

The Paradox of Re-Colonization

The British Invasion of American Music and the Birth of Modern Rock

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Zoot suit, white jacket with side vents
Five inches long,
I'm out on the street again
And I'm leaping along,
I'm dressed right for a beach fight,
But I just can't explain
Why that uncertain feeling is still
Here in my brain.
THE WHO, "CUT MY HAIR" (FROM
QUADROPHENIA, 1973)

***QUADROPHENIA*, OR REMINISCENCE ON THE BRITISH INVASION**

The plot of the Who's seminal 1973 rock opera *Quadrophenia* centers on Jimmy, a young man "born in the war" and living in a mining town who is torn between the drudgery of his "dirty job" working-class condition ("I am man who drives a local bus / I take miners to work") and fantasies of individual and class redemption in the hope of impending change:

I'm getting put down,
 I'm getting pushed round,
 I'm being beaten every day,
 My life's fading,
 But things are changing,
 I'm not gonna sit and weep again.¹

His jacket “cut and slim and checked / Maybe a touch of seersucker, with an open neck,” Jimmy rides “a GS scooter with [his] hair cut neat,”² perfectly fitting the profile of the Mod, the late 1950s sharp-dressing, amphetamine-pushing British rebel youngster, instrumental in introducing jazz, blues and R&B to the British (and European) taste. In *Quadrophenia*'s version, Jimmy the Mod is less the turn-of-decade existentialist extension of the coffee shop beatnik and more the precursor of 1970s disenfranchised punk. Jimmy rides to Brighton hoping to recapture the excitement of his teenage rebellion, but finds himself on a rock in the sea, where he contemplates whether to jump in and drown himself, or return to working-class oblivion.

Loosely referring to the real-life events of Easter 1964 in Brighton, when battles between rival youth gangs—the notorious Mods and Rockers—made national and international headlines, *Quadrophenia* could be read as Pete Townshend's artistic autobiography, in which Pete/Jimmy the Mod revisits that pivotal moment in his career, circa 1964, when together with a legion of other British musicians, he was instrumental in taking the rock 'n' roll revolution of the 1950s (personified by the Rockers) to new levels (personified by the Mods) which would shape the course of British and American popular music in the latter part of the century. Music scholar James Perone has described the Mods vs. Rockers dichotomy in early 1960s British culture as “a metaphor for the development of British Invasion rock,”³ a proxy for the cultural tensions out of which, in the five years spanning 1959 to 1964, a revolution in musical and cultural styles emerged on the British music scene and was then exported to America, where it lay the foundation of rock music as it is known today. This essay will explore

1 The Who, “I've Had Enough,” in *Quadrophenia*.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Perone, *Mods, Rockers, and the Music*, 2.

the ways in which American popular music was transplanted to Europe, especially Great Britain, “indigenized” as a consequence and then returned to sender through a phenomenon known as the “British Invasion,” in ways that radically transformed popular music for decades to come.

THE INDIGENIZATION OF ROCK 'N' ROLL IN BRITAIN

Mods and Rockers were youth subgroups in postwar Britain emerging as the offspring of the Teddy Boys (and Teddy Girls), Britain’s first self-styled teenage group. Early in the 1950s, the “Teds” had rejected the austerity of the postwar years by resorting to the fashions of Edwardian-era dandies and established teenagers as a self-identified subculture. In the Teddy Boys’ wake at the end of that decade, and amid a backdrop of exploding juvenile rebellion across the country, Mods and Rockers “represented two very different approaches taken by disenfranchised British youth.”⁴ The Rockers were associated with heavy and powerful motorcycles, favored black leather and their musical tastes ran in the direction of white first-wave American rock ‘n’ rollers such as Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, and especially Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent, who played the UK in a fateful 1960s tour during which the former was killed and the latter badly injured following an automobile accident. By contrast, the Mods were influenced by the Teddy Boys in dress and made a conscious attempt to appear more in touch with the times, or “modern” (hence their denomination), by favoring Italian scooters, modern jazz, ska-influenced sounds and R&B.

Musically speaking, the differences metaphorically staged by the Mods vs. Rockers confrontation revolved around the development of distinct youth musical styles that had their roots in American popular music, rock ‘n’ roll and blues in particular, but also radically departed from them through a process which Dave Laing has defined as “indigenization.” American popular music arrived in Britain in the 1950s through the records that American servicemen and merchant seamen traveling to England brought with them (this being one of the reasons why Liverpool, a major port, became such hotbed of musical activity), and through the live performances of American rock ‘n’ rollers and bluesmen on tour this side of the

4 Ibid.

Atlantic. This led to the development of a fervent, albeit rudimentary, scene of young British musicians who adopted and appropriated American popular music, “indigenized” it, in fact, by reworking American rhythms in the direction of a style closer to Buddy Holly’s, Eddie Cochran’s and Gene Vincent’s rockabilly than the harder-driving R&B-influenced rock ’n’ roll of Little Richard and other African American artists such as Fats Domino or Bo Diddley, to better suit the playing skills of the British musicians as well as the preferences of their audiences. In a similar fashion, the adoption of the blues in Britain led to the birth of a local blues scene in the late 1950s which would push the style to new levels of innovation, emphasizing technical skill as well as a quasi-elitist, anti-commercial stance.

