above, did not ultimately carry with it the same honour and glory of the Second World War. Also, many Americans who volunteered or were drafted for the Vietnam War felt abandoned by the American government upon their return, due to a lack of medical and psychological rehabilitation. Another possible interpretation, especially considering that this lyric arises when the narrator seems to be speaking of the present (the period when Joel wrote the song, the early 1980s), is that the "American flag" refers to then-president Ronald Reagan's attempt to boost national morale by encouraging patriotism, or 'flag-waving,' in the face of economic hardship. Finally, these lines could refer to the ever-receding

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198 Coal plays a vital role in the production of steel. One ton of steel requires half a ton of coke, which is coal that has been superheated but not burned. The coke is necessary for creating the extremely high temperatures needed to forge steel from iron.

199 Strohmeyer, *Bethlehem*, p. 143 and Serrin, *Homestead*, p. 333.

"American dream," the kind of life that had been eminently reachable to members of the World War II generation but was becoming less likely for the next one. This change of fate for American steelworkers is one of the most important themes in "Allentown;" such an interpretation seems logical, therefore. After the vitriol of the bridge, the narrator, his fury spent, withdraws into the final, resigned verse. There is a significant change of feeling in this verse. Rather than the plural, collective "we," this verse is in the singular "I." Gone is the sense of community, of family, that permeated the opening verses. Gone is the eternal optimism that had infused the previous generations with hope. Instead, the "good man," overwhelmed by depression and hopelessness, has no reason to get up and fight any longer. The song ends on a note of resignation, that it is "getting very hard to stay," (the population of most steel towns reduced by at least half after the mills closed) and there is nothing left to do but wait.

Joel's musical accompaniment supports this interpretation. Although there are some significant key changes, and the harmonic progressions sometimes underscore important aspects of the accompaniment, it is more prudent to concentrate on how certain elements of the instrumental accompaniment reinforce the meaning of the lyrics. From the outset, it is evident that Joel intended the accompaniment of "Allentown" to evoke the sounds of a steel mill. The song opens with two blasts of a steam whistle, as if announcing the beginning of a workday, before the drums bring in the rest of the band. This opening rhythm in the drums establishes a syncopated motive that recurs often in all parts, before relaxing into a steady standard time rhythm for the remainder of the six-bar instrumental introduction. Of great importance, too, is the addition of ambient sounds in the production process. During the second bar of the introduction and at several other times throughout the song, one hears the rhythmic sounds of a factory. Joel reinforces the industrial sounds with imitative vocal effects on the second, third and fourth beats of the fourth bar ("csh ooh

ah").[200] This introductory section, while establishing the industrial environment, also creates a feeling of harmonic instability. The tone set suggests a key centre of G major, but the only iterations of the home key occur in inversions in the piano and guitar parts or on weak beats as a transition to C major chords. The syncopation present in the introductory figure does provide a moment where G major feels like a point of arrival, however. Joel plays a chord based on G major on the final eighth note of the first measure, and he maintains this harmony until the final eighth note of the second measure, but the melody line subverts any sense of stability or arrival by focusing on B and C as the primary melodic tones (the melody begins on C and moves down to B at the end of the first measure).

In fact, there is a G tone present throughout the introduction, but it is not in the foreground of the mix. Joel's piano playing is the most forward element in the introduction (along with percussion), and so the G tone in the rhythm guitar, while providing some harmonic stability, does not suggest a destination tone. The piano and lead guitar parts emphasize C major in the first, third and fifth bars, with a steady, driving rhythm that reinforces the factory noises in the background, but C major does not feel like a destination point either. Not until the sixth measure does Joel arrive solidly on a G major chord and provide a sense of punctuation. After two repetitions of the opening melodic gesture, during which Joel had used deceptive cadential movements to create a looping motive, the melody arrives on G, and Joel uses the syncopated gesture from the first measure to emphasize G major as a destination key. The harmony pivots between G major and C major, using the common tone G as a bass pedal, providing a I – IV – I cadence. Any sense of rest or closure is disturbed, however, by an auxiliary cadence in D major: the arrival of an E minor chord at the

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[200] Joel makes reference to several "work" songs from the 1950s and 60s in this introduction, including the 'ooh aah' of Sam Cooke's "Chain Gang," the vocalizations in The Vogues' "Five o'Clock World," and the ambient sounds in Jimmy Dean's "Big Bad John."

beginning of the verse (serving as ii of D major), followed closely by C#s in the guitar and piano, which suggests a new key area of D major.

The verses are split into two nearly identical halves comprised of three phrases, with each subsequent phrase increasing the intensity of the verse: the first phrase ends on the first scale degree (D); the second, emphasizing the fourth scale degree, G, achieves greater vocal range; the third, however, reinforces the new key area, D major, with the inclusion of C#s in the vocal line and piano/guitar parts. Of some note, too, is the reintroduction of the syncopated rhythmic motive of the opening percussion. Joel is careful to provide a steady rhythm during the vocal section, but he and guitarist Russell Javors add some rhythmic tension during the held notes at the end of each of the first two phrases of the verse halves by recalling the syncopated harmonic pivot from the final measure of the introduction. The third phrase of each verse is longer than the first two (four measures instead of two) and also more fragmented. It closes on the fifth degree chord (A major) of D major, serving as a V/V, while providing a melodic link back to the first phrase, for the second half of the verse. This gradual transition from the key implied in the introduction (G major) to the key suggested in the verse (D major) creates an increasing sense of tension that is supported by the lyrics and Joel's melodic line. The melody reaches its apex in the third phrase of each half of the verse, as Joel sings an E at "Out in Bethlehem they're killing time" and "Met our mothers in the U.S.O," and it is in these phrases that we feel the furthest away from the home key suggested in the introduction. The vocal line descends after these climaxes, releasing some of the harmonic tension. The second half of each verse ends with a reiteration of the melody from the opening phrase of the verse ("And we're living/waiting here in Allentown"). Rather than serving as a transitional phrase, however, as it does at the beginning of the verse, this final phrase instead has the feeling of a closing gesture. The lyrics contribute to this sense, as they repeat the words of the opening phrase.

More compelling in creating this sensation of conclusion, however, is how Joel changes the melody slightly. In the first iteration of this phrase, Joel initially sings a G on the word "here" and uses a step-wise downward gesture from F-sharp to D when he sings "Allentown." In the closing phrase, however, Joel extends the range of the phrase by singing a B on "here" and changes the harmonic progression on "Allentown" by starting on an A instead of F-sharp. The destination is the same (D major), but instead of getting there through the use of a suspension (F-sharp to E over an A major harmony), Joel sings an A over the A major harmony on the third beat of the measure. This strengthens the role that this chord plays, establishing a convincing cadential gesture from a chord built on a V/V in G major. The dominant-tonic gesture is weakened somewhat by the fact that Joel delays the arrival of a strong G major chord until the third beat of the final measure of the verse, but he also creates a connection to the introduction by using the same harmonic pivot that appeared at the end of the introduction.

The final phrase of each verse thus recalls the introduction but also serves to usher in the transition section (beginning with "but the restlessness was handed down"). The first phrase of the transition section includes an instance of flattening the third degree, leading to the use of an F major chord for the first time. In terms of functionality, it seems most likely that Joel intended this chord to have a "blue" relationship to D major, but it is also possible, considering that the bass note at this point is A and not F-natural, that Joel's intended harmonic goal in this phrase was C major, at which he arrives through an elegant example of contrary motion. The melody line has a similar shape to the end of the verse, rising at first but then falling from D to G, while the bass line rises from A to the destination key of C major (through a G major chord over B). This change of harmony leads to the phrase that includes the largest vocal range and virtuosity in the piece, and also a moment of great emotional tension, as Joel reaches a high G on the word "stay," and follows it with a downward melisma. Joel revisits the contrary motion from the previous phrase during this melisma: the melodic line travels down a full octave, while the bass line rises from B to D before slipping

back down to C on the first beat of the final measure of the transitional phrase. This gesture occurs four times in the song, with renewed emotional vigour each time. The lyrics at these moments represent some of the most frustrated, angry and resigned statements in "Allentown": "and it's getting very hard to stay," "and the union people crawled away," "but I won't be getting up today," and the final line of the song, "and it's getting very hard to stay," which takes on new meaning as the lament comes to a close. The band deliberately maintains a rhythmically simple accompaniment during these moments, allowing the keening quality of Joel's voice to dominate the texture.

This transitional material is followed by a reprise of the introduction material, which had, until the point, closed with a neighbour tone gesture in G major. At the end of the second verse and the second iteration of the transition music, Joel subverts this cadential gesture with a jarring F major chord that heralds the arrival of the bridge. The transition material previously had led in the verse material, which is in G major; the forceful appearance of F-natural is unexpected. As we have seen, this is not the first instance of F-natural, but here Joel tonicizes it by using it as a bass pedal throughout.[201] As noted earlier, the bridge contains perhaps the narrator's most unbridled and passionate declaration of frustrations and disillusionment felt by workers in the steel industry. The abrupt harmonic change here, following an eighth-note rest in the entire band, and emphasized by a cymbal crash, interrupts the tale and brings the listener into the narrator's present. The bitterness of the lyrics is underscored by the inclusion of syncopated rhythms in the guitar and piano and heavier bass drums, reminiscent of the syncopated drum pickup in the opening of the song. Most striking is the final phrase of the bridge ("they threw an American flag in our face"). Although the vocal setting is rhythmically identical to the preceding phrases, the word "American" falls awkwardly in the cadence of the bar so that the rhythmic stress

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[201] This section features a prolonged double-plagal cadence, where F major, tonicized by the appearance of B-flat, transitions to C major at "flag in our face," before finally resolving to the tonic, G major.

is on the first syllable of the word rather than its natural place, the second syllable. This has the effect of throwing the listener off balance and reinforcing the syncopation provided by the band.

Furthermore, Joel punctuates this final phrase with a C major chord (rather than the F major that the pedal in the bass has supported throughout the bridge). The melodic line rises in intensity and range throughout the bridge, which, combined with the insistence of the F major chords, the syncopation in the guitar and piano, and the awkward placement of important words, has ratcheted up the tension. The arrival of C major, which heralds the return of the opening riff, releases some of this tension, but it does not feel like a point of final arrival. The harmonic progression in the first phrase (F major – G major – B-flat major), with the inclusion of B flats in the accompaniment, seems to suggest a movement into F major. In the second phrase, however, Joel reaches up to E with the melody upon the arrival of C major, as opposed to the D he sang above the B-flat major chord at the end of the first phrase. If C major is the destination chord for the bridge, then the final chords of the bridge spell out a IV – V – I progression, thus emphasizing a dominant-tonic relationship, but this is not satisfactory, considering the G major at the beginning of the next verse (as we have seen in "We Didn't Start the Fire," the final chord of a bridge section can serve as a transitional chord rather than a destination chord). It is possible that Joel intended the F naturals and B flats as blues inflections, as they would be flat three and seven in the key of G major, the tonal centre for the entire song, but this explanation is unlikely. The movement to C major, rather than serving as an arrival point, instead provides Joel with the opportunity to bring back the introductory material, which enables a transition to the next verse. The return of G major at this point serves to clarify the role of F major and C major in the transition material. As noted above, the transition section is a prolonged double-plagal cadence; F major serves as a IV/IV, cadencing to C major, which in turn serves as the subdominant of G major.

The third and final verse, in which the narrator reveals, through the change from "we" to "I," his own stake in this story, is cut short after the first half by the return of the bridge material; this time, however, a lead guitar solo replaces the vocal line; it is as if the narrator has no words left with which to tell his tale. This iteration of the bridge is identical to the first, except for the solo guitar. The tension and unease of this section is increased, however, first by the triplets in the lead guitar, then the syncopated harmonic changes in the second half of the bridge. Joel's plaintive "hey, hey, hey" provides a continuation of the guitar solo, which then leads into an extended form of the melisma that has ended each full verse. The narrator's resignation is plain, declaring that "it's getting very hard to stay," and this tone is pained, full of remorse and resentment. This lament is supported by a harmonic progression that leads to a firm closure on G major. The hum of the factory repeats and fades long after the last sounds of the band have gone, perhaps in a weak gesture of optimism that the industry is not lost forever (Bethlehem Steel had not closed its doors entirely at the time that Joel wrote "Allentown").

The tonal structure of this song, therefore, rotates around G major, with brief sojourns into D major (at the end of each verse) and F major (the bridge), and references to C major in the introduction and the transition from the bridge back to the verse. These keys are all closely related; G major is framed by C major and D major, while F major, the most distant key from the tonal centre of "Allentown," serves as a IV/IV in G major. The central keys in this tonal structure, G major and C major, are the stabilizing keys in the song. The introduction and transitional sections have suggestions of C major; it is during the introduction that we hear the sounds of industry, an optimistic sign amidst the pessimism and turmoil of the lyrics. Joel firmly establishes G major at the beginning of each verse, where the lyrics contain the most objective material in the song. Joel endeavours to maintain some narrative distance during the first halves of the two verses, and he is aided in doing so by the stability provided by the home key. The peripheral key areas in "Allentown," D major and F major,

represent instability and occur at times of greater lyrical intensity. In the first verse, Joel makes a gesture towards D major when he recalls how their fathers and mothers met, in better times at U.S.O. dances; in the second verse, the equivalent section details the narrator's frustration with having to face the realities of being a steelworker after leaving school: "No they never taught us what was real, iron and coke, chromium steel." Furthermore, the moment of highest emotional intensity in the song, at the end of the transitional material when Joel sings, "and it's getting very hard to stay," arrives with a D major chord, arrived at through an A minor seventh chord. The ensuing progression makes it clear, however, that this occurrence of D major signifies an imperfect cadence in G major rather that a gesture towards a new tonal area; A minor seven to D major functions as ii – V in G major, at which we arrive through a movement to the subdominant, C major, through the course of the melismatic material. The most remote, and also unstable, key area in "Allentown" is F major. The bridge material, with its use of F as a bass pedal, appears to move towards F major. There are, however, very few examples of B-flat in this section. The resulting tone set (F G A B C D E F) suggests a gesture towards the Lydian mode. The use of B-natural in the melody line above the pedal F undermines the sense of F major, implying the use of a subdominant pedal tone rather than a tonic. Joel does include a B-flat chord at "old man," as discussed above, which supports a temporary tonicization of F in this section, but Joel removes any sense of F as a destination tonal area with the progression at the end of the bridge, ending firmly in G major.[202]

Joel therefore uses several musical elements to underscore the narrative message of "Allentown," ranging from suggestions of authentic environmental sounds to the use of distant key areas to provide instability at key moments. As with "Pressure and "Goodnight Saigon," the other singles from *The Nylon Curtain*,

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202 There are other possibilities. Joel could be using the F-naturals as blues inflections, as mentioned above. Additionally, the presence of F-naturals in a G major context could represent a movement towards a G mixolydian scale.

however, Joel decided that he could emphasize and deepen the message of "Allentown" through the use of a descriptive and compelling video. Once again, Joel decided to work with Russell Mulcahy for the production of a video for "Allentown." Rather than producing another symbolic and highly stylized video, such as that for "Pressure," Joel and Mulcahy drew on the narrative structure of "Allentown" for inspiration for this video. The result is a dramatized depiction of the history of Allentown in which Joel plays a significant role as narrator and commentator. For the purposes of this examination, I will break down the video, which was in heavy rotation on MTV in 1982, into eleven separate scenes: Intro music, Verse 1a and b, Transition 1, Verse 2a and b, Transition 2, Bridge, Verse 3, Bridge (guitar solo), and Conclusion. Each scene tells its own part of the story of Allentown, following the lives of two young men, from World War II to the present day, and is separated from the next by freezing on an image or a focus on Joel himself.

