



“Twist and Shout”: Class, Culture and the Beatles in Post-War Britain

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Clap Your Hands... Rattle Your Jewelry

As the curtains were drawn at the Royal Command Variety Performance on November 4, 1963, the audience at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London was filled with a crowd of glamour and importance.¹ From tuxedoed businessmen to the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, the audience abounded with the most notable and elite of the British Establishment. The show itself traced its roots to the reign of Queen Victoria and often featured the most popular celebrities and performers of Britain and the world. This year the nineteen-act show included German actress Marlene Dietrich and British comedian Eric Sykes. While the performers rehearsed, five hundred police assembled outside the theatre. The police were not there to keep the small crowd of star gazers and royal enthusiasts in order. These police gathered to manage the thousands of screaming teenage girls who came to catch a glimpse of the Beatles before they entered the theatre to perform at the show.²

Just one year earlier the Beatles were barely known. However, the reception by the fans outside the Royal Variety attested to the growing fame of the foursome: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. While the band's popularity among British teenagers was indisputable, the Beatles—who were voraciously promoted by the press for their provincial and “working-class” backgrounds—were to gain approval and recognition from the British Establishment.

The Beatles' performance before a royal audience this night demonstrated their ability to overcome notions of class division. John's introduction of their final song, a song by the Isley Brothers called “Twist and Shout,” mockingly acknowledged this capacity. As John

¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63* (London: Abacus, 2005), 717-718.

² Philip Norman, *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation* (1981; rev. and updated from 2003 ed. by Sidgwick and Jackson, New York: Fireside, 2005), 219-220.

lightheartedly directed the audience to participate in the song, he exclaimed, “Will people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? All the rest of you, if you’ll just rattle your jewelry.”³ The crowd roared with laughter at the humorous request and the Beatles vigorously played the song.⁴ The British press reported the following day that the Queen Mother particularly enjoyed the Beatles’ performance of “Twist and Shout,” and with this “Beatlemania” arrived.⁵

In the years following the Second World War and leading up to November 1963, Britain experienced a period of immense cultural and social transformation. The Americanization of British politics and culture intensified. Critiques and attacks on the ruling Establishment became more vocal. Developments within the class system changed people’s attitude of what “class” meant. British youths began looking at lifestyle, music and culture differently, as a teenage market developed.

The emergence of the Beatles in the early 1960s and the ideas which they came to symbolize represented these post-war transformations. Thus, the Beatles were bestowed different images to correspond with these changes. The group acted as a medium for what various groups and individuals felt the band represented. The Beatles’ management, the British press and various media went to great lengths to create their own imagery for the group. The different depictions of the Beatles helped create a dichotomous world in which the band inhabited within the British popular imagination.

The initial reaction by the band’s management and the nation’s press produced a popular and marketable image of the Beatles—one which embodied “working-class,” provincial (Liverpool) and anti-Establishment values. This image altered as the success of the Beatles in

³ Ibid., 221.

⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 718.

⁵ Norman, *Shout!*, 221.

1963 attracted the attention and eventual acceptance of the aristocratic Establishment. Moreover, the group's image was heavily influenced by the impact of egalitarian idealism inherent in jazz and pop music imported from America. These factors helped reshape the image people held of the band. Consequently, by the release of the film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) the Beatles came to symbolize the transcendence of class within British society.

While the Beatles rose to prominence, some saw the group contributing to another transformation occurring during the 1960s. During this period London went from representing the old Victorian and Edwardian values of a fading British Empire to the "Swinging City," a city of classlessness and hedonistic youth. The people of this "Swinging London" and the press that chronicled their stories painted an egalitarian façade for what the Swinging City represented. As a result, Swinging London was depicted as a city of classlessness. The Beatles with their imagery became key figures in inventing and perpetuating the image of the capital's zeitgeist during the 1960s.

Conversely, the image of classlessness surrounding the Beatles and Swinging London was criticized as being a false portrayal of reality. John Lennon expressed this critique best in 1970. Of Swinging London and its ideals, Lennon explained, "Everyone dressed up, but nothing changed."⁶ As recognized when the decade came to a close, the spirit of 1960s London and the ideals of its Swinging City—like the Beatles imagery of classlessness itself—were mere illusions.

Transformations in Post-War Britain 1945-1963

To begin an examination of the Beatles, the stage must be set to understand the band within its historical context. The Beatles grew up during the post-war period and the political,

⁶ John Lennon in *Rolling Stone* (1970), quoted in Juliet Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles* (London: Collins and Brown, 1999), 150, 157n54.

social and cultural changes of the period had significant affects on the members and the ideas they came to represent. Thus, an understanding of Americanization, the Establishment and working-class affluence and youths is essential.

Post-war Britain was dominated by the Americanization of politics and popular culture. From military and economic dominance to the onslaught of mass popular culture, various aspects of Americanization were major forces of political and cultural change in British society during the 1950s and 1960s.

After the Second World War, Britain found a new “‘Special Relationship’ with the United States.”⁷ Both America and the Soviet Union took the reins of world supremacy away from Great Britain. Therefore, during the post-war period Britain was reliant on American military and economic strength.⁸ The Marshall Plan helped fund the rebuilding of Europe after the war, and it kept Western Europe and Britain under the American sphere of influence.⁹

In 1944, future Prime Minister Harold Macmillan likened the British relationship with the United States to that of the ancient Greek city-states dominated by the Romans. He explained, “We... are Greeks in this American empire. You will find the American much as the Greeks found the Romans—great, big, vulgar, bustling people.”¹⁰ Some in Britain resented this “American empire” and the new role the United States played in British politics and society. Resistance to the United States derived partly from its direct military and economic presence in

⁷ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 218-219.

⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History, 1945-1990* (1990; repr. with corrections and additions Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 215.

⁹ Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 42-43.

¹⁰ Harold Macmillan to Labour politician Richard Crossman (1944), quoted in Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 225.

British political affairs.¹¹ Nevertheless, Britain fully realized its “Relationship” with the United States after the humiliating Suez Crisis in Egypt—after which Britain took up its second-rate power status.¹²

As Britain took the back seat in world affairs during the post-war period, the landscape of British culture subtly altered. America’s economic and industrial might served as a catalyst for this change. American goods, music and films, although present in Britain before the war, became even larger symbols of cultural imperialism and anxiety.¹³ America, as the academic Dick Hebdige explained, “began to serve as the image of industrial barbarism; a country with no past and therefore no real culture, a country ruled by competition, profit and the drive to acquire.”¹⁴

One example of this angst towards Americanization can be seen by the hostility shown by the British elite for Hollywood films. The British elite saw American film as a form mass popular culture distracting from the high culture of British literature, classical music, ballet and theatre.¹⁵ The critics T. S. Elliot and F. R. Leavis believed it was necessary for culture to develop from the intellectual elite with the support of the upper classes. Therefore, critics equated mass popular culture with the decline of high culture.¹⁶ Even Jimmy Porter—the jazz-playing, main character that attacked the elitism and snobbery of the British Establishment in John Osborne’s 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*—concerned himself with the influence America had on British society. In the play Jimmy Porter declared, “it’s pretty dreary living in the

¹¹ Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988), 53.

¹² Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 159.

¹³ Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, 52-53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵ David Lusted, *The Western* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 15.

¹⁶ Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 80.

American Age—unless you're an American of course. Perhaps our children will be Americans."¹⁷

While some resented this "American Age," many—particularly the young—embraced aspects of American culture—especially music. The 1958 film adaptation of *Look Back in Anger* presented Jimmy Porter finding great solace in jazz music, even after he denounced the "American Age."¹⁸ For some, America and its music represented everything that was "un-British."¹⁹ Jeff Nuttall, a British art critic and jazz musician, stated, "American culture was free of our snobbery, was against the British class system. You take some of the energy... because it really did seem to be enormously liberating at the time."²⁰

For some in Britain, America signified a classless world of freedom, equality and opportunity.²¹ For the Britons who accepted this version of America, Americanization was not to be feared but welcomed. The young narrator of Colin MacInnes' 1959 novel *Absolute Beginners* articulated this attitude when he said, "I'm starting up an anti-anti-American movement, because I just despise the hatred and jealousy of Yanks there is around."²²

An "anti-anti-American movement" in Britain fittingly allied itself with American music. There is no better way to understand this than through jazz. Jazz is the "product of diaspora;" it is the syncretic mixture of African and European music forms which blended in America.²³ It was partly the African-American element in jazz and its allure of the exotic which enticed

¹⁷ John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1957; London: Penguin Books, 1982), 17.