The first generation of homemade rock ’n’ rollers was driven by local artists who often became popular in Britain before the American originals they closely imitated. Leading the pack were acts such as Lonnie Donegan and His Skiffle Group, Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele (the last two contending over the label of “the Elvis of Great Britain” and, like Elvis, soon moving from music to the movies). But just as important was a phalanx of other rockers such as Marty Wilde, Adam Faith, Bill Fury, and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, whose “Shakin’ All Over” topped the British charts during 1960.⁵

Lonnie Donegan, the acclaimed “King of Skiffle,” was also the first British artist to break the US pop charts in 1956. A genre originating in America and typical of urban rent parties in the 1930s, skiffle was extremely popular in the UK after World War II, where it became, in Robyn Sitwell’s words, “essentially an acoustic, low-tech version of rock ’n’ roll.”⁶ It was a hybrid of American jazz, folk, blues, and country music, which could be performed with the makeshift instrumentation available in the penury of the war’s aftermath. It only required a guitar, a bass and a washboard to fully equip a band. Skiffle lay at the root of the Beat revolution of the early 1960s and because it was home-made music, relying on cheap instrumentation and based on simple chords and rhythms, it had a huge appeal on working-class teens with limited financial resources and

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- 5 Johnny Kidd’s single eventually also made the US Top 40 in 1965, at the height of the British Invasion, in a distinctly Beat-sounding cover version by the Guess Who, a Canadian band.
 - 6 Stilwell, “Music of the Youth Revolution,” 435.

limited musical skills, who found it the ideal formula for “instant music”⁷ and instant musicianship. Estimates place the number of skiffle bands in Britain in the late 1950s at anywhere between five and forty thousand.⁸ Most British rock bands (including the Beatles) started out as skiffle bands and evolved more sophisticated styles whenever budgets and technical ability allowed.

Cliff Richard was, in the words of British Invasion historian Michael Bryan Kelly, “the rock ’n’ roller in England, their Elvis [...] credited with getting rock ’n’ roll off the ground.”⁹ His 1958 hit single “Move It,” credited to Cliff Richard and the Drifters (later to be renamed the Shadows, to avoid clashes in the US with the much more popular R&B outfit by the same name) is often described as Britain’s first rock and roll song. “Move It” proclaimed the ethos of rock ’n’ roll as youth music (“it’s rhythm that gets into your heart and soul / Well let me tell you baby it’s called rock ’n’ roll”). It defied those, on both sides of the Atlantic, who were proclaiming its incumbent demise (“They say it’s gonna die but honey please lets face it / Well we just don’t know what’s a going to replace it”), and challenged the shallowness of styles that the music industry was pushing in its wake (“Well ballet and calypso’s have got nothing on / Real country music that just drives along”). John Lennon is reported to have claimed that “before Cliff and the Shadows, there had been nothing worth listening to in British music.”

By the late 1950s, as the thrust of the early rock ’n’ roll revolution was waning on both sides of the Atlantic, a live dance music style which became known as “the big beat,” and later simply “Beat,” developed in Britain, taking the process of “indigenization” even further away from the original US rock ’n’ roll. Combining rhythmic elements of rock ’n’ roll, the vocal textures of doo-wop, the jazz-derived cadences of skiffle, and the African American traditions of R&B and soul, British Beat not only further incorporated American rock ’n’ roll into the British popular music tradition, but paradoxically turned it into a commodity for re-exportation to the American market. Developing across several music scenes across the country, and with distinct outcomes in each of them, British Beat was

7 Millard, *Beatlemania*, 81.

8 *Ibid.*, 98.

9 Kelly, *The Beatle Myth*, 15.

shaped mostly in Birmingham (with bands such as the Spencer Davis Group and the Moody Blues), London (most notably with the Dave Clark Five, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and the Yardbirds) and, most prominently, Liverpool, where it took on the distinguishing denomination “Mersey Beat” and showcased some of the most prolific acts of the genre, including Gerry & the Pacemakers, the Searchers, Cilla Black, and, obviously, the Beatles.

