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ABSTRACT

The period between the 1930s and 1970s witnessed numerous forms and styles of music find attraction among Americans separated by distance, race, backgrounds, and time. The emergence of rock ‘n’ roll integrated the struggles to find and control work and economic activities after World War II, and informed meanings of listening and connections to other Americans, groups, and societies. The following dissertation looks at specific performers and musicians between the 1930s and 1970s to track a history where developments in work, distribution, and access generated interest in popular music and the recording industry while facilitating cultural value. Explicitly, the dissertation examines white, male musicians that influenced and demonstrated music as work and reflected cultural developments in the United States over that time.

From western swing musicians in Texas during the Depression and World War II, through a specific case study of Lubbock, Texas, and Buddy Holly in the 1940s and 1950s, to the monumental success and popularity of the Beatles and Bob Dylan in the 1960s and 1970s, the dissertation explores how popular music and rock ‘n’ roll emphasized worker productivity and output, and reshaped economic and cultural interactions within leisure and entertainment. The following dissertation directly evaluates the prominence of white, male musicians negotiating influential and idealized roles as workers and leaders in American society and culture. Rock ‘n’ roll holds an important role in American history and this dissertation explores how race, class, and gender factored to impact the music industry based on consumer demands and trends, including relevant technological and communications developments.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: ROCK ‘N’ ROLL, POPULAR MUSIC, AND WORKING IN AMERICAN CULTURE

In early August 1966, the debut issue of teen magazine *Datebook* published the Maureen Cleave interview with John Lennon where he compared the attention given to the Beatles as role models and leaders with the societal place and impact of religions, in particular Christianity. Lennon considered the Beatles “more popular than Jesus” because the band and popular musicians were awarded overzealous attention while religious activities seemed to decline in the mid-1960s. Arriving in the United States for the Beatles’ third American tour that month, Lennon and his band mates immediately faced fall-out and backlash from Americans about the meaning of his “more popular than Jesus” comment. Although Lennon’s commentary was misinterpreted, the anger and outcry directed at the Beatles mirrored the responses the band enjoyed two and a half years earlier when they first arrived in the United States with “I Want to Hold Your Hand.” While some fans ignored the sensationalism around the comment, others disavowed the band and called for record burnings and radio boycotts. As record burnings of the Beatles’ music took place in numerous southern communities and the Ku Klux Klan picketed selected concerts, the band and their management confronted and negotiated the delicate situation. During an afternoon show in Memphis, Tennessee, the band believed gunfire opened on them when a firecracker was thrown onstage. In the end, the “more popular than Jesus” comment and backlash resulted in no violence, but the episode illustrated expectations
among consumers and critics about musicians identified as white, male, and middle class.\textsuperscript{1}

Fittingly, in the town I later grew up, Longview, Texas, the local radio station KLUE organized a bonfire for Beatles records on Friday, August 12, 1966. While Beatles records burned, a crowd of around 1,500 sang Elvis Presley songs and a local rock ‘n’ roll group played alongside a cacophony of cheers and boos. The next day, a bolt of lightning hit the station, destroying equipment and sending the station director to a local hospital for observation. Youth culture in the 1960s reveled in and interpreted popular musicians and their output as messages and directions, often assigning political and economic roles to performers and identifying personally and individually with popular music. Increasingly, despite ties between rock ‘n’ roll and the postwar working class, musicians and their audiences faced scrutiny from mainstream and conservative Americans, including the working class, and took on qualities associated with the counterculture and a middle class capable of questioning and reflecting a postwar “consumer commodity society.” After the furor subsided, the Beatles played their tour, but years of relentless hysteria and screams directed at the band as a product and not productive musicians or artists, as well as the “more popular than Jesus” controversy, factored in the band’s decision to stop touring, and the Beatles never returned to perform or tour in the United States.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} John Lennon et al, \textit{The Beatles Anthology} (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 223-227. The interview was pulled from a series of article Maureen Cleave of the London \textit{Evening Standard} conducted with all four Beatles’ members in March 1966. “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that, I’m right and I will be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first – rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right, but his disciples were think and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruins it for me.”