The introductory scene (0:00-0:18), in which the sounds of the factory are heard, portrays the industry at its peak: the end of the Second World War. The people of Allentown celebrate the soldiers in front of a banner reading "Welcome Home;" the soldiers, in uniform, embrace and kiss their loved ones while balloons fall from the sky. The video freezes on the face of a soldier as the narrator begins his sad tale. The first half of the first verse (1a), in which the narrator sets the scene of factories closing, is accompanied by black and white photos of mills closing, and long lines of men, presumably lining up for their unemployment benefits. As this stanza ends, we get our first view of the narrator: it is Joel himself, dressed like a drifter, or in the garb of an American folk singer. He is wearing a plaid shirt, a worn fedora, and strumming an acoustic guitar, leaning against a barrel in a steel mill. With this image, Joel creates an allusion to a folk song of the protest genre, with Joel himself as the wandering minstrel. His role is to tell the story of a people who cannot tell it themselves, thus placing himself in the tradition of Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and the other great American folk singers. The signifiers provided by Joel, including the acoustic guitar, the shoddy

clothes and the worn hat, all represent the image of "folk singer" that Joel is counting on his audience recognizing. Joel is tapping into a long tradition of folk songs about the steel industry, in fact, dating back at least to the Homestead Strike of 1892. During this strike, over a dozen workers and Pinkerton detectives were killed, and the Homestead union was broken by the efforts of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick. Folk song writers captured this event, one of the worst examples of labour unrest and violence in the history of the United States, in songs such as "The Fort that Frick Built" and "Father was Killed by a Pinkerton Man." Also of interest here, as Joel imitates the sounds of the factory, is the image of two faceless workers seen turning the wheels of the machinery in time with the music. This image returns several times, symbolizing the industry and the nameless thousands who made it work.

The image that Joel cultivates for himself in the video is at odds with the type of music used in "Allentown;" the visual elements created by the video are dissonant with the aural elements in the song itself. Joel presents himself as a folk balladeer, but the accompanying music lacks the usual signifiers for folk music, such as the use of acoustic instruments, limited percussion and emphasis on beats one and three of each measure. The lyrical content is consistent with topical protest songs of the 1960s and, as mentioned above, Joel was following in a strong tradition of writing music that illuminated the plight of American industrial workers when he decided to write a song about the American steel industry, but "Allentown" is rife with the elements of rock music. The use of electric instruments, heavy percussion, and focus on the backbeat signify that "Allentown" resides firmly within the genre of rock & roll. The dissonance created by the juxtaposition of folk imagery within a rock & roll context is diminished somewhat by some of the other visual aspects of the video, especially the dance scene that appears during the instrumental bridge section, but the contrast between Joel's image and the aural indicators is still somewhat jarring. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Joel made sure not to make such mistakes

again when he next tackled topical material with "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" on 1989's *Storm Front*.

In the second half of the first verse (1b), Joel returns the viewer to the past once again, where the citizens of Allentown now have a party in recognition of the troops. Under the same "Welcome Home" banner, there is much singing and dancing, as the narrator tells of the previous generation's success. The transition section, however, casts a pall over the joyful nature of the previous scene. Here, after the "Welcome Home" banner has fallen down and the party has dispersed, a heavy-hearted soldier in uniform approaches a 50s-style party replete with convertibles and sweater-wearing youth, who greet him with smiles and handshakes. The "restlessness" of this generation sees American soldiers off to war once again, this time in Korea. The image of the choreographed factory workers returns as the sounds of the factory appear again; the mill is ever-present, a driving force behind the decisions of the people of Allentown and the American military machine.[203]

The second verse begins with one of the young men from the '50s party looking dissatisfied (and wearing a red shirt that will come to identify him as a factory worker), entering a bar and absent-mindedly throwing around a pool ball, while factory workers walk by outside. Joel, as the narrator, sits on a bar stool, strumming his guitar and singing of the feelings of ennui that gripped the younger generation of Allentown men. As he begins singing the second half of the verse (2b), graduation pictures on the wall of the bar segue into a series of black and white photographs depicting the affluence of the '50s and '60s in the steel industry: a formal dance, athletics, posed family portraits, organized sports teams, a young couple on a park bench, young men studying. On the words "they

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[203] The use of factory workers moving in time with the music is an homage to the choreography of The Vogues appearance on the NBC variety show "Hullabaloo" on January 17, 1966, during which they sang their hit "Five o'Clock World." The video for this can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSIGwAY2JBs.

never taught us what was real," however, a picture of a mill appears, serving as a reminder that all of the wealth and comfort depicted in the previous pictures rested on the success of the mill. The subsequent lyric, "Iron and coke, chromium steel," accompanies a return to live-action footage of workers in the mill, turning valves, welding, wiping the sweat off their brows. Joel-as-folk-singer is present again, still leaning on his barrel and observing the proceedings. The second transition scene depicts the dissatisfied young man from the bar showering at the mill, his red shirt hanging up in the locker room, only to be greeted by an executive (wearing a hard hat, a white shirt and a tie) and served with the news that he has been let go, as Joel sings that "the union people crawled away." Unemployed and abandoned, the man hangs his head as his co-workers react angrily.[204] The bridge, which contains the music with the hardest edge and the most embittered lyrics, portrays the two main characters of the video, the soldier and the laid-off steel worker, reuniting; the solider, now in a wheelchair, and the blue-collar worker, now divested of his red shirt, the symbol of his employment, clasp hands and embrace, while workers in red, white and blue dance furiously in the mill behind them. That which was celebrated in the previous generation is rapidly disintegrating around them: the mills are closing, and the wounded soldier returns from the front with no banner welcoming him home or recognizing the sacrifice he has made.

The scene for the third verse focuses on the narrator, showing that he too is a victim of this tragedy. Joel looks tired and sweaty as he strums his guitar, and the workers are exhausted as they ply their trade around him in decreasing numbers. It may also be significant that the factory workers are always shown performing their tasks by hand. One of the reasons that the American steel industry collapsed was the corporation's unwillingness to invest in new

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204 There was some controversy about this scene. In the originally-aired version of the video, there is a brief shot of real male nudity as the young man leaves the shower room. This scene was edited in subsequent airings on MTV amid claims that the video contained scenes of homoeroticism.

technologies, which would have made plants more efficient. After the Second World War, Germany and Great Britain were forced to rebuild their industrial centers from scratch, as they had been completely destroyed in heavy bombings during the war. Their steel mills were therefore far newer than American mills, many of which had not been upgraded since their construction in the early years of the twentieth century. As a result, foreign steel became far less expensive than domestic steel, and the industry began to suffer. The federal government was generally reluctant to interfere, and thus companies such as Bethlehem Steel began to post enormous losses by the mid-1970s. Thus, Mulcahy's decision to portray factory workers working with their hands may be meant to symbolize the steel industry's failure to upgrade. The scene accompanying the guitar solo is comprised of a short dance number. All of the main characters from the video appear, including the two friends, the shirt-and-tie executive, and girls from the '50s party scene, as well as a nearly naked flaming-baton twirler. As they dance, a metal cage descends behind them, which is then lit up, revealing the Stars and Stripes in flashing lights. The dancers, with smiles on their faces, eventually gather together and throw their arms up towards the flag, then turn and link arms while facing the camera, the American flag flashing behind them all the while. This scene surely refers to the same interpretation that arose earlier for the line "They threw an American flag in our face," especially as it takes place at the same point in the bridge (albeit during the instrumental version); this could not be more blatant "flag-waving." The dancers, with their baton twirling and near prostration before the garishly-lit American flag, may be meant to serve as a distraction from the harsh realities of economic depression, especially with the lit-up flag descending between the audience (the camera) and the mill portion of the set, obfuscating the mill. The final scene serves as a kind of denouement for this story. The camera, tight to Joel's face as he sings the final lines of the song, pans out to reveal a scene of decay. The once-proud Allentown sign, now covered in graffiti and filled with holes, has partially fallen down. A wind blows through the factory yard, carrying with it the detritus of desertion. The factory is empty, devoid of workers, and the narrator, weary from the telling of the story, lies down

on his bench after he strums the final chord, covering his face with his hat. The sounds of the factory fade as the mill shuts down and "Allentown" comes to a close.

The Nylon Curtain witnessed a crucial stage in Billy Joel's development as a songwriter. While he did not abandon the Beatles-inspired pop of "Through the Long Night" (from *Glass Houses*), the straight rock of "Big Shot" (*52nd Street*) or the unabashed romance of the "Just the Way You Are" (*The Stranger*) – witness "Scandinavian Skies," "Pressure," and "She's Right on Time" for examples – Joel donned a new hat for part of this album, that of social critic. Joel had always drawn inspiration from his surroundings, but before *The Nylon Curtain*, this had usually taken the form of semi-biographical songs such as "Piano Man," "James" and "Rosalinda's Eyes," a love song from his father to his mother. After witnessing the fates of Vietnam War veterans and unemployed steel workers, however, Joel discovered that his social conscience would not let him leave these stories untold, and that his songwriting provided the platform from which he could tell them. "Allentown," at once a searing indictment of the events that led to industrial collapse and a historical document that sensitively records the passing of a way of life, is a compelling combination of folk song and rock hit, with its emotionally charged lyrics and catchy tune. In addition, Joel furthered his exploration of the medium of the music video, finding potential for increasing not only the potency of his message, but also for delivering that message to even greater numbers of people. With the music video, he could reinforce the meaning of the lyrics through visual imagery, making both more powerful, and he could also insert himself into the story in a more meaningful way. Instead of remaining distant from the story by respecting the independence from the narrative usually accorded the narrator (the narrator in folk songs is often an independent observer), Joel places himself in the middle of the action, a sympathetic participant in the economic disaster unfolding around him. Rather than inspiring his disdain, as was often the case when he wrote of his own experiences on albums such as *Piano Man* and *Turnstiles*, telling the stories of ordinary

Americans "challenged his eye and stirred his compassion;"[205] this is Joel approaching the height of his craft.

205 Holden, "*The Nylon Curtain*."

Chapter 7

"The Downeaster 'Alexa'"

Through this study, the parallels between *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front* have become readily apparent; we can view pairs of tracks that share similar themes or inspiration. The high-energy, paranoia-infused "Pressure" finds its counterpart in the alarm bells of Joel's tribute to crumbling American morals and values, "We Didn't Start the Fire," while "Goodnight Saigon," Joel's intensely personal elegy to the Vietnam War, is paired with "Leningrad," his autobiographical account of the Cold War, the United States' 'other' war of the second half of the twentieth century. "Allentown," Joel's endeavour to reveal the fates of working-class Americans losing their traditions and roots as their jobs disappear, finds its parallel track with Joel's moving tale of the collapse of the Long Island fishermen, "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." With "Allentown," especially in the video, Joel had ventured into the world of folk music, channeling the spirit of Woody Guthrie with his plaid shirt, relaxed attitude and acoustic guitar. The inclusion of the signifiers of folk music appeared out of place, however, due to the aural quality of the song, which is unmistakably rock & roll. With "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," Joel commits to the folk genre in more concrete ways, including altered instrumentation, inclusion of ambient sounds, and a change in rhythm that moves this song away from the standard rock & roll with which Joel had become identified. Inspired by his move to Long Island and his involvement with charitable works focused on aiding economically depressed fishermen, "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" is Joel's most authentic attempt at writing folk music, and, thus, one of his most compelling narratives.

Joel had tried his hand at the folk ballad earlier in his career. On his first album to achieve popular success, *Piano Man* (1973), he ends the first side with a

"Western" song called "The Ballad of Billy the Kid." Inspired by a cross-country road trip and the music of Aaron Copland (hence the "classical" feel to the instrumental sections), this song indicates Joel's early desire to write distinctly American music (picking up on Copland's desire to do the same, whether consciously on his part or not), regardless of the authenticity.[206] While the music sounds authentically Western American, with the harmonica solos, "clip clops" in the percussion, and rolling arpeggiated bass lines, Joel is less careful with the accuracy of the lyrics. He states that Billy was from "a town known as Wheeling, West Virginia" (which he was not), then proceeds to detail Billy's exploits robbing banks (which he never did), and finishes with a description of how "the cowboys and their kin,/ like the sea came pourin' in/ to watch the hanging of Billy the Kid" (which never happened: he was shot). At this stage in his career, the details are unimportant; it *sounds* authentic: "Billy the Kid" is "spectacularly unrealistic – a tissue of lies … it more than compensates with its spaghetti western melodramatic atmosphere."[207] Joel now acknowledges the factual inaccuracies in the song, often announcing during the song's instrumental introduction "every verse in this song is a lie." Several possibilities for this acknowledgement exist: Joel meant "Billy the Kid" to be tongue-in-cheek; in the writing of this song he intended to make some sort of comment on how myths, particularly those of the Wild West, get distorted over time; or he is just covering his tracks. It is difficult to tell which of these possibilities is most likely, but on the basis of the final verse of the song, in which Joel refers to the "young man from Oyster Island/ with a six-pack in his hand," it seems the first possibility may be closest to the truth.

The attempts at folk balladeering on *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front* display a greater focus on accuracy, however. Joel knew of the plight of the Pennsylvania

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[206] For more information on Copland's Americanism, see Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Works of an Uncommon Man* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1999) and Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1984).

