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# Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan And The 1960s



## Synopsis

Bob Dylan's abrupt abandonment of overtly political songwriting in the mid-1960s caused an uproar among critics and fans. In *Wicked Messenger*, acclaimed cultural-political commentator Mike Marqusee advances the new thesis that Dylan did not drop politics from his songs but changed the manner of his critique to address the changing political and cultural climate and, more importantly, his own evolving aesthetic. *Wicked Messenger* is also a riveting political history of the United States in the 1960s. Tracing the development of the decade's political and cultural dissent movements, Marqusee shows how their twists and turns were anticipated in the poetic aesthetic of anarchic, unaccountable, contradictory, punk of Dylan's mid-sixties albums, as well as in his recent artistic ventures in *Chronicles, Vol. I* and *Masked and Anonymous*. Dylan's anguished, self-obsessed, prickly artistic evolution, Marqusee asserts, was a deeply creative response to a deeply disturbing situation. "He can no longer tell the story straight," Marqusee concludes, "because any story told straight is a false one."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

MIKE MARQUEE is the author of a number of groundbreaking books on politics and popular culture, including *Anyone But England*, *War Minus the Shooting*, and *Redemption Song*. Born and raised in the United States, he has lived in London since the 1970s.

I came across WICKED MESSENGER in director Todd Haynes commentary for his film I'M NOT

THERE. Since I seem to be one of the few people who enjoyed Haynes's take on Dylan's ever-changing persona, I decided to give the book a go. In WM, author Mike Marqusee skips the gossip and places Dylan within the historical context of the 60s and the decades before. BTW: This is not a "leftist" screed - unless recounting history is the domain of the Left. In any case, among its many virtues, WM examines the question of "authenticity" (versus hype), one of my longtime considerations. Since first hearing the FREEWHEELIN' album in 1963, and seeing Dylan in concert the same year, I've long thought that the burden of being "the spokesman of his generation" was an unfair and unrealistic burden. Perhaps Dylan's real importance is that he prompted us to think more deeply, more artfully, more poetically. Thinking people did not require him - or anyone - to be the voice of our generation; we employed our own voices - speaking from our minds and hearts. Another plus in WM is the great Bibliography, which I've already begun reading through; first up, John Lewis's extraordinary memoir, WALKING WITH THE WIND.

I bought this for a project I'm doing on Bob Dylan. It combines historical information, Dylan's own quotes and explanations about his songs and other interpretations and reactions to his music at different stages. A good picture of the conflict between his influence on the protest movements and his denial of his role or responsibility as an activist.

Astute, honest and insightful take on turbulent and trying times. Love the Shelley, Blake and Thoreau quotes...Dylan's forebears, ever present in our Bard's lyrics.

This book is very interesting!!!! It provides a wonderful background of the period of time that influenced Bob Dylan's life and music. The book describes the history behind his songs and the history of what was going on in America during that era. It was more than I expected and I could hardly put the book down.

I purchased this book without knowing that the author's focus was at least as much on politics as Bob Dylan. I thought I was buying a Dylan biography but was greatly disappointed. In case others may be misled by the packaging please know that the author is so devoted to adulation of socialist/communist/left wing politics that Bob Dylan the person, songwriter, musician and performer is definitely secondary. Although the book was reasonably well-written and appears to have been researched the author's unwavering obsession with politics and his overt political bias is quite annoying. If you are a political partisan you might like the book. If you think you are buying a

biography of Bob Dylan you may be disappointed.

This book is arresting in its intelligence and exceptional prose. It is a must-read book about Dylan's political development. Marqusee is a careful listener and has grasped the zeitgeist of the age. Marqusee clearly sympathizes with Dylan's use of song as a political weapon, and he explains with great zeal and fervor how Dylan wielded that weapon. I think he misses an emerging spiritual consciousness in Dylan's songs, though, by the exclusive focus on the politics. Still, anyone who wishes to understand the political world in which Dylan sang should read this book for its keen insights and unfailingly precise language.--Lawrence J. Epstein, author of *Political Folk Music in America from Its Origins to Bob Dylan*

Have you ever wondered where Bob Dylan got some of his inspiration? Have you ever wondered what went on behind the scenes when the politically active youth culture was born in the 60's? Starting with stories about Bob's relationships with the "Dust Bowl Balladeers" and wandering along with the concert tours and digging deep into the history of SNCC (Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), and everywhere else that was relevant this book masterfully chronicles the connection between the songs and times of the 60's and beyond. The reader is treated to a deep view of what was going on as many of Bob's most beloved songs were written. You are given a clear picture of why Bob was such an honest and faithful reflection of our times and has become America's favorite balladeer. I have to say that I think the title is unfortunate, there is nothing "Wicked" about this messenger. The things he protests are outrageous things and he finds exactly the right words and the courage to sing them out with songs that can not be ignored. He also has made some of the most touching and romantic love songs that I have ever heard. I'm very glad to have been able to see some of the background behind his inspiration. Finally, I understand why Bob was not at Woodstock, why he "went electric", what went on during the London tours, who was the "girl on that album cover", and many other things. This is clearly a fascinating book that has helped me to better understand the times that I lived through even better.

*Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan And The 1960s* represents a revised, expanded edition of the 2003 hardcover *Chimes Of Freedom*, and is a recommended pick for Dylan fans and especially newcomers who missed *Chimes* and here will enjoy the benefit of a new chapter on his 2004 memoir and his 2003 film. *Wicked Messenger* shows that Dylan didn't turn away from his famous

political music but instead changed the style of his message to address changing politics. In providing a concurrent social survey of the atmosphere of the U.S. during the 1960s, Wicked Messenger draws some important connections between Dylan's musical approach, its message, and how and why it affected his times.

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