¹⁸ *Look Back in Anger*, VHS, Directed by Tony Richardson (1958; Charlotte, NC: United American Video, 1989).

¹⁹ George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), 20.

²⁰ Jeff Nuttall in interview with McKay (2001), quoted in McKay, *Circular Breathing*, 21.

²¹ McKay, *Circular Breathing*, 19.

²² Colin MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 1959, in *The London Novels of Colin MacInnes: City of Spades, Absolute Beginners, Mr. Love and Justice*, intro. Nat Hentoff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 298.

²³ McKay, *Circular Breathing*, 3.

Europeans.²⁴ Like other symbols of America, jazz and the African-American musician contrasted to the drabness of British elitism. Their audiences saw them as hip forms of Americanization.²⁵ While elitists saw jazz as a form of American cultural imperialism, British jazz audiences saw it as music of resistance, rebellion and civil justice.²⁶ They saw the African-American male and his music, as Hebdige explained, as a “model of freedom-in-bondage. Saint and exile, he flew like Charlie ‘Bird’ above his wretched condition, expressing and transcending contradictions through his art in every solo statement blown... through every battered sax.”²⁷ Moreover, the rebellious qualities which jazz possessed captured the imagination of the politically active young during the late 1950s.²⁸

In the 1950s, rock ‘n’ roll followed the lead of jazz and crossed the Atlantic. Like jazz, rock ‘n’ roll was given a similar reception by British elitists. The Establishment portrayed rock ‘n’ roll as too loud, fast and subversive.²⁹ Although having roots in jazz, rock ‘n’ roll was even given an indifferent reception among jazz fans. Journalist George Melly explained, “To us in the jazz world it [rock ‘n’ roll] seemed a meaningless simplification of the blues with all the poetry removed and emphasis on the white.”³⁰ Melly does give credit, though, to rock ‘n’ roll for resisting the snobbery of class barriers and providing underprivileged youths a chance to freely express themselves.³¹

At the same time as post-war Britain experienced the advent of Americanization, the British Establishment also found itself susceptible to the changing times. British societal

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁶ Ibid., 23, 28.

²⁷ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979; London: Routledge, 1996), 48.

²⁸ Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles*, 145.

²⁹ Ibid., 140.

³⁰ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain* (London: The Penguin Press, 1970), 36.

³¹ Ibid., 36-39.

recognition of a ruling Establishment acknowledged just how class stratification was a reality in the British consciousness.³²

The Establishment, with all its Victorian and Edwardian institutions and traditions, ruled the country through the pomp and pageantry of the upper classes.³³ As Anthony Sampson pointed out in his massive analysis *Anatomy of Britain*, the Establishment ruled through an elite, close-knit circle.³⁴ This circle contained the upper echelons of British society: members of the royal family, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the editor of the *Times*, the director of the BBC, and so forth.³⁵ The Establishment preserved its “antique” way of life through schooling and the workings of government, where a huge percent of the permanent secretaries of the government were Oxford or Cambridge graduates.³⁶

The powers and privileges held by the British Establishment were questioned and challenged by some Britons during the post-war period. The “snobbery” of the Establishment provoked debate among many Britons.³⁷ As the empire’s grasp loosened, some began questioning the purpose and leadership of the elitists.³⁸ Sampson explained, “I have felt haunted by the Victorians... in twenty years since the war, Britain should have felt confused about her purpose—with those acres of red on the map dwindling.”³⁹ For Sampson, the Establishment slowed progress and economic growth.⁴⁰ The London magazine *Queen* discussed similar concerns with its article “Establishment Chronicle” in the August 1959 issue. The article mockingly outlined the aims and purposes for keeping what it called the “Old Boy Network” in

³² Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War, 1945-60* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 167.

³³ Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), 620-622.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 632.

³⁵ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 560-563.

³⁶ Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, 198.

³⁷ Hewison, *In Anger*, 267.

³⁸ Hewison, *Too Much*, 2-3.

³⁹ Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain*, 620.

⁴⁰ Hewison, *Too Much*, 5.

command. From exclusion of the lower classes to the misuse of power, *Queen's* article expounded the feelings of alienation caused by the Establishment's elitism.⁴¹

While the Establishment was hotly debated among intellectuals, changes occurring on the opposite end of the British class spectrum were discussed just as strongly. During this period, the working class seemed to be more absorbed with mass popular culture and the Americanization of British culture rather than the faltering principles of their country's ruling Establishment.

During the post-war period mass media promoted a growing mass popular culture, largely influenced by American mass popular culture, which contributed significantly to changes within the working class.⁴² As a result, the arrival of this influence was seen by some Britons as eroding British class divisions.⁴³

This American-influenced mass popular culture was disseminated to the British working class through a growing number of television sets and the development of commercial programming during the 1950s and 1960s. Although the immediate years following the war were marked by shortages, many in the working class found new wealth and comforts—as demonstrated by the luxury of owning television sets—during the 1950s.⁴⁴ The British people “never had it so good” as the Prime Minister Macmillan so persuasively put it in July 1957.⁴⁵

While Macmillan asserted this claim, the phenomenon of working-class affluence became an area of discussion for sociologists during the post-war period. Sociologists John H.

⁴¹ *Queen*, “Establishment Chronicle,” quoted in “Notes From the Top,” *Time*, 24 Aug. 1959, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,864813,00.html>> (accessed 5 Feb. 2007).

⁴² Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (First published 1975 as *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, no. 7/8; London: Routledge, 2000), 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴ Hewison, *In Anger*, 149-150.

⁴⁵ Harold Macmillan (1957), quoted in Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, xi.

Goldthorpe and David Lockwood attempted to understand the complex issues of the growing working-class prosperity in the early 1960s: “working class ‘affluence’... has led to the claim being made that... the British class structure is in the process of change... the working class... is losing its identity as a social stratum and is becoming merged into the middle class.”⁴⁶ However, in 1969, Goldthorpe and Lockwood explained how working-class affluence did not necessarily result in the “assimilation” of working-class people into the middle class, but instead resulted in “less dramatic process of convergence” between the two groups.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, for some observers the rigid social stratification of Britain appeared to be changing during the 1950s and early 1960s. Opportunities for education and employment seemed to be transforming for the nation’s working class.⁴⁸ As journalist Francis Wheen wrote, “In the 1960s, the success of Michael Caine or Ted Heath,” entertainers with working-class backgrounds, “was interpreted as evidence that Britain was fast becoming a ‘classless society.’”⁴⁹

With the advent of a seemingly more affluent working class, a youth market emerged and youth found a new voice through music, style and leisure.⁵⁰ The development of a youth market had a profound impact on working-class adolescents.⁵¹ MacInnes expressed this independent, youthful mood best in *Absolute Beginners*: “This teenage ball had had a real splendour in the days when the kids discovered that, for the first time since centuries of kingdom-come, they’d money... we’d loot to spend.”⁵² Due to their newly found riches, youth spent more money on

⁴⁶ John H Goldthorpe, and David Lockwood, “Affluence and the British Class Structure,” *Sociological Review* 11, no. 2 (July 1963): 134.

⁴⁷ John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, and others, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1969), 26.

⁴⁸ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 21-22.

⁴⁹ Francis Wheen, *The Sixties: A Fresh Look at the Decade of Change* (London: Century Publishing Co., 1982), 6.

⁵⁰ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵² MacInnes, *Absolute Beginners*, 258.

the luxuries offered in this youth market. The drabness of past generations faded with the advent of consumerism, and the growth of pop music was a sign of the increasing economic power of teenagers.⁵³ Ultimately, three teenage, working-class subcultures formed during this period: the Teddy Boys, the Rockers and the Mods.

The Teddy Boys, or Teds for short, emerged during the early 1950s from predominantly poverty-stricken and habitually violent areas of London. Although many never had the economic opportunities offered to other youths of the nation, the Teds adopted the high-priced, upper-class dress of the foppish Edwardian suit. Despite their innocuously aristocratic style, it became a symbol of subversion in the eyes of the Establishment and the more affluent classes.⁵⁴ This criticism came as a response to the Teds' form of leisure, often restless violence.⁵⁵ The first "Teddy Boy Killing" was in 1953; as well, this group was associated with the Notting Hill race riots of 1958.⁵⁶

The Rockers, which emerged in the early 1960s, was another group associated with violent acts similar to those of the Teds. The Rockers wore tough-looking leather jackets and donned greasy, slick hair. They took up violence as a form of leisure just as the Teds did.⁵⁷ Consequently, both groups were associated with rebelliousness and disobedience. The term "Teddy Boy" even became linked, in a more figurative manner, to anyone who threatened the Establishment.⁵⁸

In stark contrast to the Teddy Boy and the Rocker was the Mod. The name is derived from their fondness for American-influenced modern jazz. Like the previous groups, fashion

⁵³ Norman, *Shout!*, 210.