[207] Childs, Andy. "Billy Joel: Piano Man," *ZigZag* July 1975. Print.

steel industry that he so passionately described in "Allentown," especially following his appearances at music festivals in Pennsylvania in the 1970s, and this familiarity lent itself to a more compelling final product. Joel made himself familiar with the issues at hand, and voiced his displeasure and disappointment at the abandonment of the American steel workers in the moving song and powerful accompanying video. This is even more so the case in "The Downeaster 'Alexa.'" Here, we witness another American industrial tragedy, but one that hit far closer to home for the composer. Joel was born in the Bronx and raised in Hicksville, NY, in the heart of Nassau County on Long Island, and he made Long Island his home once again in the late 80s. Faced with the reality of the declining fisheries and the encroachment of upper class estates such as those that line the shores of Long Island today, Joel became intimately familiar with the financial difficulties faced by Long Island fishermen in the face of government and environmental regulations. An avid fisherman himself (Joel actually owns a fishing boat in a downeaster model, refurbished as a pleasure craft, called "Alexa," named after his daughter), Joel found inspiration for a folk song in the vein of "Allentown" in this tragic story of a culture and community quickly disappearing. Making reference to specific landmarks in the Outer Lands (the archipelago that runs from Massachusetts to New York), such as Gardiner's Bay, Montauk and Block Island Sound, and taking on the role of struggling fisherman himself in the lyrics (the opening lyric "Well I'm on the Downeaster Alexa" plants Joel firmly the role of first-person narrator), this song is unmistakably in the same genre as "Allentown." His understanding of this crisis becomes clear through an examination of the background of the North Atlantic fishery, his creative process and inspiration, and text-music relationships.

The Long Island fisheries, and those of the North Atlantic in general, have been in trouble for decades, mostly through the lack of adequate resource management by those in charge, namely American government regulatory groups such as the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), local management groups like

the New England Fishery Management Council, and international instruments dealing with fisheries, especially the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).[208] As anyone connected to this issue will state, the problem is not that we fish; it is *how* we fish: how often, where, how aggressively, which species we target, the type of fishing we use, etc. In their comprehensive study on the North Atlantic fisheries entitled *In a Perfect Ocean*, Daniel Pauly and Jay Maclean state this clearly and succinctly:

> [In the 1950s, it] is a good thing that the fisheries grew. The western world had been devastated by war, and here was a resource that was underexploited. Catches grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. However, our fisheries management agencies never really succeeded at stopping the growth of a fishery once it started, and the North Atlantic fisheries overshot.[209]

Stephen Sloan, a member of ICCAT and one of the most impassioned defenders of the Atlantic Ocean's fisheries, reveals a number of scandals that illuminate some of the myriad of reasons that fish stocks such as tuna and swordfish are suffering and others, like the Atlantic cod, have collapsed entirely. He does not mince words or pull punches: "Man's ability to wipe out the fish that inhabit our oceans through his consuming greed and lack of foresight is a never-ending odyssey.... This is complicated by the venality of some politicians and fishery bureaucrats, who for a few coins of the current realm are willing to let these once fruitful waters be made barren."[210] From the *Connie Jean* incident of 1993, in which a purse seine vessel took on a net full of bluefin tuna illegally (the season was not open) because they would be worth more than yellowfin, then dumped

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[208] A more complete list of these regulatory commissions and groups appears in Daniel Pauly and Jay Maclean's study on the current state of the North Atlantic fisheries, *In a Perfect Ocean* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003).

[209] Pauly and Maclean, *In a Perfect Ocean*, p. 46.

[210] Stephen Sloan, *Ocean Bankruptcy: World Fisheries on the Brink of Disaster* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2003), p. xvi. Print.

the entire catch overboard (estimated at 50 metric tonnes), dead, when their captain could not receive permission to bring them to port, to the 2001 Japanese admission that they had been systematically purchasing illegally caught fish from unregulated vessels for years, Sloan presents a compelling case for a radical overhaul of the fisheries management system, one that punishes bureaucrats and officials rather than individual fishermen. Pauly and Maclean also detail how the over-fishing of high trophic level fish such as tuna, marlin and cod has led not only to a massive decline in the numbers of these predatory fish species, but also to the necessary fishing of lower trophic level marine species, such as invertebrates (shrimp, lobster, clams) and even zooplankton such as jellyfish. The result is not only a shrinking of the food web, but also a greater strain on the high trophic level species, as we are now eating their prey.[211]

The preceding are just a few snapshots of an industry in crisis that authors and experts such as Pauly, Maclean and Sloan present in the hopes of transforming the North Atlantic fisheries into a more conservation-based undertaking. They are loath to blame anyone in particular: "There are no villains, least of all the fishers. Although it is true that the main factor in the decline of the North Atlantic is over-fishing, the fishers are guilty only of trying to make the best living they can, taking advantage of the incentives they are offered."[212] The incentives of which the authors speak include encouraging fishermen to discard by-catch (fish of unwanted species caught unintentionally), decommissioning vessels (which has often led to using newly-acquired capital to modernize aging fleets), and income support (which can lead indirectly to an increase in the price of fish);

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[211]"Trophic level" refers to the food chain level at which an organism feeds. Plants and zooplankton, the marine equivalent of terrestrial plants, have a trophic level of 1, while humans have a trophic level anywhere between 2 (when we eat vegetables) and 5 (when we eat predator organisms such as tuna or cod, which operate at a trophic level of 4); see Pauly and Maclean, *In a Perfect Ocean*, pp. 47-53.

[212] *Ibid*, p. 63.

these incentives are thus usually immediately beneficial for fishermen, but harmful for the industry and the marine ecosystem in the long-term.[213] Pauly and Maclean summarize this economic theory:

> Under certain circumstances, the introduction of subsidies to an apparently well-managed fishery (in which, perhaps, fishermen's returns were unreasonably low) can give the new owners the incentive to fish in the most profitable manner possible, even if it is destructive, and then move on to greener pastures.[214]

Thus, the best of intentions can have, and has had, the opposite effect from that desired. Additionally, many of the fisheries agencies that have recommended or implemented incentives such as those detailed above have done so using inadequate scientific research, which, it seems, has led to "a misdiagnosis of the ocean and its problems," resulting in "a management regime at odds with biophysical reality."[215]

It is in this morass that the fishermen of the Eastern Seaboard find themselves. It is not of their making, but they stubbornly continue to attempt to make livings from an industry that had been profitable for their fathers and grandfathers. It is a confusing situation for the men and women that work the sea as their ancestors did before them. In her autobiographical book about swordfishing on the Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland, Linda Greenlaw, captain of the *Hannah Boden*, a 100-foot long-liner and sister ship to the ill-fated *Andrea Gail*, the fishing vessel whose tragic story Sebastian Junger detailed in *The Perfect Storm*, passionately states her assertion that the swordfish stocks are healthy and always will be:

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[213] *Ibid*, pp. 66-71.

[214] *Ibid*, p. 71.

[215] *Ibid*, p. 63.

> …the only way to know whether the fish are home or not is to put the gear in the water. I guess that's why what I do is called "fishing." If it was easy, we would refer to it as "catching," and there would be a lot more people doing it. Then, perhaps, there would be reason for the conservationists and swordfish rights activists to advocate putting an end to commercial fishing. Alden [a former captain] once told me that he believed fishermen using only hooks and harpoons could never wipe out any species of fish that reproduce by spawning, such as swordfish. And in seventeen years of swordfishing, I have seen no evidence of depletion.[216]

Greenlaw's assertions are by no means scientific; Sloan would point out that his estimates indicate that fishermen such as Greenlaw lower a total of over half a billion hooks in the Atlantic Ocean every year,[217] but a later point of hers seems to be in agreement regarding many of Sloan's grievances with European and Asian nations' approaches to fishing the Atlantic, when she states that "it is not the American fishermen who should be punished, but perhaps the fishermen from countries that currently have no regulations in place and continually exceed their allowable catch quotas."[218]

At times, Greenlaw provides a romantic view of the fisherman's life (neither does she mince words regarding some of the horrors and dangers of this occupation, however), in her manuscript. She describes a proud, stubborn, hard-working group of men and women who work the seas, and the philosophy that guides the best of them:

> Alden once told me that his father, also a fisherman, told him that anyone who chooses to make fishing his occupation solely for the money is in the wrong business. If no thrill is experienced in catching fish, no satisfaction in going to sea and returning to shore,

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[216] Linda Greenlaw, *The Hungry Ocean* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 1999), pp. 143-44. Print.

[217] Sloan, p, 157.

[218] Greenlaw, p. 145.

> no pride in exclaiming "I am a fisherman," then a life on the water will be unfulfilling, perhaps even unbearable.... I have always maintained that when I no longer feel a thrill, satisfaction, and pride from fishing, I will start a new career.[219]

The struggle that Joel narrates in "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" becomes clearer in the context of Greenlaw's illuminating words and Pauly, Maclean and Sloan's exposition on the state of the North Atlantic fishery. Joel's main character is part of this struggle. It is a struggle not only to make a living in a harsh environment, doing what generations before him did with great success, but also one against declining stocks as the more aggressive fishing nations and larger boats increasingly sweep the seas clean. He knows nothing but the sea and the fish that are becoming more elusive, more difficult to catch, but his pride and his need to support himself and his family will not allow him to stop.

A short history and description of the downeaster Joel sings about will provide some valuable insight. A downeaster is a type of yacht built by Down East Yachts, Inc., between 1974 and 1981. Down East built four models of sailboat ranging in length from thirty-two to forty-five feet long, and available in ketch (two masts, a main and a mizzen), schooner (two or more masts) or cutter (single mast) configurations. These yachts were mainly designed for pleasure use. In addition, however, Down East bought the design for the Defever 40 Passagemaker from Jensen Marine in 1980. Renamed the Downeast 40, this vessel, could be used for recreational or commercial fishing on a small scale. Joel's own downeaster, the "Alexa," is a hybrid lobster/swordfish boat built on a Maine lobster boat hull, a "stick boat", one that is "rigged with a long bowsprit for harpooning."[220] Unlike the 100-foot long-line boats captained by fishermen such as Linda Greenlaw that require a crew of five, these boats were designed to be operated by one or two fishermen, using more traditional methods of fishing, such as harpooning and

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[219] *Ibid*, pp. 248-49.

[220] Timothy K. Smith, "The Piano Man Builds His Dream Boat." *money.cnn.com*. FORTUNE, 20 September 2004. Web. 7 July 2008.

gill-netting. Most of the fishermen working out of the harbours of Long Island use smaller trawler-type boats such as the Downeast 40, as opposed to the long-liners or purse seine vessels that operate out of larger fishing ports such as Gloucester, MA. The narrator in "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" fishes from a boat such as this, hence the solitary feel to the lyrics, which at times give a sense of desperate loneliness.

In the commentary section of the Columbia Music Video DVD release, *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video*, Billy Joel gives, in great detail, an account of the thought process that led to "The Downeaster 'Alexa'":

> "Downeaster 'Alexa'" was my attempt to write a real folk song. I didn't want to just write a politically conscious statement. I wanted to write about people, in a dilemma, in a situation, a traditional working community of people. Which is where most good folk songs come from, whether they be political movements or working class people or, you know, people in trouble. Folk songs get written and endure because the next generation understands the plight, and they understand the feelings, the emotions. And so it was my attempt to write a folk song.[221]

Joel emphasizes two points here that are crucial for writing folk music. First he states that he "didn't want to just write a politically conscious statement," and, further, that he "wanted to write about people;" that is, he realized that in order to write compelling folk music, he had to make a connection with the people that are being most affected by the crisis at hand. Merely showing an awareness of an issue is insufficient; to write folk music, in Joel's mind, one must acquire an intimate knowledge of the issues. One of the reasons that Joel's attempts at socially conscious songs such as "Goodnight Saigon" have been so successful is that Joel inserts himself into the story as an active participant in the drama. "Goodnight Saigon" is not an anti-war song, necessarily; it attempts, rather, to

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[221] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video*.

portray the experience of the war through the eyes of teenaged American boys, thousands of miles from home, fighting a losing battle for reasons that are unclear. "We said we'd all go down together/ yes, we would all go down together": the fact that Joel avoids coming to a conclusion, but instead leaves judgment up to the listener, helps him to create a statement that is more than just "politically conscious." Of course, the language is loaded, making it clear with which side of the issue the listener should agree, but Joel himself retains his objectivity by making himself part of the story. The same is true of "Allentown," "Leningrad" ("Leningrad" even more so, since it is autobiographical; Joel never actually served in Vietnam), and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." For example, in "Goodnight Saigon," Joel sings "We came spastic, like tameless horses/ We left in plastic, as numbered corpses;" in "Allentown" he describes the situation with these words: "But they've taken all the coal from the ground/ And the union people crawled away." These vivid and stark lyrics illuminate the issues without resorting to open criticism, but are loaded in such a way that it would be difficult for a listener to disagree with Joel's standpoint. This is not to say that this first-person narration allows Joel objectivity; rather, he endeavours to provide his listener with his view of the issue or situation, but reserves his own judgment. The second important point that Joel makes in the quotation above is the implication that stories of hardship and sacrifice must not be forgotten and that folk music provides the vehicle for such tales. Folk singers are collectors and recorders of popular history who provide a living chronicle of the struggles of ordinary people in order that future generations will "understand the feelings, the emotions" of the people most intimately involved with the story being told. Joel feels close to this situation and that the story of the Long Island fishermen needs to be told:

> ...the lyric really does tell a story about a people who are in a struggle to keep their livelihood. It's, it's going on right now, in Long Island, well all up and down the East Coast and the Gulf Coast and parts of the West Coast. Commercial fishermen are being

> disenfranchised, put out of business and, um, regulated out of work. It's a sad story, and I think if they disappear, a great spirit in this country is going to disappear.[222]

Joel chronicles this story that is partly his own (he worked on an oyster dredge for nine months when he was a teenager)[223] through both the lyrics and the relationship between the music and the text.

In "Allentown," Joel told the story of the steel industry through a narrative lyric structure that included references to the past, the glory days of the industry in the previous generations, book-ended and divided by images of the present. In this structure, the singer acts as both narrator and participant in the drama. First, he situates himself in the drama through the use of the first person ("Well we're living here in Allentown"), but by the second half of the first verse, Joel reverts to narrating the story ("Well our fathers fought the Second World War"); in this manner, Joel can relate the entirety of this history while maintaining his presence in the present day of the situation. "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" is subtly different. The two songs begin in a similar fashion, with Joel establishing himself as a participant in the drama (including the use of the word "well" to initiate the lyrics, perhaps implying a certain level of informality and creating a personal relationship with his listeners): "Well I'm on the Downeaster Alexa, and I'm cruising through Block Island Sound." (For the full lyrics to this song, see Appendix A) In this instance, however, Joel does not resort to narrative story-telling to get the history of this situation across to the listener; there is no reveling in the glory days of the industry, as there is in "Allentown" ("spent their weekends on the Jersey Shore,/ Met our mothers at the USO,/ Asked them to dance, danced with them slow."). Joel tells this story entirely from a present-day point of view, only venturing into the past when he makes mention of his father ("I was a bayman like my father was before/ Can't make a living as a bayman

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[222] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video*.