Central to the development of British Beat was a preference for an 8/8 rather than 12/8 beat, which represented a departure from the syncopation of African American rock ’n’ roll rhythmic patterns, less familiar to British musicians and audiences, in favor of “a changeless four-four offbeat” drumming style which “was thoroughly flexible [and] could be used to give a rhythmic propulsion, and therefore a simple dance beat to anything,”¹⁰ including songs originating in traditions far removed from rock ’n’ roll, as in the case of the Music Hall tradition (the British equivalent of vaudeville). Ironically, the development of this new drumming style took place not in England, but in Hamburg, Germany, where several of the Mersey Beat bands (including the Beatles) played lengthy sessions night after night in the city’s red light district during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Comparing the British Beat style to that of Little Richard and Buddy Holly, Dave Laing has noted that

in the Liverpool beat style, the chord-playing of the rhythm guitar was broken up into a series of separate strokes, often one to the bar, with the regular plodding of the bass guitar and crisp drumming behind it. This gave a very different effect from the monolithic character of rock, in that the beat was given not by the duplication of one instrument in the rhythm section by another, but by an interplay between all three. This flexibility also meant that beat music could cope with a greater range of time-signatures and song shapes than rock&roll had been able to.¹¹

The wider musical range of British Beat included not only rock ’n’ roll, black and white, but also the larger tradition of the blues (including R&B), which had undergone a major revival in Britain since 1957, after the Musicians’ Union rescinded its ban against American jazz artists performing in

10 Laing, “Music Hall,” 44.

11 Ibid.

the country. At a time when, in the words of Joe Boyd, “black music of most kinds was a minority taste in white America,”¹² American bluesmen came to regard Europe, and Britain in particular, as a kind of “Promised Land,” where they performed before highly appreciative (mainly white) audiences. As bluesmen such as Bill Big Broonzy, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Muddy Waters toured extensively in Britain in the late 1950s, a youth following for the blues developed, especially among working-class young Britons who “appropriated [it] as a signifier to define and reflect their sense of otherness,”¹³ and creating an ardent circle of aficionado practitioners. The British blues revival climaxed with the formation in 1961 of Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated, Britain’s first amplified urban blues and R&B band and an incubator of a whole generation of white British bluesmen which included Jack Bruce and Eric Clapton (who would later form Cream), John Mayall (founder of the Bluesbreakers in 1963), Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck (forming, with Clapton, the trinity of Yardbirds guitarists; Page would form Led Zeppelin later in the decade), Alvin Lee (founding Ten Years After in 1966), Keith Richards, Mick Jagger, and Charlie Watts (of impending Rolling Stones fame). A significant part in the British blues revival was also played by British music scholar Paul Oliver, whose *Blues Fell This Morning* (1960) remained for decades the definitive book on the subject.

As with rock ’n’ roll, British musicians indigenized the blues, especially in the fact that in Britain the division between folk-blues (purportedly the original, authentic form of blues) and R&B (its urban African American pop variation) was never as clear cut as the purists wanted it to be. And ironically, as with rock ’n’ roll, the British adoption of the blues prepared for its popularization in later years among white, middle-class Americans: like the rock ’n’ roll revival, the blues revival stormed America in the early 1960s not from its birthplace in the US South but as a product of transatlantic dialog. The nature and ways of this transatlantic dialog will be the focus of the remaining part of this essay.

12 Boyd, *White Bicycles*, 67.

13 Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 74.

THE BRITISH INVASION OF AMERICAN MUSIC

British artists had tried to penetrate the American music market, by far the largest and most profitable of all, since the mid 1950s, when Lonnie Donegan peaked at number eight in the Billboard pop charts with his first US release, a skiffle rendering of Leadbelly's "Rock Island Line." Donegan broke into the US Top 10 again in 1961. Cliff Richard made headway in 1959 with "Living Doll," peaking at number 30 for one week, and again in 1963 with "Lucky Lips," which did not make it past the number 62 spot, to return in the Billboard Top 40 in 1964 (the magic year for Brit rock) with "It's all in the game."

Besides Lonnie Donegan and Cliff Richard, very few British acts appeared in the US charts before 1964. Those who did were mostly irrelevant to the Beat and rock revolution to come. As Michael Kelly has pointed out in his meticulous chronicle of the British Invasion, "most of the British records which hit the US charts [prior to 1964] had been . . . either jazz-oriented, instrumentals, skiffle, or a combination";¹⁴ in other words, they were almost indistinguishable from the musical blandness that dominated the US charts in the late 1950s and early 1960s. English imports were one of many reservoirs (which also included Latin, mild jazz, and instrumentals) to which the American music industry was resorting in the attempt to clamber out of the swamp which had followed the demise of early rock 'n' roll.