⁵⁴ Wheen, *The Sixties*, 14.

⁵⁵ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 82-83.

⁵⁶ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 82-85; Stephen Inwood, *A History of London* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1998), 858.

⁵⁷ Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles*, 146.

⁵⁸ Wheen, *The Sixties*, 14.

was an important expression for the Mods. The Edwardian suits of the Teds and the leather jackets of the Rockers were replaced with fashionable, Italianate outfits by the Mods. Their clothing appeared as anything but working-class, making the group acceptable to the outside world.⁵⁹ Unlike the Teds, the Mods' economic outlook appeared to observers as more positive and upwardly mobile. Yet, the group's choice of work was typically boring, menial, semi-skilled office work. The purpose of work for this subculture was to make money to support their weekend nightlife.⁶⁰ The Mods' world revolved around finding speed and energy to party through the weekend—whether this involved popping pills, driving fast scooters or dancing at night clubs.⁶¹ The music of this experience, particularly African-American jazz, was central to the Mods' lifestyle. It provided an escape for Mods and they saw the black man as a symbol of the unrestrained passage into their “imagined ‘underworld.’”⁶²

As all these changes and developments occurred during the post-war period, Britain appeared to be at the cusp of transformation. People began to perceive British culture and society in the grips of change.⁶³ The energy of change in British society was building. It seemed to some Britons that the obsession over class, accent, tradition and ritual was ending. Finally, 1963 was the year of the “explosion.” “The press... revealed how deep were the divisions in British society between the Establishment and its detractors, between the old hypocrisies and a new morality, between the old and the young,” explained Juliet Gardiner.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., 23-24, 36.

⁶⁰ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Ritual*, 91.

⁶¹ Ibid., 87-89.

⁶² Hebdige, *Subculture*, 48-54.

⁶³ Hewison, *In Anger*, 139.

⁶⁴ Gardiner, *From the Bomb to the Beatles*, 128.

Initial Response to the Rise of the Beatles 1962-1963

Before 1963 the Beatles had already made some noise in the local Merseyside-Liverpool rock 'n' roll scene. The louder the Beatles' music got the more teenage fans the band gained in the Liverpool area. However, it was the discovery of the band by Brian Epstein and George Martin—and the “Beatle” image these two men helped create—which was key to the band's success outside of Liverpool.

With the help of Epstein and Martin, the Beatles gained the British press' attention. When the press first noticed the Beatles, the initial reaction of journalists was to portray the band as warm-hearted, working-class boys from Liverpool. Thus, a working-class image of the band was broadcast to Britain by the press. It was also the timely induction of the Beatles on the national stage in 1963 which helped launch the foursome into fame, as the Beatles were introduced to Britain amidst government scandal.

In the two years preceding 1963, Brian Epstein and George Martin discovered the Beatles. These two men were instrumental in the production of the Beatles' image. They contributed greatly to the band's transformation and success in the following years.

In late 1961, Epstein, a Liverpool record store owner, first heard of the Beatles and the frenzy the band was creating in the local rock 'n' roll scene.⁶⁵ Epstein claims he first saw the Beatles aggressively playing to a rowdy teenage audience at the Cavern, a popular Liverpool club. It was at the Cavern where he realized the potential success of the group's “magnetism.”⁶⁶ This “magnetism” later became one of the driving forces in the creation and dissemination the group's image. In Epstein's words, he explained, “Their act was ragged, their clothes were a

⁶⁵ Brian Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise* (1964; Ann Arbor, MI: The Pierian Press, 1984), 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

mess. And yet I sensed at once that there was something here.”⁶⁷ He later met the Beatles and offered to become their manager. The boys agreed, and Epstein was determined to take their recordings to London and strike a deal with one of the large record companies.⁶⁸

In spite of this determination, Epstein faced one rejection after another until he eventually met George Martin—the head of Parlophone, a subsidiary of the record company EMI—in April 1962.⁶⁹ Martin, who held the biased idea that nothing of true musical talent or importance ever came from the provinces, gave Epstein a chance to present the Beatles’ material. His preconceived notions soon changed after meeting and recording with the band. Martin exclaimed, “It was love at first sight.”⁷⁰ To Martin, the boys were clean, yet, they possessed an appealing messiness to their look. Though the music was not especially remarkable, Martin still enjoyed the unique “roughness” of its sound. Not only did he like the look and the musical potential of the Beatles, he also loved the personalities of John, Paul and George (Ringo had not yet joined the band) with their offbeat, schoolboy humor. Martin was instantly drawn to the group’s distinct style and their honest humor, and he decided to sign them with Parlophone.⁷¹

Epstein and Martin felt the band radiated something special. Though the band’s image was somewhat rough and aggressive, it also possessed a good, wholesome charm. The two were determined to turn the Beatles into stars. In fact, if it had not been for both Epstein and Martin, the Beatles would have never have made it beyond their small, Liverpool audience.⁷² As explained throughout Epstein’s book *A Cellarful of Noise* and Martin’s book *All You Need is Ears*, the two went to great efforts to promote the band. The roles of Epstein and Martin before,

⁶⁷ Epstein to journalist, quoted in “The New Madness,” *Time*, 15 Nov. 1963, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,873176,00.html>> (accessed 5 Feb. 2007).

⁶⁸ Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise*, 49-60.

⁶⁹ George Martin and Jeremy Hornsby, *All You Need is Ears* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1979), 120-122.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 122-126.

⁷² Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 497.

during and after the Beatles' big break in 1963 were crucial factors in creating and hyping up the band's image.

While Epstein was given administrative powers over the Beatles' business affairs, he was also very influential in promoting and marketing the band. The revamping of the band's appearance was one of Epstein's most notable promotional schemes. He, in effect, was personally responsible for creating the Beatles' distinctive look. Before Epstein the band sported the tough, leather and jean-clad appearance of the Rockers. The band adopted this appearance during their earlier days in Hamburg, where they performed to rowdy and unruly crowds in the sleazy clubs of Hamburg's infamously immoral Reeperbahn and St. Pauli neighborhood.⁷³ It was in Hamburg in 1960 where the Beatles were first exposed to the Reeperbahn's form of sex, violence, booze, drugs and rock 'n' roll. In Hamburg they adopted the Rocker-like style and the "mop-top" hair cut sported by West German students.⁷⁴ Epstein knew he needed to trade this aggressive look for a more professional one in order to secure a recording contract.⁷⁵ While the hair stayed, the rest, as Epstein explained, was swapped for a more innocuous appearance of sweaters, ties and stylish "Beatle suits."⁷⁶ This new image proved to be a noteworthy transformation for the band.

Martin's tutelage likewise had a positive impact on the band. The band's rough sound was the legacy of Hamburg. While dealing with the drunk, rowdy crowds of Hamburg's nightlife, the band's act became more outlandish and wild. The band played music louder, faster and rougher, as Pete Best, the band's original drummer, once explained.⁷⁷ Martin possessed the

⁷³ Brian Epstein, quoted in David Pritchard and Alan Lysaght, eds, *The Beatles: An Oral History* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 86-87; Norman, *Shout!*, 90-91.

⁷⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 488-491.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 495.

⁷⁶ Epstein, quoted in Pritchard and Lysaght, *The Beatles*, 86-87.