[223] Smith, "The Piano Man Builds His Dream Boat."

anymore"). Instead, Joel develops the narrative entirely through an exposition of his own experience, as if he were telling the story to a reporter or chronicler while piloting his boat, or sending a message home to his family.

The first verse begins like a journal entry: "I have charted a course to the Vineyard/ but tonight I am Nantucket bound./ We took on diesel back in Montauk yesterday/ and left this morning from the bell in Gardiner's Bay."[224] The chronicle quickly takes on a sour tone, however. "Like all the locals here I've had to sell my home./ Too proud to leave, I've worked my fingers to the bone." From the first verse, we get a sense of the desperation of this Long Island fisherman; he has had to plot a course that takes him far from home (the Vineyard in question is Martha's Vineyard, an island near the far eastern end of the Outer Lands, southwest of Cape Cod, while Nantucket is east of Martha's Vineyard). What was once a rich fishery is now so desperate that the men who work the seas have to travel "more and more miles from shore every year" in order to find fish, and the markets are so poor that they have to sell their homes in order to support their families. The second verse picks up on the sentiment of the end of the first; in fact, Joel elides the two verses, creating an enjambment by making the first line of the second verse a continuation of the last line of the first ("I worked my fingers to the bone/ So I could own my Downeaster Alexa"), even inserting an internal rhyme in order to maintain and reinforce this continuity (bone/own). In this verse, Joel elaborates on how difficult it has become to find fish and make a living in this traditional manner. The desperation and confusion come into focus: the image of the captain clinging to the wheel, searching futilely for a catch emerges from the lyrics "a good captain can't fall asleep," and "I know there's fish out there, but where, God only knows." Joel's captain is fishing waters with which he is not accustomed, forced to explore unfamiliar waters for

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[224] The liner notes for *Storm Front* indicate that this lyric begins "I have *chartered* a course to the Vineyard," (italics mine), but it sounds like "charted" when Joel sings it, and this word makes more sense in this context than does "chartered."

unfamiliar fish, trying anxiously to find the "giants" that will help him pay his bills and clothe his children. The pride, determination and strength of this man are evident, but it may not be enough. The third verse almost takes the form of a prayer, or a message to fellow fisherman, in which the captain implores anyone that may see him to take a message home to his wife, letting her know that he is alert and working. The reference to "trolling Atlantis" is yet another indication of the desperation that has set in; the fish are so few that he is fishing completely unknown waters in an attempt to find the impossible. There are no lyrics in the second half of this verse, only the fisherman calling out to the seas: "Ya yo, ya yo!", as the seagulls fly around his boat (an effect created through the use of synthesizer).[225] Our protagonist has no more time to talk; he must work the lines or his family will starve.

Until this point in the song the lyrics depicted a narrative that focused on the fisherman's struggles to make a living in the only way that he knows how, at the wheel of his downeaster. The final verse displays a change of perspective, however; the captain's frustrations finally reach a climactic point, and we hear him apportion some blame for the first time. The need to drive "more and more miles from shore every year" is a sentiment that was expressed earlier, and one that fishermen such as Greenlaw reiterate; the good fishing grounds available to northeastern American fishermen lie mainly in the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland, a journey of several days each way.[226] At this point, however, the fisherman sings of some of the other issues that have complicated his once simple

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[225] The use of nonsense syllables may also allude to similar usage in sea shanties, many of which discuss difficulties of life at sea. Musical similarities will be discussed later in this paper.

[226] It must be noted, however, that fishermen using boats such as the Downeast 40 would not be fishing the same grounds as those driving long-liners or purse seine trawlers. The fishing grounds available to a solo boat would be considerably smaller than that of a 100 foot long-liner and closer to shore, mainly because of the reduced cargo hold on a smaller boat and the lack of a crew. Smaller holds mean less food and fresh water on board, thus shorter trips.

life, including increasing regulation of depleted fish stocks ("Since they tell me I can't sell no stripers"[227]) and the transformation of most of Long Island, the ancestral homeland of many Outer Lands fishermen, into summer colonies for the rich and famous ("But there ain't no island left for islanders like me.").

This final verse acts as a sort of epilogue in this tale, following the climactic message that the fisherman sends back to his family. It is his farewell, and the first real expression of pessimism, or, perhaps, cynicism, thus far. Earlier, Joel generally followed up comments of this nature with a statement of determination. For example, Joel balances "Like all the locals here I've had to sell my home" with "Too proud to leave, I worked my fingers to the bone;" "They say these waters aren't what they used to be" is countered by "But I've got people back on land who count on me." There is no such balance in the final verse; every couplet expresses a new statement of loss, defeat and struggle, culminating in the fisherman's feeling that his homeland is changing in a way that will leave him and his colleagues without safe harbour. At this point, the lyrics disintegrate into the call to the sea from the second half of the third verse, but it takes on a new character here. Gone is the sense that the fisherman must continue to work to feed his family; now, the "ya ya ya yo" becomes a grieving wail, grieving over the impending passing of a livelihood, job and culture that is the only one he and his family has ever known. Our protagonist and narrator will lose everything that he holds dear if he cannot find fish, but the sense of his words is that there are no fish to be had, for reasons out of his control.

Of course, the lyrics only tell part of the tale. Again, I turn to Joel's own words for a beginning of this examination of the role the music plays in telling this story and supporting these powerful lyrics:

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[227] The striped bass, or striper, is the state saltwater fish of New York, and is classified as a vulnerable species, and thus subject to protection and regulation in terms of catch.

> It's a different tempo in this song. The accents are on the first beat and the third beat, one and three, rather than the backbeat, which is, in most rock 'n roll, is on two and four. This is on one and three so it's almost like a Celtic tribal beat, where I wanted to capture the feeling of people rowing a boat like the Erin Island fishermen.[228]

In this illuminating quotation, Joel discusses several important elements that indicate a change in musical style for this song. First and foremost is the change of accent from the standard backbeat to the folk-based one and three. The use of the backbeat is one of the defining characteristics of rock 'n roll. From its early appearance in the 1920s in music of New Orleans and its subsequent emphasis in rockabilly, an early form of rock, the term *backbeat* has become synonymous with rock. Harry James and His Orchestra recorded a song called "Back Beat Boogie" in 1939; in 1994, Iain Softley directed a motion picture called *Backbeat*, about the Beatles' time in Hamburg, and there is a Beatles tribute band of the same name; Chuck Berry made specific mention of the backbeat in "Rock and Roll Music" ("It's got a backbeat, you can't lose it"); finally, one of the most respected publishing houses of monographs on popular music is Backbeat Books. As we have seen earlier in this study, although Joel occasionally showed an interest in other musical styles, he was always most comfortable writing rock & roll.

With "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," however, Joel felt a need for authenticity, a need that merited a shift in style from his standard rock & roll method to one that better suited the subject material. On his previous forays into folk song writing, we have seen similar, but less thorough attempts to alter his style. In "The Ballad of Billy the Kid," for example, Joel evokes cowboy songs of the Wild West through the slowly rolling rhythms of the opening, complete with "clip-clopping" horse hoof sounds and a vibrato-filled harmonica solo, but the band's accompaniment after the somewhat campy introduction is all rock: heavy drum riffs, syncopated

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[228] *Billy Joel: Greatest Hits Volume III: The Video.*

rhythms, and the cadential gesture typical of rock 'n roll, one that emphasizes a movement from a chord based on the fourth degree of the scale to the home key. Similarly, Joel's musical treatment of "Allentown" reveals attempts at authenticity for his tale of the plight of steelworkers in Pennsylvania in the 1980s. Again, from the outset, Joel includes sound effects meant to evoke a sense of the subject matter; this time, a whistle indicates the opening of the song, and he makes onomatopoeic vocal sounds (the "csh ooh aah" heard in the fourth full measure of music) while factory sounds can be heard in the background. Joel includes these idiomatic sounds to a much greater extent in this song than in "The Ballad of Billy the Kid," however. They especially reappear whenever Joel sings on a single syllable for an extended period of time ("It's getting very hard to sta--------ay"). Joel also includes an acoustic guitar, which he plays in the video, adding to the sense of Joel as folk singer. The backbeat is ever-present, however; it is even heard in the rhythm of the factory equipment as the song fades out; the ringing of hammer on iron emphasizes and reinforces the snare drum hits on two and four.

In comparison to "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," however, these two songs seem like experiments in authentic-sounding folk music. Joel stated that in this song he "wanted to capture the feeling of people rowing a boat;" this is an apt description for what is one of the defining characteristics of certain varieties folk music: the emphasis on beats one and three. The steady rhythm in work songs such as sea shanties or work songs of the American South was meant to help workers stay in time in repetitive tasks, whether it be picking cotton, hauling lines or securing rigging. This rhythm is often maintained through the use of a percussive instrument or, where none is available, the use of lyrics. For example, in the shanty "Boney," (written in reference to Napoleon Bonaparte) the shanty man (the leader of the shanties) sings a solo line ("Boney was a warrior"), and the rest of the sailors respond, "Away, a-yah!" (or, alternately, "Way, hey, ya!").[229] The

[229] "Boney was a Warrior." *www.napoleonguide*.com. Napoleonic Guide, 1999. Web. 9 August 2008.

sailors would synchronize their efforts on the final syllable of the ensemble lines. Joel immediately sets up a strong one-three rhythm through the use of heavy percussion: toms on one, snare on three. Furthermore, in keeping with the pattern that he established with "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" and "Allentown," Joel uses the instrumental introduction of this song to create a sense of authenticity. The first instrument that we hear at the outset, other than percussion, is an accordion, played by Dominic Cortese, helping to create a maritime feeling. Were Joel following the example that he set earlier in his career, these references to maritime music would suffice for setting the scene, as it were, for the story to come. In this case, however, Joel's efforts at authenticity go beyond the song's introduction.

The first two verses proceed in an orderly fashion, with the near-martial feel of the snare drum reinforcing both the steady rhythm necessary for a work song of the shanty variety and the stubborn, proud nature of the protagonist. The music is almost hypnotic with its military precision, constant accordion and repetitive melody, allowing the listener to focus on the story of the fisherman as he tells of his plight. The interlude in the middle of the third verse interrupts this melancholic narration, however. Here, Joel introduces three new elements that emphasize the folk feeling of this song: the use of the "ya ya yo"s in place of lyrics; a rhapsodic solo fiddle; and synthesized ambient sounds. Each of these new elements serves a different purpose in alluding to the type of folk song Joel endeavours to evoke. I will treat them in the order in which they appear. First, we hear what must be synthesized sounds, created by Jeff Jacobs, as the instrument list for this song does not indicate any other instrument that could generate the otherworldly noises that first indicate that a new and very different section has begun. These sounds could represent the calls of seagulls, which are ever-present around fishing boats as they search for dead fish or discarded catch, or possibly the songs of whales, although I believe that the former is more likely. Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that Joel is attempting to create a greater sense of atmosphere with these sounds. Seagull's calls are often described as

keening, in that they sound similar to the mournful cries of humans in times of loss; they certainly evoke feelings of solitude and gloom, and represent maritime surroundings.

Second, Joel sings the first "ya yo"s of the song, which always land on the first or third beat of the bar, similar to the style of the shanty. These cries are similar to those of the sea gulls, and they certainly evoke similar feelings. What is particularly isolating about these lyrics is what is missing. In a typical sea shanty, the lines that the sailors sing are in response to those provided by the shanty man, the leader of the song. The breaks between each "ya yo" in this section should be filled by the shanty man, providing the story for the shanty. Our protagonist works alone; the missing part of the song completes his isolation. Finally, Joel includes a fiddle solo beginning in the second bar of this interlude that continues until the beginning of the fourth verse.[230] The fiddler plays in an improvisational style, with the more rapid bowing style and occasional double stops that are characteristic of folk music. The near-rhapsodic figurations in this solo emphasize the modal quality of this song (which, for the most part, suggests both C major and A minor through the use of a tone set that includes the notes of both scales), especially when Joel includes a change in key centre from A minor to E minor (suggesting a key of E Aeolian) partway through the solo. The fiddle returns once more at the conclusion of the song, when Joel resorts once more to the "ya yo"s of this section. This use of traditional folk instruments (if we include the accordion from the introduction) aids in creating a more authentic folk sound than that in "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" or "Allentown," and in creating the maritime atmosphere necessary for Joel's intentions. The use of these signifiers is a simple method of suggesting folk music. Music seems generally to rely on 'emergent' musical elements for conveying emotion and sentiment, such as melodic shape, tonality/modality, tempo and dynamics, elements that require closer analysis, which, according to Peter Kivy's 'contour theory,' act as

[230] A note of interest: the performer attributed to this solo is listed only as "World Famous Incognito Violinist."

expressive features that communicate emotion to listeners.[231] In this song, however, Joel moves from an allusive form of communication to one that is more representative by adding elements of authenticity in the instrumentation (accordion, fiddle) and his vocalization (nonsense syllables). Especially in the case of his vocalization, Joel's approach appears more Platonic regarding the relationship between music and emotion; Plato asserted, "melodies have the power to arouse emotions in listeners by imitating or representing the manner in which people express them in their speech and exclamations."[232] This concept implies some level of implicit comprehension on the part of the listener; similarly, songs such as this are less successful if the listener cannot empathize with the narrator: familiarity with the story is necessary for a more complete understanding of the song. The song loses its ability to arouse emotion if the signifiers signify nothing.

Some aspects of Joel's vocal performance contribute to the folk sense created in this song. First, examining the tone set that vocalists use usually helps to define the key area suggested, but a study of the tone set here confuses the matter in terms of regular rock or blues scales. Initially, this song appears to oscillate between the key areas of C major and A minor, since Joel uses the following tone set in the first two lines of lyrics: [ABCDEFG]. At the beginning of the third line of lyrics ("I have charted a course to the Vineyard"), however, Joel adds a high B-flat to the tone set, which might seem to suggest a shift to F major, especially since the B is not "sharpened" until another two measures have passed. Also, a shift to a key that is based on the fourth degree of C major would not be uncommon in a song such as this, since there is a strong relationship between key areas that are a fourth apart in standard rock and blues songs. I believe, however, that this note serves as an expressive gesture rather than a shift in key

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[231] Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 37-40.

[232] *Ibid*, p. 16.

(especially since there is no convincing sense of a key change here). Since it occurs briefly, and only at this point in the song, it appears that this, the highest point in Joel's vocal line, may be meant as a point of emphasis, an emotionally climactic point in the song. We can also view it as an attempt at creating a "folk" feel, since this upper neighbour tone movement is common in folk music. The B-flat is almost an ornament, an improvised note at an important lyrical moment; the fact that Joel performs it in the same manner in each verse does not diminish its emotional effect. In fact, it seems to grow more poignant and desperate every time it appears.