Such demise had occurred towards the end of the 1950s, as original rock 'n' roll had fallen out of favor in the US due to a number of concurring factors, mostly concurrent with the demise of several of the key players.¹⁵ Little Richard retired from music to become a born-again Christian in 1957; Elvis enlisted in the army in 1958, and then took off to Hollywood for a full decade; Jerry Lee Lewis was blacklisted from American radio following the staunch moral backlash of his third marriage to a thirteen-year-old cousin in the same year; Buddy Holly died in a plane crash on February 3, 1959 (a date remembered as "the day the music died"); Alan Freed, rock 'n' roll's legendary DJ and promoter, was fired from radio and TV in 1959 after being indicted for payola payments, a well established practice in the

14 Kelly, *The Beatle Myth*, 18.

15 See Altschuler, *All Shook Up*; Stilwell, "Music of the Youth Revolution"; Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody*; Arnold Shaw, *The Rockin' '50s*.

music industry (also known as “pay for play”); and Chuck Berry was imprisoned a couple of years later under the Mann Act for supposedly transporting an underaged girl across state lines for immoral purposes.

Music scholars have offered diverging interpretations on what followed the eclipsing of rock ’n’ roll in America in the late 1950s. Those looking at the dynamics of the music market have argued that, beginning in 1959, popular music in the US became bland and formulaic, driven by large doses of “teen” sounds put out by a growing number of independent labels. Rock historian Reebee Garofalo, for example, has argued that, as a “rather limited science,” rock ’n’ roll had—by the end of the 1950s—been absorbed into “the collective unconscious” of singers, songwriters, and producers, who used its fairly elementary formulas to endlessly mass-produce derivative artifacts, known in the industry as “schlock rock.”¹⁶ This brought about “a new generation of white, middle-class teen idols”—Fabian, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell, and others—whose musical backgrounds barely scratched the surface of rock ’n’ roll. A more sophisticated, and ultimately more compelling, interpretation has come from scholars interested not so much in what was happening in the sales charts, but rather in what was brewing beneath them. These scholars have argued that the 1959–1993 period is better described as a moment of transition in which “a genuine fusion of black and white music” took place, “on a level of intimacy not encountered since the early 1950s or, arguably, the mid-1920s.”¹⁷ Among African American artists, Solomon Burke, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and others demonstrated, as Hatch and Millward have argued, that an R&B artist “could still retain a vital relationship with the black audience while surviving in the teenage pop market and in a Las Vegas night-club context.”¹⁸ Among white artists, the mainstreaming of the folk revival brought renewed interest in the African American roots of American popular music and a quest to merge these with rock ’n’ roll. Bob Dylan, an early rock ’n’ roller who had embraced the blues through folk music in the late 1950s, did

16 Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out*, 143.

17 See Friedlander and Miller, *Rock and Roll*; Hatch and Millward, *From Blues to Rock*.

18 Hatch and Millward, *From Blues to Rock*, 91.

just that, with his quest for a style which became epitomized by his 1965 defining single “Like a Rolling Stone.”¹⁹

It is in the five-year hiatus between the demise of early rock 'n' roll and the Beatles' historic landing at JFK airport on February 7, 1964 that the roots of this new style were laid, as the British Invasion of American music took shape. According to music historian Charlie Gillett, “Britain served the useful function of re-establishing popular music as a medium for personal expression rather than as the raw material for mass-produced entertainment.”²⁰ The Beat movement, which had been developing since the turn of the decade in Liverpool, Birmingham and London (but also as far away as Newcastle, Glasgow and Dublin), provided those sounds of self-expression and, despite some initial hesitation, America embraced them with sudden and unprecedented enthusiasm. The first British Beat single to appear in the Billboard charts was Del Shannon's 1963 cover of an early Beatles number, “From me to you,” which Shannon (an American artist) had heard during the rehearsals of an all-star concert in London in which both he and the Beatles were featured. Faithfully replicating the Fab Four's original arrangement, Shannon's version can be legitimately be viewed as the spearhead in a trend reversal, in which British popular music no longer imitated American formulas, but in fact set novelty trends for the US market. That same year, the Beatles, who had already had three successful releases in Britain (in late 1962 and early and mid 1963), made repeated attempts at breaking the American market, all of them aborted.

Only on the strength of their next two singles, “She Loves You,” released in the summer of 1963, and “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” released in the fall of the same year, was EMI, the Beatles' British label, able to persuade Capitol Records, its US counterpart, to put their commercial muscle behind a major promotional campaign for the band, to include the US release of their latest singles and major television and live appearances. “I Want To Hold Your Hand” was released in America on January 2, 1964 and within three weeks shot to the top of the pop charts, where it remained for seven straight weeks. In the second week of January, Capitol put out “She Loves You,” which replaced the previous hit at the top of the charts in

19 *Ibid.*, 110. For an in-depth discussion of the making and implications of Dylan's “Like a Rolling Stone”, see Greil Marcus, *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*.