⁷⁷ Pete Best, quoted in Pritchard and Lysaght, *The Beatles*, 40-41.

prudence to respect this quality. However, with Martin's guidance he pushed the band to create new material and expand beyond the sound they developed during their Hamburg encounter.⁷⁸

One of his first acts was to replace Pete Best with a more personable drummer who more suitably fit the band's image envisioned by Epstein and Martin. Consequently, John, Paul and George chose the friendly Ringo Starr whom they met in Hamburg when Ringo was playing with the band Rory Storm and the Hurricanes.⁷⁹ Moreover, Martin's promotional abilities helped to catapult the Beatles' music into the British market.⁸⁰

With a new look formulated and under the management's shrewd leadership, the Beatles were ready to take Britain by storm in 1963. Their album *Please, Please Me* was selling at a rate of 50,000 copies per week by February.⁸¹ In March, the single "Please, Please Me" made it to the number one position on the British music charts. The Beatles were clearly marketable, and their success continued to grow throughout the year. Thanks to newly found affluence among the working class and a new teenage market, their records sold and Beatlemania began to take off.⁸² In late 1963, the group was featured on the *London Palladium* show, one of the most popular shows on television at the time.⁸³ However, as Epstein explained it was not until the Beatles' energetic performance in front of a royal audience at the Prince of Wales Theatre in November that Beatlemania finally manifested.⁸⁴

Through the promotional efforts of Epstein and Martin, the band succeeded in catching the eye of the nation's press in early 1963. Accordingly, the British press propagated

⁷⁸ George Martin and Jeremy Hornsby, *All You Need is Ears*, 199.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 126; Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 490.

⁸⁰ George Martin and Jeremy Hornsby, *All You Need is Ears*, 136.

⁸¹ Maureen Cleave, "Why the Beatles Create All that Frenzy," in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 57.

⁸² Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 504-508.

⁸³ Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise*, 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

Beatlemania on a larger scale. George Melly explained, “Throughout... 1963 Beatlemania grew and grew. The papers fed it and it fed the papers.”⁸⁵ The marketability of the Beatles appealed to British newspapers and tabloids. The press fell in love with the style, music and quirky personalities of the foursome. All through 1963 the press wrote about the Beatles, and the band responded by perpetuating the images and stereotypes which benefited and promoted their growing stardom. Maureen Cleave’s article “Why the Beatles Create All that Frenzy” from the *Evening Standard* and Stanley Reynolds’ “Big Time” from *The Manchester Guardian* are reports that endorsed and publicized the Beatles in a very positive manner. The two journalists bestowed likable characterizations on the band members in their articles.⁸⁶

The appeal of the Beatles’ image mixed well with an array of working-class jargon. As opposed to the Establishment-dominated values of the capital, the press associated the band with what it felt were honest, working-class and independently-minded northern values. The Beatles were pictured by the press as friendly, ordinary chaps from Liverpool.⁸⁷ In her article Cleave described the boys as the “darlings of Merseyside.” Their personas, with all the plain, original and slightly “silly” humor were made out by Cleave to attest to their northern autonomy and charm. According to Cleave, the Beatles were humble in their manners but remarkably confident on stage. Each member of the band was stereotyped by Cleave with what she believed were their own working-class characteristics. John was the sarcastically witty one; Paul had the boyish, good looks and charm; George was the quiet and shy one; and Ringo was “ugly but cute.”⁸⁸ The

⁸⁵ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 69.

⁸⁶ Cleave, “Why the Beatles Create All that Frenzy,” 57-59; Stanley Reynolds, “Big Time,” in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 69-72.

⁸⁷ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 506.

⁸⁸ Cleave, “Why the Beatles Create All that Frenzy,” 57-59.

British historian Dominic Sandbrook explained, “the Beatles’ designated characteristics... worked in their favour, cementing the impression of old-fashion simplicity.”⁸⁹

Although the media created this working-class image for the Beatles, it was not entirely based in reality. The families of John and Paul were not necessarily “working-class,” as their families possessed middle-class aspirations. John grew up in a “mock-Tudor villa” in the suburbs and attended the Liverpool College of Art. Paul’s parents were extremely ambitious. They aspired to live in “posh” middle-class neighborhoods and wanted Paul to become a doctor or great scientist.⁹⁰ George’s family too had goals for their son, though they were much more modest and working-class in outlook than those of John and Paul. They wanted their son to travel along a “safe and honorable course” as an electrician.⁹¹ Cynthia Lennon, John’s first wife, even acknowledged her ex-husband’s comfortable upbringings. Although John dressed in the garb of the lower classes—long before the Beatles’ working-class image was even formed—his family aspired to be middle class. She wrote, “he dressed like a down and out Teddy boy when his home and background were decidedly middle class.”⁹² Though John, Paul and George grew up in families with middle-class characteristics and ambitions, they ultimately became identified with the Beatles image as working class.

The member with the truest working-class upbringing was Ringo. Indeed, his family was part of the working class: his father was a bakery worker, his mother a barmaid and his grandfather worked as a boilermaker at the Liverpool shipyards.⁹³ The addition of Ringo into the

⁸⁹ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 507.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 485-488.

⁹¹ Norman, *Shout!*, 73.

⁹² Cynthia Lennon, “A Twist of Lennon,” in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 17.

⁹³ Norman, *Shout!*, 173.

band helped strengthen and reinforce the humble, working-class image promoted by the press. Journalists saw Ringo's personality as "loveably plain... and decidedly ordinary."⁹⁴

Although the Beatles' image was only partially based in truth, the media continued to embellish this working-class imagery. Reynolds likened the Beatles to working-class and provincial ideals in his article "Big Time." He wrote, "there is a connection between Liverpool and the four young musicians that seems to go deeper than pride for hometown boys; something, perhaps, deep in the mysterious well of English, and especially Northern working-class sentimentality."⁹⁵ The article heralded how their tastes were not ostentatious or flamboyant, noting how the Beatles had "no taste for champagne" or fancy cars.⁹⁶

Fan magazines, such as Liverpool's *Mersey Beat*, hyped up the same imagery created during the initial phase of Beatlemania. *Mersey Beat* portrayed George as an "ordinary child" who left school for work at a young age. The article, which also featured an interview with George's mother, highlighted George's honest virtues.⁹⁷ The article explained how George was "never a naughty boy." Albeit, this was not necessarily true, especially after his earlier exploits in the sleazy and dingy clubs on Hamburg's Reeperbahn.

In fact, the members of the Beatles were often mischievous and wild. They voraciously smoked and drank while performing. They often picked fights and slept with their female fans after their shows.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the British press turned a blind eye to the Beatles' rowdy behavior. Journalists continued to depict the group as cheerful, clean and ordinary. Besides

⁹⁴ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 69.

⁹⁵ Reynolds, "Big Time," 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹⁷ Bill Harry, "A Beatle Named George," *Mersey Beat*, 20 Aug. 1964, <<http://www.mersey--beat.net>> (accessed 2 Mar. 2007).

⁹⁸ Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good*, 505-506.

possessing a money-making look and sound, the media had other reasons for building up the Beatles. For the press, the band held cultural and social significance.

At the same time as the press' fixation on Beatlemania continued through 1963, newspapers were also wrapped up in the scandalous Profumo affair.⁹⁹ John Profumo, the Minister of War, resigned from his position after confessing that he had lied to the House of Commons about his affair with the call girl Christine Keeler, the lover of a naval attaché at the Soviet Embassy. The media, as a result, associated the affair with the "general upheaval and loss of direction that was afflicting Britain."¹⁰⁰ While corruption amongst aristocrats was nothing new, the subsequent cover-up and reaction of the government showed how distant and out of touch the Establishment was from the people.¹⁰¹

While the Profumo affair preoccupied newspapers on Fleet Street, editors were becoming tired of news related to the corrupt Establishment and Britain's post-war anxieties. They wanted something unrelated to Profumo, something to take the public's focus away from the country's troubles. They wanted something safe, innocent and harmless; as a result, British newspapers and tabloids became absorbed with the Beatles.

In September 1963, the *Daily Mirror* followed the precedent established by journalists like Cleave and Reynolds. The paper ran a two-page article about the band. In the same month, the music newspaper *Melody Maker* polled the Beatles as the top band in Britain.¹⁰² It was the innocently plain and working-class image of the band that the press liked. It was this image that

⁹⁹ Ibid., 506-507.

¹⁰⁰ Hewison, *Too Much*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Morgan, *The People's Peace*, 225-227.