Secondly, as I briefly discussed above, the use of the "ya yo"s in particular give an impression of the sea shanty, albeit in a somewhat abbreviated style (i.e. missing the shantyman lyrics). This is also similar in some respects to the yodel, which is primarily of Swiss Alp fame, but is also common in the music of the American west, and country music. The Swiss yodel was probably first used as a method of communication, but its function changed with its appropriation into American cowboy songs. In songs such as Michael Burton's "Night Rider's Lament," for example, recorded by several artists including Jerry Jeff Walker in 1975, the yodel comes to represent the sense of loneliness and isolation that is part of the cowboy mystique. Instead of acting as a form of communication with other cowboys, the yodel here reinforces the solitary nature of the job. "Night Rider's Lament" tells the tale of a cowboy who has left behind a potential wife and a better income for the life of riding and roping. Burton immediately gives the listener a sense of this solitary and lonely lifestyle from the outset:

> Last night as I was out a-ridin'
> Graveyard shift, midnight 'til dawn,
> The moon was as bright as a readin' light
> For a letter from an old friend back home.

As the song progresses, the narrator learns of how his life could have progressed had he chosen a different life, but he reiterates in the chorus how much he prefers the life of the cowboy, no matter the sacrifices he has had to make:

> But he's never seen the Northern Lights,
> Never seen a hawk on the wing.
> He's never seen spring hit the Great Divide,
> And he's never heard Ol' Camp Cookie sing.

At the conclusion of the song, the singer performs a yodeling solo; it is unclear if this is to represent "Camp Cookie" singing, or if it is the narrator himself, but it makes little difference. The parallels between the lives of these two solitary workers are striking, especially in their representation in song. Both have made sacrifices for their work: the fisherman has little chance to see his wife and family, while the cowboy has no family at all. Both work alone for the most part, but also relish the potential for company. The fisherman in "Alexa" desires to send a message home to his family, while the unnamed cowboy receives a letter from a friend; both work far away from the comforts of home, in the wilds of America. Finally, there is a vocal representation of their isolation at the end of each song; the cowboy has his yodel, the fisherman his wailing cry. Both are too proud of their heritage to give up their profession, but the lament inherent in their song, their unspoken desire for something better, is most evident here.

Joel augments the sense that "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" is a folk song through the video he produced for the song. Shot entirely in black and white, perhaps to add a feeling of history or to wash out the colour from this stark narrative, the video intersperses film of Joel and other members of his band playing music with footage of real Long Island fisherman doing their jobs. This is a common style for Joel's videos; "Allentown," "Goodnight Saigon," "We Didn't Start the Fire" and "Leningrad" all include still photography or video footage of actual events and people, and so it is unsurprising that Joel decided to format the video for "The

Downeaster 'Alexa'" in the same manner. What is unusual, however, is the muted role that Joel plays in the video. Dressed in a hooded sweatshirt and jeans and playing the accordion, Joel is shown either leaning against the posts of a worn pier or sitting inside an old boathouse; his role in the drama is a peripheral one at best. His attire resembles that of the fishermen in the video, and so perhaps he is one of the displaced, one of the locals who had to sell his home in order to support his family. He does not appear to be the objective narrator that he put forward in the video for "Allentown," where he told the story but seemed to have little invested in the tragedy. Here, however, the emotion of this tale is present on Joel's face throughout the video. He either stares off across the water as he plays, watching the others work the seas, or shows his anger and frustration as he sings, "they tell me I can't sell no striper, and there's no luck in swordfishing here." The other members of the band appear in a similar fashion, playing folk instruments (fiddle, acoustic guitar and a large drum, played with a soft mallet) and wearing the attire of the working class (one band member even wears a sou'wester). The video footage shows the brutal conditions in which the fishermen of this tale work: lines snapping taut, ropes breaking, nets being thrown overboard and dragged back onto the boat, waves breaking over the sides, wind and rain pummeling the workers. Additionally, in "Allentown," Joel sings of the glory days of the steel industry and depicted the economic prosperity of earlier generations early in the video; this is not the case for "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." This story takes place entirely in the present, and the video thus has little in the way of optimism or reminiscence. The bleak picture is completed with shots of wives and children waiting on land in houses worn by time and North Atlantic storms and the gravestones of men presumably lost at sea. There is no hope remaining here; Joel's alternately muted and pained expressions betray his close involvement in this story and his waning optimism that the North Atlantic fisheries will return.

Previous to *Storm Front*, Billy Joel's desire to write music of the people, for the people, took form in songs such as "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" and "Allentown,"

but it was not until he tackled a topic with which he was intimately aware, a story that was taking place in his own backyard, that he was able to come closer to his goal of writing a real folk song. With "The Downeaster 'Alexa'," Joel brought together the elements necessary for alluding to a convincing, effective folk song: a relevant story; moving lyrics; an intimate knowledge of the topic; and authentic instruments, music and vocal style. His previous efforts had each contained one or more of these facets of folk music, but they lacked in other areas. This is not to say that "Billy the Kid" and "Allentown" are unsuccessful songs; indeed, the opposite is true. "Allentown" remains one of Joel's most popular songs, and was the highest charting single from *The Nylon Curtain*, while "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" is still a concert favourite, over twenty years after Joel wrote the song. Through comparing "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" to Joel's other efforts at writing music that dealt with historical or factual topics, however, we can see how his understanding of folk music and effective communication of folk themes evolved. He wanted to write a folk song, and at times, "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" sounds like one, and it certainly looks like one in the video; the aural-visual dissonance that exists in the video for "Allentown" is not present here. Regardless of his intentions, "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" succeeds in achieving Joel's original reason for writing the song: illuminating the plight of the Long Island fishermen. He did so by using the aural and visual signifiers of folk music to generate the maritime atmosphere necessary for creating a compelling narrative.

Chapter 8

Joel's Final Albums; Conclusions

In the years following the success of *Storm Front*, an album that garnered him another number 1 record and his third number 1 single ("We Didn't Start the Fire"), two more Grammy nominations, a tour that broke attendance records at several venues including Miami Arena, Target Center in Minneapolis, MN, and Knickerbocker Arena in Albany, NY, and two sold-out concerts at Yankee Stadium on 22 and 23 June 1990, Joel's recording career took a surprising downward turn. He waited four years before releasing his next rock album, 1993's *River of Dreams*, although in the meantime he did loan his talents to projects such as Disney Records' *Simply Mad About the Mouse* (1991), for which he recorded a version of "When You Wish Upon a Star," and two movie soundtracks: *A League of Their Own* and *Honeymoon in Vegas*, both from 1992. During interviews designed to publicize *Storm Front*, Joel began to give hints that he was considering winding up the rock & roll phase of his career. In a 1989 interview for *Newsday*, he stated "You don't necessarily have to be on the cutting edge, or a celebrity, or a rock star to be a musician. This is just one phase of it. Maybe I'll look back and say, this was the blue period. But I intend to be an artist all my life. I don't intend to stop making music just because I'm not a commercial recording artist."[233] The next year, Joel gave further notice that he felt this stage of his career might be coming to a close: "My priorities right now are family, music, then everything else. I need substance in my life. And the world needs substance. The world doesn't need any more *hip* ... The world doesn't need more *cool*, more *clever*. The world needs substantial things."[234]

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[233] Wayne Robins, "Billy Joel Charting a New Course," *Newsday*, 29 October 1989, as cited in Bego, p. 266.

[234] Wall, "On Fire Again," *Rolling Stone*, p. 36.

The years between *Storm Front* and *River of Dreams* also saw Joel settling numerous lawsuits and legal cases regarding his financial issues. Frank Weber, Joel's long-time manager, embezzled millions of dollars from Joel while he managed the songwriter's career from 1980-88. The original lawsuit against Weber included thirty million dollars of misdirected funds and sixty million dollars in punitive charges. As the lawsuit progressed, it became clear that Weber had been systematically funneling Joel's money into high-risk ventures such as "gas and oil tax shelters, real estate partnerships, and horse-breeding farms;" furthermore, Weber funded the development of a hotel in Virginia that went bankrupt, leading to over one million dollars being seized from Joel's accounts.[235] In 1990, Joel was awarded a partial settlement of two million dollars by the New York Supreme Court; a second award of over $600 thousand was handed down on 25 February 1993. In 1992, Joel filed an additional $90 million suit against Allen Grubman, his lawyer from the Frank Weber days, alleging that Grubman's firm had participated in "payoffs, kickbacks and other illegal activities at the expense of Mr. Joel" to ensure Weber's help in attracting other clients from the industry. By the time of the suit, Grubman's clientele included Bruce Springsteen, Madonna, Michael Jackson, MCA Records chairman Al Teller and music recording mogul Tommy Mottola.[236]

As he continued to try to get his finances in order, Joel's personal life began to fall apart. His marriage to Christie Brinkley showed signs of the strain of raising a child (their daughter Alexa Ray) and years on the road, touring for Joel's albums; the two drifted apart in the early 90s, leading to their eventual divorce in 1994. Joel also witnessed the musical landscape change around him. Country music was gaining a greater foothold in North American music sales, with artists such as Alan Jackson, Brooks & Dunn, Shania Twain and Garth Brooks achieving

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[235] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 240.

[236] *Ibid*, pp. 271-2.

crossover success. Additionally, the early 90s saw the popularization of alternative rock, a genre previously relegated to college radio stations and underground clubs (although some alt rock bands such as R.E.M. did find mainstream success in the 80s). Bands such as Nirvana, Soundgarden and Alice in Chains provided a hard-edged alternative to heavy metal, while performers such as Tori Amos, Sinead O'Connor and Toad the Wet Sprocket expressed the philosophical side of alt rock with their challenging and introspective lyrics. It was in this atmosphere of change, both personal and professional, that Joel decided to begin working on his next album. Joel felt the need for a new producer for the album, originally titled *The Shelter Island Sessions*, since Joel recorded the album in his own studio, Boathouse, on Shelter Island. He chose accomplished guitarist Danny Kortchmar to produce the new album. Kortchmar had worked previously with James Taylor, Carole King, Bonnie Raitt and Linda Ronstadt, among others, as a guitarist, and co-wrote Jackson Browne's hit record, "Somebody's Baby." Joel appreciated Kortchmar's approach to production and his talents on the guitar, and so brought him on the new project. Joel also reached out to former band member Richie Cannata for assistance on the album. Cannata agreed to play tenor sax; his distinctive sound is noticeable on "A Minor Variation." He made it very clear to Joel, however, that he was not interested in returning in a touring capacity.

The resulting album, *River of Dreams*, is one of Joel's most self-aware efforts, filled with songs that rekindle his affair with nostalgia (such as the doo-wop tone of the title track) while showing a new philosophical side. The songs about his relationships have a darker tone than usual. "The Great Wall of China" is an impassioned rant against Weber and his illegal activities that cost Joel millions, while he reveals his crumbling marriage to Brinkley and struggles with his personal life in "Blond Over Blue" and "A Minor Variation." He counters this pessimistic tone with the hit single "All About Soul," in which he describes his love for Brinkley in an almost reverential manner: "It's all about soul/ It's all

about faith and a deeper devotion … The woman's got soul/ The power of love and the power of healing." Joel's faith here, which *Rolling Stone* writer Kara Manning translated as "faith in the future, faith in love, faith in hard-earned, if frustrated, wisdom,"[237] comes from a place of deeper thought and seasoned maturity, as opposed to the wild and untamed "faith" from one of Joel's earliest tracks inspired by Brinkley: "Keeping the Faith," from *An Innocent Man*, in which Joel revels in his youth and strutting pride. The other songs from the second half of the album show Joel "diving further into the philosophical abyss of middle age … searching for an answer before time fades away."[238] "Lullabye (Goodnight, My Angel)" is Joel's response to his daughter's sensing the impending breakup of her parents; in this, one of Joel's most emotional tracks, he endeavours to reassure his daughter and provide her with answers to questions he is having difficulty answering himself. The hesitant optimism of "Two Thousand Years," which Greg Sandow called a "driving, anthemic vision of the future,"[239] finds a partner in the redemptive spirituality of "River of Dreams." Joel had examined his own mortality on previous albums, expressing his disillusionment on tracks such as "Summer, Highland Falls" and "This is the Time," but he reveals self-reflecting moments such as these with a much greater sense of perspective and genuine searching on this album.

The sense of melancholy present on *River of Dreams* is unmistakable, and it comes to a head on the final track, "Famous Last Words." Joel struggled with this song; he thought he had finished the album before writing it, but found that the album was incomplete. He and producer Kortchman knew that they needed another song, but Joel had "mentally closed up shop" before realizing that the

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[237] Kara Manning, "Billy Joel: *River of Dreams*," *www.rollingstone.com*. Rolling Stone magazine, 19 August 1993. Web. 7 June 2011.

[238] *Ibid.*

[239] Greg Sandow, "River of Dreams." *www.EW.com*. Entertainment Weekly, 13 August 1993. Web. 7 June 2011.

album did not work; he claimed "I didn't know till the recording was made that this thing couldn't fly. So I had to write another song and it took me weeks and weeks of banging my head against the wall."[240] The result, "Famous Last Words," sounded prophetic at the time; critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine described Joel as sounding "exhausted" by the end of the album, calling the song "a sad close to an otherwise strong career … an unworthy way to depart."[241] Other critics did not read the signs of Joel's imminent retirement from rock music as clearly as Erlewine did. *Entertainment Weekly* called *River of Dreams* "a pensive record that also manages to be irresistible … almost a state of musical grace … the songs rock hard, and his music and singing are … persuasive," and saw "Famous Last Words" as "an untroubled symbol of approaching middle age."[242] At *Rolling Stone*, Manning wrote that Joel seemed to have made a significant discovery with this album, that "inner peace isn't the point – it's the hellish searching for it that is ultimately so compelling,"[243] while giving no sense of recognition that "Famous Last Words" could represent Joel's final effort in the field of rock & roll (to date).

For many critics (excepting Erlewine), *River of Dreams* represented Joel's finest effort at writing a cohesive album with a compelling narrative from beginning to end. *Time* magazine described this storyline as one of "a man on the emotional ledge … he rages at a social landscape scarred by greed, fame-mongering, obsessive love," while later the protagonist "ponders continuity and eternity … he prays that 'we're on the verge of all things new' after 'Two Thousand Years'."[244]

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[240] DeMain, "Billy Joel: Scenes from a Musical Life."

[241] Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "River of Dreams: Billy Joel," allmusic.com. Web. 7 June 2011.

[242] Sandow, "River of Dreams."

[243] Manning, "Billy Joel: River of Dreams."