20 Gillett, *Sound of the City*, 230.

late March. “Please Please Me” (an earlier Beatles hit in the British charts) followed one week later, rapidly climbing to number three. These singles invariably championed the driving “Beat” rhythm which British rock ‘n’ rollers had “indigenized” from American sources. Before the year was out, the Beatles had charted 34 singles in the Billboard Top 100 pop (a historic high), six of which had climbed to number one, two to number two, and one to number three. Nineteen Beatles singles made it to the Top 40 in 1964 alone, including all of the four songs which had been unsuccessfully launched on the American market the previous year. Beatlemania had swept the US and the band had become, in Lennon’s infamous words, “more popular than Jesus.”

No account of the Beatles’ sudden storming of the US pop charts in 1964 is complete without reference to their first US tour in February of that year. Lengthily discussed in print and film, the Beatles performed to screaming sold-out audiences in Washington, DC and New York City’s Carnegie Hall, as well as making three appearances on the most powerful vehicle of youth culture promotion in America at the time: the Ed Sullivan Show. The television appearances drew audiences in excess of 70 million viewers each, with the first one of Sunday, February 9 reaching a record crowd of 73 million viewers—about two-fifths of the total American population and the largest number of viewers recorded on American television until that day. The documentary *What’s Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964), by celebrated direct cinema auteurs Albert and David Maysles,²¹ brilliantly captures the spirit of that first US tour, including the band’s quick wit during press conferences (Q: “What do you think of Beethoven?” / RINGO: “Great. Especially his poems”),²² crowd hysteria, and evidence of the Beatles’ disbelief of their own success, best captured in the director’s repeated filming of Paul McCartney obsessively glued to a transistor radio, contemplating his own stardom on the American airwaves.

21 An edited version of the documentary was re-released in DVD as *The Beatles: Their First US Visit* (and credited to Kathy Dougherty, Susan Frömke and Albert Maysles) in 1999.

22 For a full script of this press conference, see, for instance, *The Beatles Ultimate Experience*, Beatles press conference, American arrival, February 7, 1964, accessed June 26, 2012, <http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/db1964.0207.beatles.html>.

McCartney's amazement is our own, and a way of addressing it lies in what I call "the paradox of re-colonization," the conundrum by which a whole generation of young UK musicians, raised in the penury of postwar Britain and exposed to American rock 'n' roll and blues mostly through imported records, were able to master these style's key formal elements, absorbing instrumental techniques and singing styles (and accents) which were musically and culturally foreign to them, then take that newly-learned lingo to new stylistic heights and re-export it to the US, "re-colonizing" American music with American's own sounds. This is the paradox to which I will return momentarily.

THE MUSICAL ROOTS OF THE BRITISH BEAT

Although it was singles that determined an artist's success during the rock 'n' roll and Beat years (rock albums began to outsell singles precisely in the wake of the British Invasion), it is the early albums of the British Invasion bands that tell the full story of their music and reveal the full range of their sound matrix. The Beatles' first, second, fourth and fifth albums, as well as their fifth EP, "Long Tall Sally," all released between 1962 and 1965, included a large number of cover songs, spanning the wide range of musical influences which had shaped their sound. Such influences were no less than a comprehensive synthesis of American popular music.²³ Although no traditional rock 'n' roll number appears on their first album, *Please Please Me*, the pioneers of the early rock 'n' roll revolution are very well represented in all of the Beatles' subsequent releases which include cover songs. Chuck Berry ("Roll Over Beethoven," "Rock and Roll Music"), Carl Perkins ("Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby," "Honey Don't," "Match Box"), Little Richard ("Long Tall Sally," "Hey, Hey, Hey, Hey!") and Larry Williams ("Dizzy Miss Lizzy," "Slow Down") all figure prominently in the band's early albums. In that genre, the Beatles also cover Buddy Holly's "Words of Love" and "Kansas City," a song written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the Jewish Tin Pan alley songwriting duo responsible for Elvis' defining "Hound Dog" of 1956. R&B, in its various sub-forms, is

23 It is interesting to notice that the Beatles stopped including covers in their albums roughly at the same time they stopped performing live.

another central node of attention in the Beatles' early albums. Their first and second LPs include four "girl group" covers: The Shirelles' "Boys" and "Baby It's You," The Cookies' "Chains," and The Marvellettes' "Please Mr. Postman." This last number is also one of three Motown covers, also including Smokey Robinson's "You Really Got a Hold on Me" and "Money (That's What I Want)," the Detroit label's first all-time release, co-written by the label's founder Berry Gordy and recorded by Barrett Strong in 1959. The Motown sound had captivated the Beatles for its unique combination of vocal harmony and powerful rhythm, characterized by its intense use of the back-beat, which once prompted Lennon to ask the Four Tops: "When you cats go into the studio, what does the drummer beat on to get that back-beat? You use a bloody tree or something?"²⁴ Among the R&B classics, the Beatles's early albums included covers of Phil Medley and Bert Russell's "Twist and Shout," which had previously been recorded by The Top Notes and by The Isley Brothers, as well as the lesser known "Mr. Moonlight," a song written by Roy Lee Johnson and quite popular in Britain at the time among R&B cognoscenti. Beatles covers also included one Tin Pan Alley standard ("A Taste of Honey"), two soul ballads (Arthur Alexander's "Anna" and Richard Drapkin's "Devil in His Heart"), the Broadway tune "Till There Was You," and a country & western number ("Act Naturally"), to demonstrate how well-versed the Mersey musicians were in the gamut of American popular music and to testify to the range of influences that textured their Beat sounds.