¹⁰² Norman, *Shout!*, 206-207.

the newspapers wanted to project. The Beatles and the publicity it received throughout 1963 became positive foils to the tiresome news of the Profumo scandal.¹⁰³

The Beatles and the Production of a Classless Image 1963-1965

People began noticing the changes which had taken place since the end of the war. “Old symbols were not revered as in the past. The young, with men wearing longer hair and women much shorter skirts, were developing an irreverent, anti-establishment culture all their own... a permissive youth culture,” explained historian Kenneth O. Morgan.¹⁰⁴ A “new morality” was widely discussed as it appeared to be grasping British society. Under the influence of this “new morality” society became more permissive toward issues regarding class, sex, style and music.¹⁰⁵

Capital punishment was abolished and homosexuals were permitted to openly express their sexuality. Minorities, who previously faced discrimination and prejudice in the prior decade, experienced fewer restrictions and more opportunities to advance their economic status. As a result, Asians and West Indians were slowly brought into government service work. It appeared that Britain had found a new place in the world as a more tolerant, less imperialistic society.¹⁰⁶

As the majority of British society became more permissive toward social change, too was the attitude of the Establishment toward sex, style and music. Consequently, censorship became less strict in regards to media regulations. The country’s official censor, Lord Chamberlain, censored movies, books and music less frequently during the 1960s. The explicit sexuality of the

¹⁰³ Hewison, *Too Much*, 66

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 207.

¹⁰⁵ Hewison, *Too Much*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 242.

film *Room at the Top* from 1959 and the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—written in 1928, but not published in the United Kingdom until 1960—both attested to the loosening of censors.¹⁰⁷

The Beatles represented this same acceptance towards sex, style and music. George Melly explained, “The teenage reaction [to the Beatles] was perhaps largely sexual, but music, in itself, was fresh and interesting and very few people could remain indifferent or antagonistic... Their music had become all-persuasive.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, more people began to accept the “populist” changes of the time. The success of the Beatles attested to the ascendance over the old symbols of social restriction and limits existing within British society. The band was understood as the harbinger of a “populist revolt” in Britain.¹⁰⁹ The writer Charlie Gillett explained this facet of the Beatles. He wrote, “Their social message was rarely expressed, but hung about their heads as an aura of impatience... the Beatles presented working-class youth loose and free, glad to be out, unafraid to snub pretension.”¹¹⁰

Just as the Beatles had done, other young, ambitious people were finding success and fame in every direction. An image of classlessness was beginning to surround the youthful celebrities who successfully transcended Britain’s social stratification. The socially mobile rose above notions of class, as the academic Robert Hewison explained, “Because social barriers would impede the meteoric rise of such young, ambitious people, they chose to present themselves as ‘classless,’ and indeed some, like the Beatles, had risen to fame and fortune from working-class origins.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ When, *The Sixties*, 90-98.

¹⁰⁸ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁹ Morgan, *The People's Peace*, 258.

¹¹⁰ Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (1970; repr. New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971), 312.

¹¹¹ Hewison, *Too Much*, 73.

It was finally fashionable to be young and working-class in Britain. The old world of high culture and accents seemed to disappear in the wake of commercial allure and consumer charm.¹¹² Even Anthony Sampson, who in 1962 had expressed his anxiety over the fate of Britain, expressed a more positive attitude. He felt 1963 was the year Britain exploded. What emerged from the explosion was a less class-restricted society. In *The Anatomy of Britain Today* Sampson explained, “Reverence and stuffiness are out of fashion, and nearly everyone, from the head of the BBC to the Lord Chancellor, likes to think of himself as being ‘anti-Establishment.’”¹¹³

Exposure of the Establishment’s vices, such as the Profumo affair, undeniably helped launch the Beatles to national stardom. However, as the Beatles’ fame grew in late 1963, the construction of a working-class image of the group—the same image which had been contrasted against the Establishment in the press—began to give way. The band and the qualities bequeathed to them by the press began to symbolize something else in Britain’s popular imagination. The success of the Beatles and the wide reach of Beatlemania transformed the band’s image into one of classlessness. The Establishment’s acceptance of the Beatles and America’s musical influence on the band were seen engaging an image of classlessness. These ideas merged with the Beatles’ working-class image through the instruments of the media in the Beatles’ first movie *A Hard Day’s Night*.

Toward the end of 1963, the Beatles received growing recognition from the Establishment. The pinnacle of success for the band in 1963 was their performance at the Royal Variety Show in November where the group played for the nation’s elite. Despite the boys’

¹¹² Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1997), 157.

¹¹³ Anthony Sampson, *The Anatomy of Britain Today*, (1965; New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966), 668.

working-class upbringings, they now played for the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret. The Beatles' performance at the Royal Variety helped generate more power for the engines which propelled Beatlemania. The Beatles became an even larger and hotter point of discussion as they received the accolades of the Establishment.¹¹⁴ If it were not for the institutions of the Establishment, Beatlemania would never have reached such heights. The engines of Beatlemania relied on the acceptance of the band by the nation's elite. Hewison explained, "in both politics and culture the elite controls the mass, through the institutions of the corporate state, and the control of mass communications by corporations run by elites."¹¹⁵

The Beatles' image contained dualities seen by the media as connecting the high and low notions of class. These dualities transcended, for some, the social stratifications of Britain. Sociologist Renee Claire Fox proposed the Beatles inhabited many dual roles: the boys were both adult and child-like; they were good, but they presented themselves as bad; their style suggested sophistication, though it contrasted with their "homespun" personalities and act. Fox saw a great dichotomy in the band's representation of class. The Beatles were from working-class, provincial backgrounds, but attracted the auspices of royalty and others in the Establishment.¹¹⁶ Epstein elaborated on this characteristic: "They are British, but un-English in that they accept barriers neither of class nor sex... all classes and both sexes adore them... They are Liverpool with its hard, flat humour, but they have a far wider... world of inward smiles than the average earthly Liverpoolian."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise*, 80-84

¹¹⁵ Hewison, *Too Much*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Renee Claire Fox, quoted in John A Osmundsen, "Peoplewise, the Beatles Provide New Study for the Sociologists," *New York Times*, 17 Feb. 1964, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, <<http://proquest.umi.com>> (accessed 5 Feb. 2007).

¹¹⁷ Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise*, 93.

The Beatles' working-class image may have contrasted with the decadent image of the upper classes during the Profumo scandal. However, by the beginning of 1964 the band was being accepted by the Establishment for their fresh, young look. Epstein explained, "By 1964 it had become fashionable to be a Beatle fan. There were no longer barriers of any sort... By the summer... practically every senior citizen, king of commerce, aristocrat... was clamouring to illuminate his name... or his promotion with the name, 'Beatle.'"¹¹⁸ Many wanted to align themselves with the band's success, and the appeal of the Beatles attracted all classes and generations. Even Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth's husband, was swept into Beatlemania. He remarked the band was "helpful" to Britain's well-being and cheerful character.¹¹⁹

As the Beatles' fan base stretched into all reaches of British society, a change of leadership occurred in the British government. "In 1964... the British people rejected the decaying upper-class government and embraced Harold Wilson, the young dynamic, thoroughly modern grammar-school boy," wrote Francis Wheen.¹²⁰ In the wake of the Profumo affair, Conservative Prime Minister Macmillan resigned in late 1963 and Sir Douglas-Home, former Earl of Home, became his replacement. The following year the Labour party, under the leadership of Wilson, gained the votes to remove the Conservatives from power. Though an Oxford graduate, Wilson tried to represent himself as an ordinary, young, energetic Prime Minister. Like the Beatles, he modeled himself as transcending his class. He was just an "ordinary bloke," and he aligned himself with British popular culture to perpetuate this image.¹²¹

Wilson furthered his alignment with popular culture by naming the Beatles as Members of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.) in June 1965. The M.B.E. is a very

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹¹⁹ Prince Phillip, quoted in "Beatles Are 'Helpful,' Prince Philip Thinks," *New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1964, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, <<http://proquest.umi.com>> (accessed 28 Feb. 2007).

¹²⁰ Wheen, *The Sixties*, 54.

¹²¹ Ibid., 54-64.

prestigious award often given to war heroes. Wilson ostensibly claimed he did this to pay homage to the financial and economic contributions the Beatles made to the country, but he also wanted to win over voters for future elections. Although the announcement angered some past recipients and members of the Establishment, the Beatles accepted the title, insisting it was to spite the protest. The Beatles received the award from Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace on October 26, 1965, as crowds outside upstaged the monarch by yelling “God save the Beatles.”¹²² Paul was reported to have called Buckingham Palace a “keen pad,” and he said the Queen was “just like a mum to us.”¹²³ John said they even were asked by the other M.B.E. and O.B.E. (Officer of the British Empire) inductees to sign autographs.¹²⁴ The group, in their working-class humor, joked about the award. In their minds, it epitomized the very Establishment they opposed.

