According to Dylan, the song was inspired by the construction of [fallout shelters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fallout_shelter), a widespread practice in the U.S. during the [cold war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_war) political climate of the 1950s when he was growing up.

In 1963, Dylan gave this account of how he came to write "Let Me Die in My Footsteps" to [critic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critic) [Nat Hentoff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nat_Hentoff), who wrote the [liner notes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liner_notes) for *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*:

"I was going through some town and they were making this [bomb shelter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bomb_shelter) right outside of town, one of these sort of [Coliseum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coliseum)-type things and there were construction workers and everything. I was there for about an hour, just looking at them build, and I just wrote the song in my head back then, but I carried it with me for two years until I finally wrote it down. As I watched them building, it struck me sort of funny that they would concentrate so much on digging a hole underground when there were so many other things they should do in life. If nothing else, they could look at the sky, and walk around and live a little bit, instead of doing this immoral thing."

**Lyrics:**

I will not go down under the ground  
’Cause somebody tells me that death’s comin’ ’round  
An’ I will not carry myself down to die  
When I go to my grave my head will be high  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

There’s been rumors of war and wars that have been  
The meaning of life has been lost in the wind  
And some people thinkin’ that the end is close by  
’Stead of learnin’ to live they are learnin’ to die  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

I don’t know if I’m smart but I think I can see  
When someone is pullin’ the wool over me  
And if this war comes and death’s all around  
Let me die on this land ’fore I die underground  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

There’s always been people that have to cause fear  
They’ve been talking of the war now for many long years  
I have read all their statements and I’ve not said a word  
But now Lawd God, let my poor voice be heard  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

If I had rubies and riches and crowns  
I’d buy the whole world and change things around  
I’d throw all the guns and the tanks in the sea  
For they are mistakes of a past history  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

Let me drink from the waters where the mountain streams flood  
Let the smell of wildflowers flow free through my blood  
Let me sleep in your meadows with the green grassy leaves  
Let me walk down the highway with my brother in peace  
Let me die in my footsteps  
Before I go down under the ground

Go out in your country where the land meets the sun  
See the craters and the canyons where the waterfalls run  
Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho  
Let every state in this union seep down deep in your souls  
And you’ll die in your footsteps  
Before you go down under the ground

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**Questions/ Task:**

Read the lyrics of this song and answer the following questions:

1. What images of American does Dylan create in the song? What stands out to you the most?
2. How does Dylan portray the Cold War?

Now listen to the song and follow along with the lyrics. When the song is over answer the following question:

1. How did the music impact the meaning of the lyrics?
2. Do you think the music ‘fit’ the topic/ lyrics of the song? Why or why not?