Although the choice of songs for the early Beatles albums was obviously dictated by factors that went beyond the band's individual preferences and were determined by production and marketing decisions, these selections nevertheless emphasize to what extent the Beatles were "imaginary Americans," as Leslie Fiedler once remarked.²⁵ And if classic rock 'n' roll was the central pillar of their sound, R&B and Soul were just as crucial in the making of their musical style. In fact rock 'n' roll covers in their first two albums were outnumbered by R&B and Soul classics, a genre in which the Beatles found the natural evolution of rockabilly, especially in the way

24 John Lennon, as quoted in Oscar Bettison, *"I Wanna Take You Higher: The Stylistic Development and Cultural Dissemination of Post-Psychedelic Funk Music"*. ProQuest, UMI Dissertation Publishing (September 3, 2011), 6.

25 For a discussion of Fiedler's contention and of the Beatles' international trajectory, see Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s*, 60–61.

that it emphasized groups over solo artists, sophisticated arrangements over the more elementary formulae of early rock 'n' roll, and doo-wop-derived vocal harmonies over individual vocal performance.

Blues, R&B, and Soul proved to be crucial ingredients for the music of other British bands which also ranked high in the US pop charts in 1964 following the Beatles' breakthrough. In February, a London Beat (typically known as "Tottenham sound") outfit called The Dave Clark Five shot to number six with "Glad All Over," a driving R&B single written by two of the band members, Dave Clark and Mike Smith, and featuring some of the key ingredients of the Stax sound—a persistent saxophone line and percussion drumming—molded into a production closely reminiscent of Phil Spector's wall-of-sound experiments at Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles. As the Dave Clark Five stormed the US charts again a few months later with "Can't You See That She's Mine" (peaking at number four), another London band, The Rolling Stones, named after a Muddy Waters blues classic, appeared for the first time in the Billboard charts with "Not Fade Away," their third UK release. Credited to Buddy Holly and Norman Petty, "Not Fade Away" had been originally recorded by Holly's band The Crickets in 1957 and was based on the characteristic Bo Diddley beat, a beat drawn straight out of West African rhythms.

Two British Invasion bands joined the Beatles at the top of the US charts in 1964: an outfit from Newcastle upon Tyne called The Animals, which went to number one in September with an electric rendering of a blues traditional, "The House of the Rising Sun," also covered by Bob Dylan on his first album a couple of years earlier; and Manfred Mann, a jazz and R&B-influenced London band, whose "Do Wah Diddy" had originally been recorded by the predominantly-female black group The Exciters and was rooted in gospel-style call-and-response vocals. Manfred Mann's version of the song typified the British Beats' adoption of African American music: while preserving the call-and-response vocals, the group simplified the more sophisticated snare drum work of the original, replacing its heavy syncopation with a double pair of maracas that Mann played himself (a style Mick Jagger was very quick to pick up) and flavoring it with the distinctive wheedling tone of the Vox Continental organ.

To sum up, all British Beat bands had a deep commitment to many aspects of African American music. While for the Beatles it was mostly R&B, especially Motown, for the Stones, the Animals and Manfred Mann it

was mostly the blues, together with Memphis R&B, as their early albums bear witness. The Animals drew on both country and city bluesmen, John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed in particular, and on R&B (Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, and Joe Tex especially); city blues was the foundation of Manfred Mann's sound (the band's first album included songs written or performed by Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters); the Stones' early albums were, in the words of bassist Bill Wyman, "totally obsessed by the blues,"²⁶ from early master Robert Johnson to the city sounds of Muddy Waters to Irma Thomas' R&B classic "Time is on My Side," which became a standard in the Stones' repertoire, although "black" rock 'n' roll (Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley) was also an important influence.

THE PARADOX OF RE-COLONIZATION

More British Invasion bands broke into the US Top 10 in 1964, including The Zombies, a band from St. Albans, Hertfordshire, whose "She's Not There," penned by Rod Argent, offered an unusual combination of cool jazz-tinged atmosphere, vocal harmonics, and double-time drumming (an explicit quotation of funk-oriented R&B rhythms)—a formula which many described as "ahead of its time."²⁷ Other significant chart-toppers were Gerry and the Pacemakers and Billy Kramer and the Dakotas, two Mersey Beat bands who, like the Beatles, were part of Brian Epstein's stable of artists; and the Kinks, a London outfit which proved highly influential during the British Invasion for their merging of a wide range of influences, from music hall to R&B to folk.