[244] Corliss, Richard. "The Last Songwriter." *www.time.com*. Time, 30 August 1993. Web. 8 June 2011.

Rolling Stone seemed to put aside their dislike of the artist, asserting that with *River of Dreams*, Joel "abandons his array of confused romantics and smooth hustlers – revealing the stranger behind the mask."[245] *River of Dreams* was Joel's first album to enter the charts at number 1; it eventually sold over five million copies in the United States, was certified platinum in five different countries, and gave Joel another top five hit when "River of Dreams" peaked at number 3 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. The *River of Dreams* tour lasted from September 1993 (with an opening concert in Portland, ME on September 10) to January 1995, including tours of the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan. The first Face to Face tour with Elton John took place in the middle of the *River of Dreams* tour (July to October 1994), with the two star piano players entertaining sold-out crowds across the United States.

Despite the critical, popular and commercial success of the album and the tours, however, Joel was becoming more disillusioned with the rock business. In 1996, Joel was a guest star at the Grammy Awards. The event was broadcast live, and Joel was asked to pay tribute to two great American composers: Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland. Joel, who had always been an appreciator of classical music, was honoured to do so. When it came time for him to make his speech, he claimed to have gotten "choked up to say their names," acknowledging "a great debt to these two great composers."[246] When he watched the broadcast, however, he was disappointed to find that CBS had cut out the speech to make room for commercial time. When asked about the situation, Joel said, "Why would you cut out Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein? People need to hear that. Kids need to hear those names. They decided that they didn't need to be heard. Editing. Always try to have control of the editing. If it's got to be done,

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[245] Manning, "Billy Joel: River of Dreams."

[246] DeMan, "Scenes from a Musical Life."

you might as well do it."[247] Furthermore, Frank Sinatra received the Best Traditional Pop Vocal Performance Grammy during the same ceremony for *Duets II* (produced by Joel's long-time friend Phil Ramone), and CBS also cut his acceptance speech. Joel was even more pointed in his response: "They treat music like a bastard child. It's just for their purpose, they don't care how they cut it. They cut Frank Sinatra off at the Grammys, they had to do a commercial. So the guy was rambling, so what? He's Frank Sinatra, let him ramble."[248]

Joel also suffered some of his most devastating personal losses in the time period following the release of *River of Dreams*. Through most of 1993, Joel and Brinkley progressively began to live separate lives. Brinkley began dating real estate developer Rick Taubman, although she and Joel continued to take care of each other. She was at his bedside when Joel had an attack of kidney stones in February of 1994, and Joel rushed to attend to her after she was in a helicopter accident in April of that year. In August of that year, however, the couple officially announced their intention to divorce; Brinkley immediately married Taubman and revealed that she was pregnant by him; she gave birth to a son in early 1995. Joel was devastated by the loss and sensitive to the part he had played in the breakup of the marriage. Billy Zampino, Joel's road manager during the *River of Dreams* tour, asserted that Joel changed his set list in the early months of 1994 after a local writer claimed that "Movin' Out" was "a slap at Christie," and that he substituted "Shades of Grey," in which Joel's numbing feelings of regret and confusion are evident: "I won't be righteous again, I'm not that sure anymore … There ain't no rainbows shining on me/ Shades of grey are all that I see."[249]

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[247] *Ibid.*

[248] *Ibid.*

[249] White, Timothy. "A Portrait of the Artist," *books.google.com*. Google Books. From *Billboard*, 3 December 1994, p. 15. Web. 13 June 2011.

Joel was dealt a further personal blow when he heard that on August 24, 1995, Doug Stegmeyer, his former bass player, committed suicide by shooting himself with a shotgun in his studio. Stegmeyer had been unceremoniously released from the band after the Soviet tour in 1987. Joel was notorious for firing band members with little or no notice; virtually every member of his core band – Stegmeyer, Javors, Brown, and Cannata – was simply not asked back at some point in the 1980s with little or no explanation (the main exception is DeVitto, who appeared on every album after *Turnstiles*, although he was fired from the touring band in 2004). Joel's lack of tact when it came to replacing band members left a bitter taste in the mouths of the musicians who felt they had been "in on creating the monster that became 'Billy Joel'."[250] According to various musicians who worked with Joel and Stegmeyer, his firing hit the bass player hard. DeVitto stayed close to Stegmeyer in the years between 1987 and his death, and the picture he paints is of a man filled with self-doubt: "He was very bitter about it. You don't get fired, you just don't get asked back for the next tour … And you either accept it, or you go, 'No, no, I think that there's still hope here.' Or, you just can't believe, 'How can I be "done"? I've given this person everything! What did I do wrong?' Doug could never get over that. Never get over that. Never could imagine what he did wrong … It is hard to go from Billy Joel's fame, to like, nothing. Nothing."[251] Stegmeyer reportedly blamed his suicide on Joel in a note he left, writing "It's Billy for being so fucking cheap.").[252] Joel, however, has never spoken publicly about his feelings regarding Stegmeyer's suicide.

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[250] Mark Bego, personal interview with Liberty DeVitto, 1 October 2005, cited in *Billy Joel*, p. 289.

[251] *Ibid*, p. 289.

[252] *Ibid*, p. 298.

After the breakup of his marriage and Stegmeyer's suicide, Joel focused his energies on touring, recording the odd track for tribute or compilation albums, and writing an album of classically-based instrumental music (eventually released as *Fantasies & Delusions* in 2001). Although his tours, both solo and with John, continued to be extremely successful, and his albums continued to sell (virtually every album was certified platinum at least once by 2000), his disillusionment with pop music and the industry continued to intensify. He made his views on the industry known in various interviews. In one particularly vitriolic interview, he made his frustrations with his listeners clear: "I'm translating the music so people can understand what I did. Then I've got to translate it into a video so the *dumbos* can get an idea of what it's all about. I'm a pissed off musician … 'I am the Entertainer?' Well, 'Fuck you!' I don't want to be 'The Entertainer.' Not anymore."[253] Joel toned it down for his induction in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1999, but it was clear that he was in the process of turning his back on popular music. By the time he entered his fifties, Joel began to feel irrelevant, and his usual on-stage antics were taking their toll; the exhaustion that accompanied touring, playing his catalogue to aging audiences around the world, caused a change in his musical focus. He explained his new musical sensibilities, notably using the terminology of art music to describe this new compositional style: "I really feel that now would be a time to try my hand at a different kind of writing. I want to be able to expand on a theme. I want to be able to do expositions. I want to be able to do variations. I don't want to have to repeat a motif over and over again. I don't want to work in song form. I don't want to have to create within that box."[254]

Joel was obviously searching for a legacy at this point, looking for a way to leave his mark on the world in a more positive way than he had to this point. Tiring of

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[253] Robert Doerschuk, "Front Man: Billy Joel," *Musician*, December 1997, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 305.

[254] Demain, "In a New Romantic State of Mind."

his image as the petulant "piano man," tarnished by visits to rehab for his alcohol and drug abuse, Joel turned his attention away from composition (much to the consternation of his record label, Columbia, who resorted to releasing a third volume of *Billy Joel's Greatest Hits* in 1997 and several live compilation records in order to sell more Billy Joel albums) and towards charity work. Such enterprises were not entirely new to Joel; he had been involved with charitable organizations since the early 80s. Rather than putting his energy towards large causes such as No Nukes, however, he found smaller, more specific charities with which to be involved. Joel's first significant charity work arose after the release of *The Nylon Curtain*. In the wake of increased awareness of the problems with the Pennsylvania steel industry after the popularity of "Allentown," Joel performed a concert in December 1982 in Allentown as a benefit for the embattled community. He then gave a concert at Nassau Veteran's Memorial Coliseum on 29 December 1982 that raised $125,000 for a Long Island group called Charity Begins at Home that Joel helped to found. Along with Louise Friedman, a non-profit expert who ran the Rehabilitation Institute in Garden City in the late 70s, Joel established this charity to raise money for a variety of causes in Nassau County, NY, including aiding victims of child abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault; people with autism, cystic fibrosis and brain injuries; and hospices and animal welfare, among others. Joel had been inspired by the charitable work of another New York musician, Harry Chapin. Chapin's own charity, Long Island Cares, is involved with food banks and feeding the hungry in Long Island. Chapin died in a car accident in 1981; subsequently, Joel made Chapin's charity one of the causes under the umbrella of Charity Begins at Home. Joel kept a low profile when it came to his charitable work in the 1980s, but his presence was noted. New York radio personality Ken Dashow described Joel as part of a "troika" of musicians-turned-charity workers:

> Bruce [Springsteen], Billy, [the late] Harry [Chapin] … didn't just do it because a manager said 'Hey why don't you give some money to charity? It'll look good.' No, these guys just read the newspaper, with the newspaper on their left and a checkbook on their right. That's another thing for me that elevates Billy … 'Don't put my

> name on it. Don't do a press release. You need musical instruments? You need something? Here.' Not when it was fashionable. Not when he needed to clean up his image … 99 percent of it you've never seen or heard about what he's done … That's their way of giving back.[255]

In 1999, Joel changed the charter of the organization to include all of the counties of Long Island. Charity Begins at Home now donates hundreds of thousands of dollars to various causes every year, and Joel continues to be involved through donations and benefit concerts, although he does not serve as a director.

Joel's other main contribution to charitable causes in the 1980s came in 1985 when, after the American Music Awards were handed out on 28 January he was invited, along with dozens of other musicians, to participate in recording "We are the World." Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie wrote the song and intended all proceeds made from the sale of the record to aid with Ethiopian famine relief. Jackson, Richie and eventual producer Quincy Jones were inspired to follow the lead of Bob Geldof, who spearheaded "Do They Know It's Christmas," a song written to raise money for the same cause and performed by a group called Band Aid. Comprised of British acts including Phil Collins, Bono, George Michael, Paul McCartney, Duran Duran, Culture Club and many others, "Do They Know It's Christmas" sold over three million copies in Great Britain and led to numerous follow-up versions with newer artists including Band Aid II (1989) and Band Aid 20 (2004).[256] "We are the World," recorded at A&M Recording Studios, featured

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[255] Mark Bego, personal interview with Ken Dashow, 12 December 2005, cited in *Billy Joel*, p. 202.

[256] Later in 1985, Bryan Adams, Jim Vallance and David Foster wrote a song called "Tears are Not Enough" for a Canadian benefit single in the same vein as "Do They Know It's Christmas" and "We are the World." The ensemble that they gathered included Gordon Lightfoot, Burton Cummings, Anne Murray, Corey Hart, Joni Mitchell, Geddy Lee (of Rush), Mike Reno (from Loverboy) and others, and was called Northern Lights. The project raised over three million dollars for Ethiopian famine relief.

leading American artists such as Ray Charles, Bruce Springsteen, Cyndi Lauper, Stevie Wonder, Tina Turner, Bette Midler, Bob Dylan and many others. "We are the World" became the first single to be certified platinum; it has sold over twenty million copies and raised over $60 million for African famine relief. For Joel, "We are the World" was an example of being in the right place at the right time; it was unusual for him to get involved in a global charitable effort such as USA for Africa, the name given to the super-group that sang the single. His other charitable works, especially those with which he has been involved since the release of *Storm Front*, have generally been for smaller organizations or causes that were to which he felt a more personal connection, or those for which Joel felt he could use his pianistic talents.

For example, in May 1991, Joel autographed and auctioned off a Young Chang grand piano; the proceeds supported the "Give Kids the World Foundation," an organization that runs a non-profit theme park in South Florida. Joel chose a way to support the foundation that related directly to his talents, using his reputation as the "Piano Man" to raise money for children with life-threatening illnesses. In 1992, perhaps inspired by the seemingly tireless work that his good friend Elton John had done (and continues to do) for HIV/AIDS research, he performed at a cocktail party as part of a benefit for the AIDS Project Los Angeles, an event at which Barbra Streisand and David Geffen were honoured for their efforts. Joel also donated a grand piano to the State University of New York at Stony Brook after he heard that their piano had been ruined in a flood. In 1998, Joel appeared at a gala performance at Carnegie Hall in support of Sting's Rainforest Foundation that included Elton John, James Taylor and Martha Reeves. Finally, Joel's "Elegy: The Great Peconic," one of the tracks from his instrumental album, *Fantasies and Delusions*, was chosen for inclusion on the album *Music of Hope*, a classical recording whose proceeds supported the American Cancer Society.

The charitable works that have been closest to Joel's heart are those that have arisen directly from his personal experiences, however. He was exposed to the economic hardships of steel workers in Pennsylvania during his time spent playing festivals and university concerts in 1970s. Witnessing the results of the collapse of a major industry such as steel had a profound effect on Joel, so much so that his first socially conscious song, "Allentown," dealt directly with this issue. He subsequently did charitable projects in the Lehigh Valley in order to help relieve the economic pressure from steel workers in cities such as Allentown and Bethlehem. Years later, when Joel moved back to Long Island, he became involved with helping longshoremen and fishermen who were suffering the same plight as steelworkers had in the 70s and 80s. Charity Begins at Home added the Long Island baymen as one of the causes for which they raised money after Joel made their situation known to the organization. At this time, Joel also began giving a series of master classes in colleges around the country. These classes originally consisted of Joel's talking to the audience, telling stories and playing some songs. Since then, however, Joel has taken to using such classes to educate young musicians about the workings of the music industry and how to write music. Having direct contact with young musicians reminded Joel of the importance of education, especially considering his own lack of formal education. He thus starting giving admission fees from classes such as the one held on 31 July 1989 at the Performing Arts Center of Long Island University (Southampton) directly to scholarship funds designed to aid young music students in need.[257] To this end, Joel set up the Billy Joel Endowment Fund in September of 2005, an organization entirely devoted to providing scholarships for university music students. Although Joel did not release exact figures regarding the size of the fund, several schools announced significant donations from the fund within weeks of Joel's making the organization public. By the end of September of that year, New York University-Steinhardt, Syracuse University,

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[257] Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 249.