The reception the Beatles received at Buckingham palace in October 1965 recalls a very similar welcome two years prior where band was paid official homage by the Establishment at the Prince of Wales Theatre. However, the performance at the Royal Variety in November 1963 provides an interesting look at the band’s music and the significance American music played in de-classing the Beatles’ image—from working-class to one which rose above notions of class. The ideas and influences behind the band’s music are ripe with class-transcending imagery.

For many Britons, America represented everything “un-British.” America became a symbol of freedom—a freedom from the snobbery and the social stratifications of Britain.

¹²² Robert Sandall, “Joint Honours,” in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 130-131.

¹²³ Paul McCartney to journalist at Buckingham Palace (1965), quoted in Pritchard and Lysaght, *The Beatles*, 203.

¹²⁴ John Lennon to journalist at Buckingham Palace (1965), quoted in Pritchard and Lysaght, *The Beatles*, 204.

American music, such as jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, gospel, soul and rock 'n' roll, was viewed by Britons as new, modern, hip and fashionable (See pages 6-7).

Coincidentally, new American music was readily available for the Beatles. This was largely a result of geography. As a major port, the Beatles' hometown of Liverpool was an entry point for newly-imported American music. Paul McCartney sheds light on this. He explained, "Liverpool was a seaport, and a lot of imports like blues records, country-and-western and rock-and-roll records, came into Liverpool through the ships."¹²⁵

During the band's early days, the members avidly sought out the newest albums from America. The Beatles' music was an amalgamation of various artists and bands, often African-American musical genres. Little Richard's rock 'n' roll singing style and the gospel "call-and-response" style of the Drifters were adopted by the band.¹²⁶ Another example of this encounter can be seen in the band's first hit "Love Me Do," released in October 1962. The use of a harmonica in the song was inspired from the melodic harmonies, or "gospel-blues tinge," of "Hey Baby" by the American artists Bruce Channel and Delbert McClinton.¹²⁷ John Lennon further explained the influence American music played on the band's songs. He explained about one example in a 1980 interview with *Playboy* that even the monosyllabic sounds, such as the "woo's," "aaah's" and "oooh's," came specifically from the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout" and were copied throughout the Beatles repertoire.¹²⁸

While the Beatles emulated the musical style of many American singers, they often simply copied and produced their own versions from the American originals. Elvis Presley, Ray

¹²⁵ McCartney, quoted in Pritchard and Lysaght, *The Beatles*, 15.

¹²⁶ Gillett, *The Sound of the City*, 309.

¹²⁷ Steve Turner, *A Hard Day's Write: The Stories Behind Every Beatles Song* (New York: Harpers-Collins Publishers, Inc., 1999), 23.

¹²⁸ John Lennon in *Playboy* (1980), quoted in David Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, ed. G. Barry Golson (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 143.

Charles and the Everly Brothers were just some of the artists whom the Beatles covered.¹²⁹ Their version of the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout" was one of their most popular songs. It appeared on the backside of *Please, Please Me* and the Beatles often closed their earlier concerts with this energetic ballad.¹³⁰ Consequently, it was not peculiar when the band performed "Twist and Shout" at the Royal Variety.

Nevertheless, the song and its performance for the royal audience were still significant in symbolizing the image of classlessness for the band. "Twist and Shout" was created by an African-American band; yet, the song was sung that night at the Prince of Wales Theatre for some of the most elite in British society. As this regal audience danced to the simple, energetic lyrics of the song, dualities in the band's image were further created. At the Royal Variety, the band presented the dichotomous identities that sociologist Renee Claire Fox (see page 24) discussed and felt signified the appeal of the band. At the Royal Variety, the band appeared to transcend notions of class. They appealed to both the youthful fans that waited outside the theatre and the royalty who sat inside. For this, the Beatles became showmen to all. This same showmanship was tested in one of the most powerful Beatles images produced—one which represented the Beatles rising above notions of class—the 1964 film *A Hard Day's Night*.

A Hard Day's Night was conceived by Epstein and executives at United Artists in late 1963 as a promotional device to take advantage of Beatlemania. Richard Lester, an American ex-patriot known for his humorous, surrealist films, was chosen as the director.¹³¹ Alun Owen, known for his television dramas set in the provinces, was chosen to write the screenplay. Owen, being a fellow Liverpool native, added an air of authenticity to the script and a bond with the

¹²⁹ Steve Turner, *A Hard Day's Write*, 17.

¹³⁰ Phil Johnson, "Twist and Shout," in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 65.

¹³¹ Bob Neaverson, *The Beatles Movies* (London: Cassell, 1997), 12-13.

band.¹³² The plot was based on an “exaggerated” day in the life of the foursome. Owen even observed the band in 1963 under the pressures and daily frenzies experienced while touring. In early 1964 George Martin and the Beatles hastily produced the soundtrack for the musical. The result produced some of the band’s most classic songs including “Can’t Buy Me Love” and “A Hard Day’s Night.”¹³³

Although the band feared the film might typecast them in the category of other contrived pop musicals of the 1950s and 1960s, the careful selection of Lester and Owen by United Artists and the shrewd foresight of the film’s production overcame this concern. In essence, the production team built the screenplay, musical score, plot, characters, antics and humor around the Beatles’ own image. Accordingly, the final product turned out to be a significant pop musical and one of the most prized movies in film history.¹³⁴

As the film opens, the title song “A Hard Day’s Night” plays and the Beatles run through an undesignated provincial train station (possibly in Liverpool) to escape a mob of fans. The band escapes with their management on a train. Throughout much of the film, the band encounters the pretentiousness and arrogance of the upper classes. In their train cabin, the band confronts a bowler-hat-wearing gentleman who is anything but gentle in his manners. It is here that the band faces the snobbery of British society. Instead of acquiescing, the group mocks this “proper” and “respectable” figure. Ultimately, the Beatles arrive in London. They progress through irritating interviews and dim-witted questions. They retort with amusing sarcasm. At a television concert rehearsal, the boys face a condescending and bombastic director.¹³⁵

¹³² Stephen Glynn, *A Hard Day’s Night* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 2005), 17-18.

¹³³ Neaverson, *The Beatles Movies*, 13-14.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

¹³⁵ *A Hard Day’s Night*, DVD, directed by Richard Lester (1964; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2002).

The band can be interpreted in this section of the film as no better off than “any working-class boy or girl in a dead-end job.”¹³⁶ The band is seen as being trapped by its own fame and success. On one hand, the Beatles are continuously harassed by fans. On the other, the upper classes seem to hold little respect for them. At first glance the boys appear entrapped by a class-conscious British society. However, they transcend this imprisonment, and they are pictured as the antithesis of the downbeat worker.¹³⁷ The film is full of imagery which attempts to debunk the British class system.

The film’s plot reveals the band’s impulse to diverge from the designs of class. In the film, the Beatles escape their predicament through their ability to reject the pretensions of class. This is achieved through the quick witted humor Owen injected into the script and the surrealist sequences of Lester’s directing. The sarcastic humor and surrealist qualities in the film place all characters, both high and low, on the same plane as the Beatles. This can be seen when the Beatles meet the stuffy, old gentleman on the train. This man, with his haughty accent, clearly represents the older generation that dominates the Establishment. He is rude and obnoxious toward the Beatles, but they respond to his insults with quick wit. In one sequence, the band strangely appears outside the window of the train cabin mocking the old gent.¹³⁸

The Beatles’ capacity to rise above the dilemma of class entrapment is maintained throughout *A Hard Day’s Night*. During the concert rehearsal the Beatles decide they cannot handle the pomposity and haughtiness of their surroundings. As a result, they break out of the studio, they frolic about in an open field jumping and dancing, and they escape into the greater London area. After this, the band members split up to explore their newfound freedom. They are humorously engrossed by the world. Backstage, John cynically teases a comical woman who

¹³⁶ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 73.