Before 1964 was out, 25 British Invasion bands had entered the Billboard charts, with a total of 93 hits, 60 of which ranked in the Top Forty for at least a week.²⁸ The following year, the number climbed to 108, setting an all-time record, and remained significantly high until 1968, showcasing, alongside already established names, new arrivals which included the Spencer Davis Group, from Birmingham (Steve Winwood, the band's leader, is author of a long string of R&B derived rock classics, including

26 Wynn, *Cross the Water Blues*, 6.

27 Kelly, *Beatle Myth*, 42.

28 All references to the Billboard charts are from Joel Whitburn's standard compilation, *Billboard Hot 100 Charts: The Sixties*.

“Gimme Some Lovin’”), the Them, from Dublin (fronted by R&B-influenced lead singer Van Morrison), the Yardbirds (a blues-inflected outfit from London, famous for enlisting, in close succession, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck as lead guitarists), Herman’s Hermits, the Troggs, the Hollies, and the Who, whose engrossing appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival of 1967 made them an overnight sensation in the US.

Beginning in 1968, the British Beat in the US began to wane due to factors in one way or another connected with a dramatic transformation of the American popular music scene in the wake of the British Invasion. The first of these factors was the development of an American native Beat movement, closely replicating the sounds of the British Beat bands, just as the British bands had been hard at work earlier in the decade imitating American sounds. The Monkees, assembled in Hollywood in 1966 for the launch of a television sit-com centering on four aspiring rock ‘n’ rollers, became the American response to the Beatles; likewise, The Turtles, another LA-based Beat band, and the Beau Brummels, from San Francisco, closely replicated not only the sounds but also the looks (and at times the British-inflected accents) of their transatlantic counterparts. Another factor in the decline of the British Invasion was the growing attention that African American music, and especially Motown, was receiving in the US pop charts (from 1965 through 1971 Motown had at least ten Top 10 hits per year) and the more funk-oriented soul records coming out the southern studios in Memphis and Muscle Shoals. Moreover, the concurrent development of a blue-eyed soul scene, with bands such as The Righteous Brothers and The Rascals, pointed to the fact that more white American acts were turning to African American music for new directions.

The driving force behind the decline of the British Invasion in America after 1968 was primarily, in Elija Wald’s words, “a major change in orientation [*from*] rock ‘n’ roll (the earlier, teen-oriented music) to rock (its myriad post-Beatles offshoots).”²⁹ Beginning at mid decade (a good starting point might be the historic recording of Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” in August 1965 and his infamous “electric” appearance at the Newport Folk Festival the previous month), American rock extended the adoption of African American musical language to a wider cultural territory and

29 Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 237, italics mine.

presiding over the inception of a plethora of subgenres, including folk rock (which stressed poetic or socially conscious lyrics with acts such as Dylan and The Byrds), blues rock (Steppenwolf, The Butterfield Blues Band, and the genre's British originators which had become a staple on the American charts), country rock (Creedence Clearwater Revival, Band, Poco), southern rock (The Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd), psychedelia (The Shondelles, Vanilla Fudge, The Doors), west-coast sounds (Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, CSN&Y), funk rock (The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Sly & the Family Stone), and jazz-fusion rock (Blood, Sweat & Tears, Chicago).

And although it would be improper to locate the British Invasion as the sole factor for the emergence of rock, it was arguably its main enabling factor: specialists and aficionados might disagree with the finer subgenre distinctions, but the fact remains that the British Invasion was instrumental in the emergence of a rock scene in the mid to late 1960s, which took American popular music in so many new and transatlantic directions. This takes us back to the question of the “paradox.”

In his study of the British Invasion, Michael Kelly has argued that the British Invasion bands’ “penchant for redoing US hit songs of the recent and not so recent past” was a “paradoxical situation,” the paradox, according to Kelly, lying in the fact that although the British bands had become popular in America because they presented themselves as an alternative to American rock ’n’ roll, “nearly all of them redid old American material.”³⁰ Although I share Kelly’s idea of the paradox, I rather see it operating in another, much more decisive direction. The paradox of the British Invasion was, in my view, not in the music, but rather in the fact that it took precisely these British musicians—teenagers in the late 1950s who had grown up absorbing and replicating American blues, R&B and rock ’n’ roll—to persuade white American audiences (driving record sales in the US) that African American music was the language of the postwar generation. In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), which is set in 1964, Thomas Pynchon satirizes the British Invasion through the collective character of The Paranoids, a fictional band composed of American teenagers who speak with an ordinary American accent but are instructed to watch British TV so that they can

30 Kelly, *Beatle Myth*, 28.

sound genuinely British.³¹ Possibly an explicit reference to the Beatles (who called themselves Los Paranoias),³² The Paranoias also function as a reminder of the uncanny nature of the British Invasion, whose bands spoke in strong (often working-class) British accents but sang with a distinct American twang. Moreover, those white working class Britons swept white America by drawing from a cultural reservoir that white America had always resisted coming to terms with.