State University of New York-Purchase, Juilliard School of Music, the New England Conservatory, the Tanglewood Music Centre and the Eastman School of Music all announced gifts of $300,000 from Joel's fund. The gifts helped to create scholarships at these schools, as well as to begin the Billy Joel Student String Quartet at SUNY-Purchase and several programs designed to support music students after their graduation from these institutions. The foundation also donated money to the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2008, which enabled the creation of the Billy Joel Fund for Music Education, designed to "support activities that help break down barriers in bringing City of Philadelphia school children to the Orchestra's School Concerts" and to assist local schools with bringing students to concerts, as well as providing "essential support for collaborative work with music teachers in the school system on a variety of programs and projects, some of which may include developing curricular and extra-curricular programs in the public schools."[258]

Perhaps the most significant event in Joel's life that led directly to his being inspired to give back was the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. Joel was one of the celebrities allowed into the restricted area at Ground Zero after the terrible tragedy. His presence there was noted by Kevin McCarthy, a New York City police detective assigned to the site in the days after the attack: "Billy was very respectful and subdued. He shook hands with several of us officers and was genuinely touched by the tragic site that he witnessed. I was very impressed with his friendliness and his sincere concern for those of us working down there in these crucial days following the tragedy."[259] For Joel, a passionate New Yorker devoted to giving back to the city in which he was raised, the attacks of September 11 were devastating and difficult to process. In an

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[258] Blodgett, Katherine. "The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Announces Details of Billy Joel Fund for Music Education." *www.philorch.org*. The Philadelphia Orchestra, 25 January 2008. Web. 14 June 2011.

[259] Mark Bego, personal interview with Kevin McCarthy, 6 July 2006, cited in *Billy Joel*, p. 316.

interview with Bill DeMain later that year, Joel tried to express his feelings about the event: "I've been actually trying to get my hands around the emotional impact it's had on me. I went down to Ground Zero after that telethon and tried to get a handle on the scope of this thing. It was like being kicked in the stomach … I think it's going to take a while for it to translate into music. I don't even think words are adequate."[260] The telethon to which Joel refers here was *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, a benefit held on 21 September 2001 involving Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Wonder, U2, Neil Young, Alicia Keys and many others; Joel sang "New York State of Mind" for the concert, which raised over $200 million.

In October, Joel participated in another fund-raising effort at Madison Square Garden, a concert called *The Concert for New York City*. Broadcast live on several networks, the show featured Joel prominently. He sang two songs, "New York State of Mind" and "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)," as well as a duet with Elton John, featuring John's hit single "Your Song." In a moment eerily reminiscent of the video for "Goodnight Saigon," during which several Vietnam War veterans sing the chorus, arms around each other in fraternity, a visceral reminder of the actual human cost of war, Joel placed a fireman's helmet on his piano for the performance of "New York State of Mind." Joel explained the helmet and the feeling backstage during the concert: "It was from the Station Two guys – that's a particular fire department in New York that took a pretty bad hit. A lot of their people didn't make it. When I saw that helmet, I said, 'That's got to go on the piano," because that's really who the real heroes were … There was almost a sense of inadequacy among a lot of the performers, as if what we're doing really isn't enough. Everybody wanted to be able to do more, but that was what we could do."[261] Joel did what he could. He sang of his love for the city with "New York State of Mind," then exposed his grief and heartache regarding the events of September 11, memorializing the World

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[260] Demain, "New Romantic State of Mind."

[261] *Ibid.*

Trade Centre with "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway);" truly, he had seen "the Empire State laid low."

Billy Joel has always been a songwriter who translated his personal experiences into song, from "Piano Man" to "The Entertainer," "Summer, Highland Falls" to "All About Soul," "James" to "Scenes from an Italian Restaurant." When it came time to give back to the communities that had given him so much, he relied on some of his experiential music to communicate his passion for the charitable works with which he involved himself; thus, "New York State of Mind" became a signature song for new reasons when he used it to help raise money for the families of firefighters and other rescue workers who had fallen during the attacks of September 11. Most of his music inspired by personal experiences has focused on his work, his life, his loves and his homes, in ways that have allowed his fans, especially those in New York, to identify with him. His focus on his own life did, however, lead him to be regarded as self-indulgent, self-involved and egotistical by many. His antics both on and off the stage and the sense among some critics that he believed his audience was interested in listening to his problems (one critic wrote of *Storm Front* that "when he sings about life with a model in "When in Rome" and "That's Not Her Style," it's time to head for the lifeboats … he's best when he avoids introspection")[262] reinforced this reputation. Nonetheless, Joel had moments when he looked outside himself for inspiration. The six songs that figure prominently in this study represent the instances when Joel looked up from his own life and noticed the world around him, when he wrote about the lives of his listeners and their experiences. These songs arose primarily on two albums (it could be argued that "Miami 2017 (Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)" is Joel's first effort at writing about the world around him, but it is still largely about his own perspective on New York), *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front*, and it is obvious that Joel learned lessons on how to write such material in the intervening years.

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[262] Sean Plottner, review of *Storm Front*, *Us* magazine, 13 November 1989, as cited in Bego, *Billy Joel*, p. 256.

When he wrote "Pressure," Joel intended the song to be about the pressures of songwriting. When it came time to create a video for "Pressure," however, the message changed into one of intense social criticism. Joel was working with a medium that was relatively new to him, and to its viewers; the resulting disconnect between his original intent for the song and the one that comes through when one considers the tone and narrative of the video is jarring and potentially confusing. Regardless, the presence of the video, with its memorably stylized choreography and surreal symbolism, fundamentally changed the meaning of the song. In 1989, Joel, recognizing the importance of social commentary in music, wrote "We Didn't Start the Fire," a thinly-veiled criticism of the state of world affairs and America's part in the Cold War, both politically and culturally. The message for "We Didn't Start the Fire" is more consistent than that of "Pressure," partially because the video that Joel created for "We Didn't Start the Fire" is based directly on the lyrics for song, but also because Joel relied on his own experience not only for writing the song, but also for choosing the images and the narrative for the video. Joel has gone on record saying that the lyrics for "We Didn't Start the Fire" arose directly from a mental exercise that he played with himself to try to remember all of the important people, places, events and cultural signifiers that made up the history of the world through his first forty years. The video then shows the story of the average American family during this time span (1949-89), perhaps depicting the family life that Joel, the product of divorce and poverty, wished he could have had.

The two songs that Joel has written about American industry also arose directly from his experiences. Witnessing the changing economic situation in Pennsylvania through the 1970s inspired him to tell the story of the embattled steelworkers of Pennsylvania and their history with "Allentown." Once again, however, the video for this song from *The Nylon Curtain*, in which Joel appears as a Woodie Guthrie-style narrator, strumming an acoustic guitar in a battered fedora, shows the conflict inherent between the message Joel wanted to send and

the medium in which he told it. The video for "Allentown" has a distinct narrative, showing the glory days of the steel industry giving way to changing fortunes, resulting in the collapse of an industry and a way of life, but Mulcahy's influence is obvious here, from the choreographed dance number during the instrumental section to the camera freeze shots for scene changes. The resulting product contains some of the idioms of a folk song (i.e. Joel's appearance), but Mulcahy's direction caused the video to appear too stylized for a folk song, and the song had too much of a rock & roll edge for the image Joel put forward. In 1989, after Joel moved back to Long Island and he saw the depressed state of the fisheries there, he was first inspired to help through charitable works, then to write a song for his new album. Perhaps inspired by the direct contact he had with the fishermen who worked the waters around Long Island, Joel was able to deliver a more consistent message by altering the medium through which he wrote "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." Rather than writing a rock & roll song on a folk subject and relying on the visual idioms of folk music in the video, as he had with "Allentown," Joel appropriated the *musical* idioms of folk music in the studio. Gone is the back beat rhythm so iconic in rock & roll music, and in its place is the more folk-like emphasis on beats one and three. The instrumentation of "'Alexa'," including fiddle, acoustic guitar and accordion, lends the feel of a sea shanty, and the image Joel creates for himself in the video, dressed in a hooded sweatshirt and jeans, and playing the aforementioned accordion, suggests that he is more of an involved participant in this story than he had been in "Allentown." Then, he had been the dispassionate narrator, telling the story from a distance, but in "The Downeaster 'Alexa'" he is an impassioned member of a displaced community; the rage and frustration is evident on his face in the video for the song, whereas his expression in "Allentown" was primarily one of sympathy.

The final pair of songs perhaps best represents how Joel's experiences with external events inspired him to write songs dealing with said events. With "Goodnight Saigon," the opposite was actually the case. Joel had been reluctant to write music about the Vietnam War since he had not served in the conflict. He

lied to avoid the initial draft, stating that he was the only source of income for his family, and then he barely missed the cut during a draft in 1970 (Joel said that his number was 197 and the draft went to 195). His guilt over not serving was evident in his interview for *Playboy* magazine in 1982: "I'm no less guilty than the guys who went off to Sweden and Canada and went underground as draft dodgers. When amnesty was declared, I felt a pang of relief myself. I'm not particularly proud of it, because I didn't dodge the draft for these political reasons. I just had nothing against the Vietnamese."[263] Joel lost friends in the conflict, an experience that intensified his guilt and led to his reluctance to write a song about something he had never experienced personally. Even while scores of other musicians were writing songs about the war, Joel refrained. It was not until he was approached by a group of veterans, well after the end of the Vietnam War, to write a song about *their* experience that Joel made the decision to write "Goodnight Saigon." Lacking experience himself, Joel did research (by all accounts, one of the first times Joel did research before writing a song) by talking to his veteran friends about life in Southeast Asia; he "picked their brains and asked them what music they listened to, and how they felt," discovering in the process that "the feeling of camaraderie, of only having one another for support, was something they all still share."[264] Joel translated this "feeling of camaraderie" into the lyrics, singing in the first person plural tense, telling the story of all American soldiers through the experiences of a single narrator. The chorus of "Goodnight Saigon," sung by a "ghostly brigade chanting from beyond the grave,"[265] provides the dramatic centrepiece for the song, and remains the most emotionally-charged section of the song, both in the video (made up of still photographs of soldiers and images of conflict, and live footage of Joel singing the song) and in his live performances. The presence of veterans singing the chorus provides a level of authenticity Joel could otherwise not have brought to

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[263] Sheff, "Playboy Interview."

[264] Holden, "Billy Joel on the Dark Side."

[265] *Ibid.*

the song; his reluctance to write on something with which he had no personal experience and his guilt for not serving in the conflict was thus assuaged.

Joel had no such guilt, no such lack of experience when it came time to write on America's other great conflict of his lifetime (to that point), the Cold War.[266] In fact, Joel's personal experiences while visiting the Soviet Union during the *КОНЦЕРТ* tour in 1987 led him to write a song that represented both the American and the Soviet points of view regarding the Cold War. Joel's perspective on America's role in the Cold War softened after he spent time with Viktor, a man close in age to himself who also grew up without a father. His time in Moscow and Leningrad caused a paradigm shift in Joel's thoughts on the Cold War: "Right now we're looking at what could be the beginning of the end of the Cold War," he stated in an interview with Stephen Holden in 1989.[267] This change in attitude is apparent in the manner in which he wrote "Leningrad." He appropriated the idioms of Soviet music for the sections of the song that dealt with the Soviet experience, and even named the song after the city of Viktor's birth. The opening piano solo is reminiscent of the Soviet anthem, and Joel relegates his own history with the conflict to the bridge material; his efforts to privilege Viktor's story are unmistakable. The lessons Joel learned from *The Nylon Curtain* are once again apparent in the video that Joel produced for "Leningrad." He borrowed the idea of using images of conflict that he utilized in the video for "Goodnight Saigon," but expanded it for "Leningrad." The verses about Viktor feature videos of life in Soviet Russia, while the sections about Joel's experience growing up the United States involve videos of children in air raid

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[266] Joel has not remained silent on the wars in which the United States has been involved over the past decade. In 2007, he wrote "Christmas in Fallujah," the proceeds from which went to Homes for Our Troops, a charity designed to build homes for returning veterans who have disabilities arising from injuries received in combat. Originally performed by Cass Dillon (Joel felt that the song should be performed by someone younger than he, in order to be more relevant), Joel has since released a live version of him singing the song, recorded during a concert in Sydney, Australia held 11 December 2008.

[267] Stephen Holden, "The Pop Life/Billy Joel Turns 40." *www.nytimes.com*. The New York Times, 18 October 1989. Web. 16 June 2011.

drills and Americans fighting against Communism in Korea and Vietnam (ironically, Joel makes specific reference to watching his friends "go off to war," creating an indelible connection with "Goodnight Saigon"). Joel's own experiences feature prominently in the final section of the song, when he sings of traveling to the Soviet Union; at this point, the video ceases featuring archival footage, and instead involves video taken for a documentary on the band's travels through the U.S.S.R.

The idea of using personal experiences as inspiration for artistic endeavours is, of course, not unique to Joel, nor is writing songs about war, social issues, the influence of mass media, or poverty and declining industry. The artists from whom Joel claims the most inspiration, such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, all wrote songs such as these, and at varying times during their respective careers. What makes these six songs remarkable, then, is not that they exist, but rather the place that they occupy in Joel's oeuvre, and the role they played in shaping not only the artist into whom he evolved through the 1980s and 90s, but also the citizen of the world that he became through the experiences of creating the songs. It is clear that Joel underwent a fundamental shift in sensibility between *Glass Houses* and *The Nylon Curtain*. The former album represents Joel of the 70s: self-centred and self-absorbed, lashing out at the critics and attempting to reinforce his public bad-boy persona through his music. The latter, while still including songs about his life and his loves, shows Joel looking up from the piano and noticing the world around him, seemingly for the first time. *The Nylon Curtain* reveals a Billy Joel who cares enough to give his opinion about events, trends and people in the world; the declaration that he makes about the state of affairs as he sees them is intensely personal, revealing an ability to be thoughtful, sensitive and compassionate that he had not shown since *Cold Spring Harbor*. The self-examination that often accompanies major life milestones (in this case, his thirtieth birthday), combined with Joel's attempt to reach a specific audience that he felt was under-represented on the charts at the time, resulted in three songs that, when taken into consideration along with their

videos, represent a significant new direction for his songwriting. Joel's listeners and his critics alike recognized that with *The Nylon Curtain* he had produced something new (for him), that he had struck off in a new direction with "Pressure," "Allentown," and "Goodnight Saigon," perhaps not musically, but certainly in terms of content and message. He was certainly influenced by events of the time, from playing concerts in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania to listening to the stories of his friends returned from war; in addition, writing the songs influenced his actions subsequent to the release of *The Nylon Curtain*, including, but not limited to, his involvement in charitable concerts supporting steelworkers in Allentown and his participation in "We are the World."