¹³⁷ Glynn, *A Hard Day’s Night*, 36.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

does not recognize his celebrity. George somehow comes across a business executive who specializes in the “teenybopper” market, though the man understands nothing about teenagers. Unknowingly, this man does not realize he is in the presence of a real teenage sensation. While John and George delve into the world of the upper classes, Ringo—at the suggestion of Paul’s rebellious, senile Irish grandfather—nostalgically explores the working-class sectors of London. John, Paul and George must then find their missing drummer before the concert begins, whilst the antics of Paul’s grandfather get the band into trouble with the police. Finally, to the relief of the band, Ringo is found and the film ends with the Beatles performing to a fan-packed studio.¹³⁹

British audiences, from teenage fans to the royal family, loved the film when it was released in July 1964.¹⁴⁰ Audiences were attracted to the film for a number of reasons. First, *A Hard Day’s Night* possessed a sharp and fresh humor thanks to Owens’s script, Lester’s directing and the Beatles’ acting. The second ingredient which attracted audiences was the presentation of the Beatles’ personalities and image. The same working-class image of the band which the press broadcast in 1963 transferred into the film. Furthermore, audiences were fascinated by the film’s depiction of the Beatles’ image of classlessness. The band was shown as handling success and fame with ease. The boys never retreated into a world of arrogance and vanity. Instead, they transcended the trappings of class and embraced their newfound social mobility.¹⁴¹ In the film they were able to explore both their working-class backgrounds and the privileges of the middle and upper classes.¹⁴² The film projected an image of optimistic and upbeat British youths. The film unmistakably perpetuated an image of classlessness, as the Beatles were presented as neither downtrodden commoners nor haughty celebrities.

¹³⁹ *A Hard Day’s Night*.

¹⁴⁰ Glynn, *A Hard Day’s Night*, 82.

¹⁴¹ Neaverson, *The Beatles Movies*, 22-23.

¹⁴² Glynn, *A Hard Day’s Night*, 36.

A Hard Day's Night proved to be extremely successful for the Beatles, as it boosted the band's fame to an even wider audience. Not only did the film appeal to teenage Beatle fans, but it also charmed adults. While newspapers praised the film with positive reviews, the appearance of Princess Margaret at *A Hard Day's Night's* opening added more "cultural credibility" to the film.¹⁴³

The Beatles in Swinging London 1963-1966

By the release of *A Hard Day's Night* in the middle of 1964, the band had already made a huge mark on the British cultural and social landscape. Jeff Nuttall reflected on this: "The Beatles were and are the biggest single catalyst in this whole acceleration in the development of sub-culture."¹⁴⁴ Nuttall referred to what he felt was the creation of a new group of young, classless, successful Britons. These people had been caught up with the Beatles in the "explosion" of 1963. For Nuttall, the Beatles spearheaded the movement toward a "class" or subculture comprised of the young. The focal point of this new group was Britain's very own capital.

For the young and talented during the early 1960s, London became the city to make it big. Young Britons congregated in the capital captivated by imagery of classlessness. They came from all sects of British society. There were those from the provinces like model Jean Shrimpton, and of course the Beatles.¹⁴⁵ There were those from London's working-class, cockney-speaking East End, such as the photographer David Bailey, the stylist Vidal Sassoon and the actor Michael Caine.¹⁴⁶ They mixed with the members of their generation from the middle-class suburbs, such as Rolling Stones' singer Mick Jagger and boutique store owner

¹⁴³ Neaverson, *The Beatles Movies*, 27.

¹⁴⁴ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), 136.

¹⁴⁵ Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 24-25.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, 35, 55.

Mary Quant.¹⁴⁷ Aptly, they all dabbled in the world of the privileged upper classes, such as the flamboyant bohemia known as the Chelsea Set.¹⁴⁸ This new group broke into a world of fame, wealth and success, where birthrights meant little.¹⁴⁹ The names of this young generation were synonymous with the “rise” of Swinging London, and it was a more permissive society that allowed this to happen.¹⁵⁰

Swinging London is said to have come into full “swing” sometime in the middle of 1963.¹⁵¹ It was centered on youthful fashion. Shops that benefited from the new teenage market appeared on Carnaby Street in Soho and on King’s Road in Chelsea. The Carnaby tailors focused on male Mod styles, while King’s Road centered on women’s fashion. Mary Quant was especially successful with her King’s Road boutique called Bazaar. Quant wanted to design a style for young girls that did not simply imitate the stuffy, old dress of their mothers. Quant promptly invented the miniskirt. In addition to the boutique shops, clubs and discothèques emerged—the direct result of increased affluence among the young, a teenage market and the commercial success of pop music.¹⁵²

Since great fortunes were to be made in London, the Beatles—just as they did in *A Hard Day’s Night*—left Liverpool for the thrill and excitement of London in 1964. Epstein explained how the Beatles needed to leave Liverpool for London. The band needed to be closer to the center of show business and the new adventures of pop culture.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 9-10, 44.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 42-45.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵⁰ Morgan, *The People’s Peace*, 255.

¹⁵¹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 5.

¹⁵² Inwood, *A History of London*, 865-867.

¹⁵³ Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise*, 105.

When the Beatles arrived in London, the working-class image was dropped as they adopted a new status in their newfound riches. The modest and humble boys of 1962 and 1963 seemed to disappear after 1964. They bought large mansions in London's suburbs with swimming pools.¹⁵⁴ Paul was dating the young and beautiful actress Jane Asher. George married Patti Boyd, a young model.¹⁵⁵ John ostentatiously bought a Rolls-Royce, Mini-Cooper and Ferrari. He even started to voice his opinions about politics and society in interviews. He went so far as to proclaim the Beatles more popular than Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁶

As the Beatles came into fame and fortune, they shed their old skins. There was little left to resemble the working-class image that had been created earlier. Journalist Maureen Cleave even proclaimed the Beatles as Britain's other royalty.¹⁵⁷ The author Shawn Levy clarified this idea:

The Beatles... weren't the kings so much as the deities of the scene; they created and steered it and never gave the sense of looking back but always forward; they changed their hairstyles or the cut of their clothes and the world took note; the mere fact that one of them was attending a lecture or a restaurant opening or a movie premiere made that event a top news story.¹⁵⁸

The Beatles possessed an aura and authority which made a powerful impact on their new London settings. George Melly gave credit to the rising popularity of many clubs in the Swinging London scene—what he called “hippy joints,” such as Annabel's, the Ad-Lib and the

¹⁵⁴ Maureen Cleave, “How Does a Beatle Live? John Lennon Lives Like This,” in *The Beatles Literary Anthology*, ed. Mike Evans (London: Plexus, 2004), 159.

¹⁵⁵ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 177.

¹⁵⁶ Cleave, “How Does a Beatle Live?,” 159-161.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁵⁸ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 177.

Cromwellian—to celebrities such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. John Lennon and Ringo Starr were responsible for making the Ad-Lib a hot spot.¹⁵⁹

Journalists, such as George Melly and Maureen Cleave, helped invent Swinging London. They illustrated the Swinging City with an imagery of classlessness. The media did the same for the capital as it had done for the Beatles. The media painted Swinging London with an egalitarian image. The media hyped up this picture as the zeitgeist of 1960s London. The fashions, music styles, shops and clubs of the scene were popularized through the media. Women’s magazines, Sunday newspaper supplements and photographers all helped to broadcast the fashions, trends and the chic locales of Carnaby Street and King’s Road.¹⁶⁰ The photographer David Bailey captured the likenesses of the individuals making London a culturally-prosperous city. Bailey’s *Box of Pin-Ups* from 1965 featured John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Brian Epstein, the Rolling Stones, Lord Snowdon (the husband of Princess Margaret), Vidal Sassoon and Michael Caine. Bailey’s work was a “who’s who” of the Swinging City.¹⁶¹ The British press made the celebrities of Swinging London icons of classlessness. Yet, the journalistic piece which most idolized the classless, unrestricted, hedonistic fervor of the city came from the American magazine *Time* in 1966.

On April 15, 1966, *Time* proclaimed London the “Swinging City” in its article “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass.” The article highlighted the sights and sounds which had been making so much noise in the British media. Every hotspot from King’s Road and Soho to the fancy new mansions of the wealthy celebrities was featured in the article. The foppish men’s fashions of the Mods, the discothèques of Piccadilly Circus, the trendy restaurants around town

¹⁵⁹ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 94-101.

¹⁶⁰ Inwood, *A History of London*, 865.

¹⁶¹ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 154-155.

and the parties of Kensington and Chelsea were exalted. London was proclaimed to be the bohemia of the modern world with the spirit of classlessness driving the city. The article extolled, “London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence... The city is alive with birds (girls) and beatles, buzzing with minicars and telly stars... The guards now change at Buckingham Palace to a Lennon and McCartney tune.”¹⁶² It all happened, according to *Time*, in a “bloodless revolution.” The Beatles and the rest of the working classes were able to break into the world of British privilege.¹⁶³ The article helped further formulate an image of classlessness, even though much of the London picture illustrated by the magazine was merely an invention—a myth.