It took the re-colonization of American music by a swarming British Invasion in the mid-1960s to enable the rise of a full-fledged rock movement in America and to endow Americans with a powerful cultural reservoir capable of granting a whole generation “a sound of their own.”³³ Discussing the birth of southern rock, Mark Kemp articulates this very paradox:

It’s ironic that the genesis of southern rock goes back to the British Invasion of the mid-1960s, when acts such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Yardbirds, the Animals, Cream, and Led Zeppelin took southern American musical traditions such as the blues, country, and early rock & roll, and transformed them into a new sound. It was an exciting new style of rock & roll that reintroduced southern musical traditions to a new generation of Americans, including young southerners, who were hungry for a sound of their own, a sound that was distinct from the music of their parents yet culturally familiar.³⁴

It took a sort of cultural triangulation, from Memphis and Chicago to the poverty-ridden urban centers of postwar Britain and back to the golden gates of the Billboard charts, to empower mainstream American popular music with the sounds of its own African American roots. The British Invasion musicians had adopted American blues (and its offshoots) for its musical merit, largely unaware of the cultural suspicion which had until that point segregated it from white audiences in America and which had in the process rendered the racial (and racist) critique inherent in American blues irrelevant. In fact, the early British invasion coincided with an albeit short-lived moment in the American music industry when the separation of white and black charts vanished, as the two consumer markets appeared to con-

31 See Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s*, 60–61.

32 See Craig Cross, *Beatles-discography.com*, 393.

33 Kemp, *Dixie Lullaby*, xx.

34 Ibid.

verge into one largely shared template of popular music tastes.³⁵ To the British youngsters absorbing records imported from the US in the mid to late 1950s, American blues did not equal, as singer Cassandra Wilson effectively summarized, “low class, low income, sadness,” but rather, in Keith Richards’ words, “the most important thing America has ever given to the world.”³⁶ And when British music had a chance to break through the US pop market, it had the paradoxical effect of suddenly neutralizing that cultural uneasiness and pushing it to the side of the equation. “One obvious effect of this European glamour,” emphasizes Elijah Wald, “was to separate rock ‘n’ roll from its associations with juvenile delinquency and, more enduringly, with black Americans. Another was to smooth the path to its acceptance as art.”³⁷

By the mid-1960s, the British Invasion had become instrumental in enabling the emergence of an American rock scene, at first as an extension of that invasion, then as an autonomous cultural movement. Although raising issues of whether, in the words of Brian Ward, “whites should even try to express themselves using the music of a community of which they are not members, grounded in historical experiences they never share,”³⁸ the British Invasion helped erode long-held American myths of cultural identity. It would obviously be naïve to claim that the emergence of rock obliterated race issues in American music (let alone racial segregation in America): in spite of its roots in the blues, American rock became a largely white affair, with its own racist (or at best noncommittal) undertones. As Brian Ward has extensively documented, white consumption and adoption of black music did not eradicate racial prejudice; in fact, it was “deeply inscribed with many of the social, sexual, moral and economic and even racial values of the dominant culture” and ended up reinforcing racial stereotypes.³⁹ But it remains a fact that, beginning in the 1960s and into the following decades, the blues gained unconditional acceptance in white America. When in the summer of 1967 the Monterey Pop Festival catapulted Otis Redding to instant stardom among a white crowd that “complete[ly understood] the mu-

35 Billboard discontinued its R&B charts between November 1963 and January 1965.

36 Richards and Pallington West, *What Would Keith Richards Do?* 99.

37 Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 233.

38 Ward, “That White Man, Burdon,” 3–5.

39 Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 4.

sical ley lines being drawn that night between rock and deep soul”⁴⁰ and prepared Jimi Hendrix (who had made his first US appearance precisely at Monterey) to become, within a couple of years, the highest-paid rock musician in the world,⁴¹ it was clear that the American popular music scene had become less focused on the race of musicians, and more on the stuff of their music.⁴² And although white artists remained for many years more marketable than the African American acts they admired,⁴³ the British Invasion also marked a defining watershed in the development of late twentieth-century popular music in the US, its shift away from early rock ‘n’ roll to a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated Mod aesthetics mixing African American styles and defining rock for the decades to come.

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40 Inglis, *Performance and Popular Music*, 35.

41 Lang, *Road to Woodstock*, 84.

42 See also Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come*, 89.

43 Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out*, 167.

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