Songs such as "Allentown" and "Goodnight Saigon" are conspicuously absent on *An Innocent Man* and *The Bridge*; Joel relied on one of his compositional strengths for the former, adopting the musical style of a previous era (in this case, doo-wop), then fell back into his comfort zone for the latter, writing jazz- and blues-influenced autobiographical rock songs that are at times reminiscent of better days, at times tinged with the melancholy that accompanies regret. His attitude towards songwriting was undoubtedly affected by his trip to the Soviet Union for the *КОНЦЕРТ* tour in 1987 and his move to Long Island in 1988, however, and caused another shift in perspective leading to *Storm Front* in 1989. Approaching his fortieth birthday, Joel felt wiser than he had been before *The Nylon Curtain*, having gained some better perspective on how to interpret what was important to him and to his audience. When he spoke to Stephen Holden in 1989, he talked about how turning forty felt different than thirty: "Turning thirty was a trauma, but forty wasn't bad at all. At forty, you may have to take a little more inventory, but you tend to deal with things a little more calmly. And you know that you don't have the corner on wisdom at any age."[268] The songs from *Storm Front* included in this study are proof of the newfound wisdom and sense of calm contemplation that Joel alluded to in his conversation with Holden. His

[268] Holden, "Billy Joel Turns 40."

choices for "We Didn't Start the Fire" indicate his attempt to use this newfound perspective to make sense of the events that had shaped his life thus far. Joel assuaged his guilt about "the whole Vietnam syndrome" by writing a song about the Cold War, a war with which he was intimately aware, most acutely after getting to know Viktor and seeing behind the Iron Curtain. Finally, the experience of returning home to Long Island, seeing the struggles of the fishermen there through new eyes, and his subsequent involvement in charitable works to help them in their plight inspired Joel to expose the situation to his listeners with "The Downeaster 'Alexa'." Not content to write a mere rock & roll song about the situation, however, as he had with "Allentown," Joel strove to find an authentic voice to tell the story; hence his attempts to write a folk song.

The reasons that Joel stopped writing pop music after *River of Dreams* are fairly clear. His frustrations with the music industry are well-documented, he was wary of making a fool of himself on stage by touring too long (although he has come out of retirement for numerous tours over the past ten years, Joel maintains that he is now finished touring, having said "farewell" to Shea Stadium on 18 July 2008), and his personal life had been tumultuous since his breakup with Brinkley, leading him to want to spend more time with his family. Regardless of his reasons, barring a future album release, *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front* remain unique in Joel's catalogue because of the songs discussed here, and exist as partners to each other, parallel albums in an extensive oeuvre throughout which Joel worked tirelessly not to repeat himself. The roles he played in these three pairs of songs are roles he did not play beforehand, and would not play again afterwards: the sociologist ("Pressure" and "We Didn't Start the Fire"); the balladeer ("Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa'"); and the war correspondent ("Goodnight Saigon" and "Leningrad"). What becomes clear in a study of these songs and their relationship to each other within their pairs, and within their respective albums, is not only Joel's evolution as a songwriter, but his evolution as a person. His personal growth, evidenced by his need to give

back through charitable work, inspired him to write songs about the world he lived in rather than his own place in the world, but the opposite is also true: his growth as a musician and the awareness he gained through writing about others undoubtedly led to his need to give something back. The Piano Man's legacy cannot, therefore, only be measured by platinum albums and record-setting tours; for many, he will be remembered for giving a voice to those who had none of their own, for making known stories that previously had not been told, and for finding his own critical voice in the process.

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Appendix A: Lyrics (all by Billy Joel)

"Pressure"

You have to learn to pace yourself
Pressure
You're just like everybody else
Pressure
You've only had to run so far, so good
But you will come to a place
Where the only thing you feel are loaded guns in your face
And you'll have to deal with pressure.
You used to call me paranoid
Pressure
But even you cannot avoid
Pressure
You turned the tap dance into your crusade
Now here you are with your faith
And your Peter Pan advice
You have no scars on your face
And you cannot handle pressure
All grown up and no place to go
Psych 1, Psych 2, what do you know?
All your life is Channel 13,
Sesame Street, what does it mean?
Pressure
Pressure

"We Didn't Start the Fire"

1949	Harry Truman, Doris Day, Red China, Johnny Ray
	South Pacific, Walter Winchell, Joe DiMaggio
1950	Joe McCarthy, Richard Nixon, Studebaker, television
	North Korea, South Korea, Marilyn Monroe
1951	Rosenbergs, H-Bomb, Sugar Ray, Panmunjom
	Brando, *The King and I*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*
1952	Eisenhower, vaccine, England's got a new Queen
	Marciano, Liberace, Santayana goodbye
Chorus	We didn't start the fire
	It was always burning since the world's been turning
	We didn't start the fire
	No we didn't light it but we tried to fight it
1953	Joseph Stalin, Malenkov, Nasser and Prokofiev
	Rockefeller, Campanella, Communist Bloc
1954	Roy Cohn, Juan Peron, Toscanini, Dacron
	Dien Bien Phu falls, "Rock Around the Clock"
1955	Einstein, James Dean, Brooklyn's got a winning team
	Davy Crockett, Peter Pan, Elvis Presley, Disneyland
1956	Bardot, Budapest, Alabama, Krushchev
	Princess Grace, *Peyton Place*, trouble in the Suez
Chorus	
1957	Little Rock, Pasternak, Mickey Mantle, Kerouac
	Sputnik, Chou En-Lai, *Bridge on the River Kwai*
1958	Lebanon, Charles de Gaulle, California baseball
	Starkweather homicide, children of thalidomide
1959	Buddy Holly, *Ben-Hur*, space monkey, mafia
	Hula hoops, Castro, Edsel is a no-go
1960	U-2, Syngman Rhee, payola and Kennedy
	Chubby Checker, *Psycho*, Belgians in the Congo
Chorus	
1961	Hemingway, Eichmann, *Stranger in a Strange Land*
	Dylan, Berlin, Bay of Pigs invasion
1962	*Lawrence of Arabia*, British Beatlemania
	Ole Miss, John Glenn, Liston beats Patterson
1963	Pope Paul, Malcolm X, British politician sex
	JFK blown away, what else do I have to say?
Chorus	
1964-89	Birth control, Ho Chi Minh, Richard Nixon back again
	Moon shot, Woodstock, Watergate, punk rock
	Begin, Reagan, Palestine, terror on the airline
	Ayatollah's in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan
	Wheel of Fortune, Sally Ride, heavy metal suicide
	Foreign debts, homeless vets, AIDS, crack, Bernie Goetz
	Hypodermics on the shore, China's under martial law
	Rock and Roller Cola Wars, I can't take it anymore!
Chorus	

“Goodnight Saigon”
We met as soulmates on Parris Island
We left as inmates from an asylum
And we were sharp, as sharp as knives
And we were so gung ho to lay down our lives.

We came in spastic like tameless horses
We left in plastic as numbered corpses
And we learned fast to travel light
Our arms were heavy but our bellies were tight

We had no home front, we had no soft soap
They sent us Playboy, they gave us Bob Hope
We dug in deep and shot on sight
And prayed to Jesus Christ with all of our might.

We had no cameras to shoot the landscape
We passed the hash pipes and played our Doors tapes
And it was dark, so dark at night

And we held onto each other, like brother to brother
We promised our mothers we’d write.
And we would all go down together.
We said we’d all go down together
Yes we would all go down together.

Remember Charlie, remember Baker
They left their childhood on every acre
And who was wrong? And who was right?
It didn’t matter in the thick of the fight.

We held the day in the palm of our hand.
They ruled the night and the night seemed to last as long as
Six weeks on Parris Island
We held the coastline, they held the highlands
And they were sharp, as sharp as knives

They heard the hum of our motors
They counted the rotors
And waited for us to arrive.
And we would all go down together.
We said we’d all go down together
Yes we would all go down together.

“Leningrad”

Viktor was born in the spring of ’44
And never saw his father anymore
A child of sacrifice, a child of war
Another son who never had a father after Leningrad.

Went off to school and learned to serve the state
Followed the rules and drank his vodka straight
The only way to live was drown the hate
A Russia life was very sad
And such was life in Leningrad

I was born in ’49
A cold war kid in McCarthy time
Stop ’em at the 38th Parallel
Blast those yellow reds to hell
And Cold War kids were hard to kill
Under their desks in an air raid drill
Haven’t they heard we won the war
What do they keep on fighting for?

Viktor was sent to some Red Army town
Served out his time, became a circus clown
The greatest happiness he’d ever found
Was making Russian children glad
And children lived in Leningrad

But children lived in Levittown
And hid in the shelters underground
Until the Soviets turned their ships around
And tore the Cuban missiles down
And in that bright October sun
We knew our childhood days were done
And I watched my friends go off to war
What do they keep on fighting for?

And so my child and I came to this place
To meet him eye to eye and face to face
He made my daughter laugh, then we embraced
We never knew the friends we had
Until we came to Leningrad

“Allentown”

Well we’re living here in Allentown
And they’re closing all the factories down
Out in Bethlehem they’re killing time
Filling out forms, standing in line.

Well our fathers fought the Second World War
Spent their weekends on the Jersey Shore
Met our mothers in the USO
Asked them to dance, danced with them slow
And we’re living here in Allentown.

But the restlessness was handed down
And it’s getting very hard to stay.

Well we’re waiting here in Allentown
For the Pennsylvania we never found
For the promises our teachers gave
If we worked hard, if we behaved.

So the graduations hang on the wall
But they never really helped us at all
No they never taught us what was real
Iron and coke, chromium steel.
And we’re waiting here in Allentown.

But they’ve taken all the coal from the ground
And the union people crawled away.

Every child had a pretty good shot
To get at least as far as their old man got.
Something happened on the way to that place.
They threw an American flag in our face, oh oh oh.

Well I’m living here in Allentown
And it’s hard to keep a good man down
But I won’t be getting up today.

And it’s getting very hard to stay.
And we’re living here in Allentown.

“The Downeaster ‘Alexa’”

Well I’m on the Downeaster Alexa,
And I’m cruising through Block Island Sound.
I have charted a course to the Vineyard.
But tonight I am Nantucket bound.
We took on diesel back in Montauk yesterday,
And left this morning from the bell in Gardiner’s Bay.
Like all the locals here I’ve had to sell my home,
Too proud to leave. I worked my fingers to the bone

So I could own my Downeaster Alexa,
And I go where the ocean is deep.
There are giants out there in the canyons.
And a good captain can’t fall asleep.
I got bills to pay and children who need clothes.
I know there’s fish out there, but where, God only knows.
They say these waters aren’t what they used to be.
But I’ve got people back on land who count on me.

So if you see my Downeaster Alexa,
And if you work with the rod and the reel,
Tell my wife I am trolling Atlantis,
And I still have my hands on the wheel.
Ya yo, ya yo
Ya yo, ya ya yo

Now I drive my Downeaster Alexa,
More and more miles from shore every year,
Since they told me I can’t sell no stripers.
And there’s no luck in swordfishing here.
I was a bayman like my father was before.
Can’t make a living as a bayman anymore.
There ain’t much future for a man who works the sea.
But there ain’t no island left for islanders like me.

Ya ya ya yo,
Ya ya ya yo
Ya ya ya yo
Ya ya ya yo.

Appendix B: Billy Joel Albums (Domestic)

1971	*Cold Spring Harbor*	Family
1973	*Piano Man*	Columbia
1974	*Streetlife Serenade*	Columbia
1976	*Turnstiles*	Columbia
1977	*The Stranger*	Columbia
1978	*52nd Street*	Columbia
1980	*Glass Houses*	Columbia
1981	*Songs in the Attic* (Live)	Columbia
1982	*The Nylon Curtain*	Columbia
1983	*An Innocent Man*	Columbia
1985	*Greatest Hits Volume I and II*	Columbia
1986	*The Bridge*	Columbia
1987	*КОНЦЕРТ* (Live)	Columbia
1989	*Storm Front*	Columbia
1993	*River of Dreams*	Sony Columbia
1997	*Greatest Hits Volume III*	Columbia
1997	*1973-1997: The Complete Hits*	Columbia
2000	*2000 Years*	Columbia
2001	*Fantasies & Delusions*	Columbia
2001	*The Essential Billy Joel*	Columbia
2004	*Piano Man: The Very Best of Billy Joel*	Sony
2005	*My Lives*	Columbia Legacy
2006	*12 Gardens Live*	Columbia

Appendix C: Track Listings, *The Nylon Curtain* and *Storm Front*

The Nylon Curtain

Side A	Side B
“Allentown”	“She’s Right on Time”
“Laura”	“A Room of Our Own”
“Pressure”	“Surprises”
“Goodnight Saigon”	“Scandinavian Skies”
	“Where’s the Orchestra?”

Storm Front

Side A	Side B
“That’s Not Her Style”	“Storm Front”
“We Didn’t Start the Fire”	“Leningrad”
“The Downeaster ‘Alexa’”	“State of Grace”
“I Go to Extremes”	“When in Rome”
“Shameless”	“And So it Goes”

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Ph.D. University of Western Ontario (Musicology)
Dissertation: *The Other Sides of Billy Joel: Six Case Studies Revealing the Sociologist, the Balladeer and the Historian*
Advisor: Dr. James Grier

M.A. University of Victoria, 2002 (Musicology and Vocal Performance)
Thesis: *The* Old American Songs *and Aaron Copland's Place in the American Folk Tradition*
Advisor: Dr. Gordana Lazarevich

B. A. Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec, 1999 (Music History, Vocal Performance)

Teaching Experience

Kyiv International School
Music Teacher, 2010 - present

University of Windsor, School of Music
Instructor, 2009
Selected Topics in 19th Century Music
Opera in Europe, 1800-1900

University of Western Ontario, Don Wright Faculty of Music
Instructor, 2008
Music History, c. 1800 to the present
Required course of all second-year music majors

University of Western Ontario, Don Wright Faculty of Music, 2004-2007
Teaching Assistant
Music History Surveys, Medieval to present (required course for all music majors)
Introduction to Music (non-major course)

University of Victoria, Faculty of Music, 1999-2002
Teaching Assistant

Introduction to Music History (non-major course)
Rudiments of Music Theory (required course of all first-year undergraduate students)

Conference Papers

"'Goodnight Saigon': The Ultimate Pop Music to Epitaph to the Vietnam War?" CMS Great Lakes Chapter Meeting, Muncie, IN, March 19-20, 2010.

"A New Role for the Piano Man: Billy Joel as Balladeer in 'Allentown' and 'The Downeaster Alexa'," **C**MS Great Lakes Chapter Meeting, Mt. Pleasant, MI, March 28, 2009, and UWO Graduate Student Symposium, London, ON, May 8-9, 2009.

Professional Activities

- Membership, American Musicological Society, 2007 - 2010
- Membership, College Music Society, 2008 - 2010
- Guest lecturer, Orchestra London Lunch & Learn Series, 2008 - 2010
    - Lecture topics have included "King of Instruments: Organ Works by Poulenc & Saint-Saëns" (November 19, 2008) and "Seas of Emotion: Works by Elgar and Vaughan Williams" (January 14, 2009)
- Executive Member, Society of Graduate Students in Music, University of Western Ontario (Awards & Honours), 2007-08
- Session Chair ("Early 20th Century Music"), University of Western Ontario Graduate Student Symposium, 2008
- Senator, Humanities Division, Bishop's University Senate, 1998-9