Similar to *Time*’s curiosity in Swinging London, other foreigners were attracted to the Swinging City and its image of classlessness. The setting of this new fashionable London appealed to foreign film directors. Michelangelo Antonioni came to London to capture this very feeling in his 1966 film *Blow-Up*.¹⁶⁴ Antonioni’s film captured the ambiance of Swinging London, but it also critiqued the selfishness and superficiality of the city’s image. In the film, Antonioni’s unnamed protagonist is a celebrity photographer. He drives a fancy car, has casual sexual relations with models and has rich, drug-abusing friends.¹⁶⁵

Throughout the filming Antonioni tried to capture, or what he felt captured, the look and feel of London. He even went so far as to paint the streets, fire hydrants and the façades of houses in the colors he envisioned Swinging London to be. This was a literal metaphor for what the media was doing with London during the 1960s. The press created an artificial façade for the

¹⁶² “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass,” *Time*, 15 Apr. 1966, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835349,00.html>> (accessed 4 Jan. 2007).

¹⁶³ “You Can Walk Across It On the Grass,” *Time*.

¹⁶⁴ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, 162.

¹⁶⁵ *Blow-Up*, DVD, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (1966; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2004).

city. The people involved in the Swinging City were evading reality.¹⁶⁶ This is best witnessed at the end of *Blow-Up*. The protagonist encounters a troupe of mimes pretending to play a game of tennis. First perplexed by the group, the protagonist eventually enters into their imaginary world by participating in their game.¹⁶⁷

While *Time* wrote its article and Antonioni produced his film, the Beatles changed their music and style. They released *Rubber Soul* in late 1965 and *Revolver* in the middle of 1966. With these albums, their music transformed. Their songs became more experimental, and even more so in 1967 with the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The Beatles themselves began to experiment with drugs, starting with marijuana and moving on to LSD.¹⁶⁸ The Beatles were taking full advantage of their Swinging London playground.

Fame brought riches, and this wealth brought them into a class of young, well-to-do hedonists. Their image no longer resembled the humble, working-class boys from Liverpool. They drove the same cars and lived in the same style homes in the same affluent London neighborhoods as the Establishment. By 1966 the Beatles were entirely immersed into the very Establishment they had been so dynamically set apart by in the press of 1963.¹⁶⁹

The Beatles transcended class divisions in the name of fame and fortune, but by 1966 they had effectively created their own exclusive “class”—a subculture of young people who flocked around the “cult” of Swinging London. The population of the Swinging City numbered only three or four hundred people. Yet, this small group flew the banner of egalitarianism. They claimed to be free of class distinctions and class barriers. Nevertheless, they often flirted with

¹⁶⁶ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 162.

¹⁶⁷ *Blow-Up*.

¹⁶⁸ Melly, *Revolt into Style*, 78-81; Martin, *All You Need is Ears*, 199.

¹⁶⁹ Gillett, *The Sound of the City*, 328.

the upper classes and the Establishment. Their clubs and restaurants required membership or a certain amount of “swinging” status. These places became just as exclusive as any of the Establishment’s institutions.¹⁷⁰

The image of classlessness that surrounded the Beatles and Swinging London was an invention of the media. By focusing on the classless imagery of the band and the Swinging City, the press often neglected to report the troubling doubts and uncertainties still plaguing the nation. The very fact that journalists so avidly praised the social mobility of the Beatles attested to the deeply-rooted class distinctions existing in Britain’s social consciousness.¹⁷¹

Britain continued to be preoccupied with class, and the working class still experienced antagonism from the middle and upper classes.¹⁷² Under the new Labour government of Harold Wilson, Britain was troubled by economic problems. Though the nation was beginning to accept the loss of its empire, the country faced other issues. Britain faced political and economic pressures from the United States just as it did during the Suez Crisis of the 1950s.¹⁷³ Britain still suffered from racial discrimination, even in the seemingly more permissive society.¹⁷⁴ While a few working-class Britons like the Beatles did experience the affects of affluence, poverty was still a major problem in Britain. In late 1965, professors Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend published *The Poor and the Poorest*. The report revealed a fact many journalists omitted from their invention of the classless society. There were great numbers of people still living in poverty and the numbers were increasing.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!*, 20, 321.

¹⁷¹ Hewison, *Too Much*, 73-78.

¹⁷² Wheen, *The Sixties*, 129.

¹⁷³ Hewison, *Too Much*, 78-79.

¹⁷⁴ Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society, and Politics* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 165-166.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

While there were genuine transformations in British society during the post-war period, other changes were ephemeral. The image of classlessness surrounding the Beatles and Swinging London was fabricated by the press and media. Britain remained a class-obsessed society. Just as Prime Minister Douglas-Home did in 1963, Margaret Thatcher formed her government in 1979 with an almost exclusive cabinet from the aristocratic ranks of the Establishment.¹⁷⁶

John Lennon eventually saw through the falsities of the 1960s and the image that once formed around the Beatles. He came to denounce the media's construction Swinging London and the false realities associated with this invented imagery. In 1970, Lennon exclaimed, "The people who are in control and in power and the class system and the... bourgeois scene is exactly the same except that there is a lot of middle-class kids with long hair walking around London in trendy clothes."¹⁷⁷

Conclusion

The years leading up to the 1960s appeared to be the harbinger of immense cultural and social change in Great Britain. It was a period of competing insecurities toward the general plight of the nation. Empire, class, race and morality were all important issues. Americanization took a firm hold on British mass culture. People fervently questioned the role of the ruling Establishment. It looked as if the working class was becoming richer. The growth of consumerism led to a new teenage market. Working-class, youth subcultures began to create their own styles, social manners and music. The transformations that occurred during the post-war period seemed to explode in 1963. People appeared to be more open-minded toward issues of sex, class and style. Many believed a more permissive and tolerant society emerged.

¹⁷⁶ Wheen, *The Sixties*, 6-7.

¹⁷⁷ John Lennon in *Rolling Stone* (1970), quoted in Wheen, *The Sixties*, 129.

As Britain experienced a cultural renaissance in 1963, the Beatles entered the British cultural scene. The Beatles symbolized the culmination of these post-war changes. Nevertheless, they did not do this on their own. The Beatles owed part of their success to luck and timing. They were helped along the road to fame and fortune by shrewd management and a press and media willing to promote the band.

As the Beatles emerged on the cultural scene, their management and the nation's press invented marketable images of the group. The initial image of the group was developed by the Beatles' management and the press in 1962 and 1963. The Beatles were envisioned as wholesome, working-class boys with all the distinct markings of provincialism. They were presented as anything but snob and arrogant members of the upper classes.

Likewise, the success of the Beatles in 1963 led to the eventual recognition of the group by the Establishment. As a result, the image of the band transformed. The band's image became de-classed. As a result of their association with American musical influences and the success of *A Hard Day's Night*, the Beatles appeared to transcend notions of class and class divisions in British society. An image of classlessness surrounded the Beatles, and the press continued to play a major role in the embellishment of this imagery.

London was also surrounded by this same image. The capital was transformed into the Swinging City, which distanced itself from the old stuffy symbols of a pompous past. Youthful egalitarianism, fashionable styles, rock 'n' roll tunes and anti-Establishment values epitomized this hedonistic bohemia of the 1960s. Accordingly, the press hid around every corner to capture this spirit. Newspapers, magazines and films helped invent and broadcast the imagery of Swinging London, ultimately crowning the Beatles as its royalty. The Beatles and some of their peers in the London scene did achieve fame and fortune from working-class upbringings. The

journalists, and the subjects of their stories, portrayed this as the slow deterioration of the class system.

In spite of this, the symbols of change eventually disappeared. The spirit of Swinging London faded, and the Beatles split up shortly after the decade ended. Britain remained obsessed with class long after the decade of “classlessness” ended. Britain still faced troubling political and cultural challenges. Studies exposed classlessness as a false portrayal of reality, and poverty continued unabated throughout the 1960s. Ultimately, the Beatles did not achieve the classless ideals the press and media envisaged. The specter of class division in Britain remained long after the curtains were drawn on the 1960s. The reality of class inequality could not be conjured away by the Beatles rock 'n' roll tunes.

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