\textsuperscript{2} Van Craddock, “Longview's Beatles Bonfire Turned Into a Shocking Event,” \textit{Center for Regional Heritage Research} (blog), September 2011, accessed June 17,
The reactions of Americans to the “more popular than Jesus” comment in August 1966 serve as useful tools in a multi-faceted examination of various intersections of ideas and issues within the diverse society and culture of the United States. The Beatles may be a quintessential example to discuss the tumultuous 1960s, but the band demonstrated the development of popular music as a revolutionary force and presence in the lives of Americans. Historian George Lipsitz, writing about popular music’s ability to inform history argued “Popular music is not history, but it can be read historically, dialogically, and symptomatically to produce valuable evidence about change over time. Popular music can mark the present as history, helping us understand where we have been and where we are going.” Throughout history, the controversial politicized statement can hold as much value as the one-hit wonder, illustrating where popular music promoted a diversity of tastes among Americans. When Lennon made his comment in 1966, the Beatles were perceived as safe, a product young Americans could easily consume, and seemed to represent little challenge beyond inspiring hysterical behavior among girls. But, Lennon’s comment created furor from those previously unchallenged sectors because the band fit modes celebrated in American society: the white, male worker outwardly productive and contributing to economic success. After World War II, the construction of the “consumer commodity society” facilitated the explosion of popular music as a valuable personal and community tool. Lipsitz’ examinations indicated how popular

music and “popular culture often become focal points for the expression of desires suppressed in other spheres—desires for connections to others, for meaningful work, for a culture not based on lies.” Popular music is important personally, culturally, and in the community, not least because it entertains and can organize, but also generates skills and a trade within the marketplace.³

Popular music exemplifies a form of entertainment accessible to all yet reliant upon historical developments and specific reactions to events and issues within society and culture. By the 1960s, popular music heavily influenced Americans in both political and class contexts due to technological and industrial output that produced consumer goods and provided affluence and income for workers. To cite these elements as valuable and contested within American culture demands understanding how the specific components reached that accessibility and potentiality, as well as connected local, regional, and national communities. Acceptance of new music and affluence into lives and communities followed movement and technologies, but those changes were not universally accepted, often meeting both excitement and backlash. In the postwar period of the late 1940s and 1950s, such acceptance occurred due to increased industrial activity and consumer products that demonstrated success and American strength. Despite those opportunities and documented influence, rock ‘n’ roll particularly faced scrutiny around its performers and meanings related to questions of race, gender, and sex. Meanwhile, technological developments undermined issues

of class because more Americans accessed those goods in one form or another (class remained relevant through quality and value differences).  

Musicians between the Depression and the 1970s experienced vast new opportunities performing for audiences and producing consumer goods, but ultimately encountered societal expectations that negated the costs of working in the music industry or holding a career in music. The prominent individual that personified the successful musician was white and male, despite countless alternative representations that explicitly negated that assumption. With the Depression, performing for work provided escapes from economic concerns and contributed to entertainment and leisure for Americans, but after the war, expectations changed the meanings associated with performing, touring, and regularly interacting with audiences and consumers. In the midst of new economic opportunities in the 1940s and 1950s, technological expansions in recording and emphasis on that aspect of the music industry complicated ideas about working as a musician or enjoying economic security in those careers. Individuals like Buddy Holly, the Beatles, and Bob Dylan, to name examples discussed in this dissertation, enjoyed popular acclaim, but conflicted with roles newly ascribed to them and how limited economic prospects were with recording. Performing emerged as work defined less by enjoyment or an arena for innovation, and more as a specific place to gain regular income, despite a rapidly growing and expanding music industry through the 1960s and 1970s.

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4 In Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947-1977 (New York: Fireside, 2000), James Miller called rock ‘n’ roll a “mode of social interaction” with “a more or less fixed repertoire of sounds and styles and patterns of behavior” (18).
The identification of musicians as workers in the twentieth century revolved around connections constructed by historical notions of the American worker as white and male, and massively popular and successful musicians like the Beatles and Bob Dylan championed new methods that fulfilled expectations that the authentic, productive musician was white and male. The postwar music industry offered work and careers defined by mass appeal and popular success, but also offered positions for musicians and performers to contribute social and political viewpoints that factored in a decisive and active time period for Americans. To accomplish that cultural impact, easily visible in the early twenty-first century, musicians across the United States (and in areas affected by American economic and political power) expanded the social role of music in dispersed communities to include economic opportunities and work performing in local and regional markets that connected with larger economies tied to urban communities. The introduction of the radio nearly a century ago facilitated those opportunities during the 1920s and 1930s, but the cultural changes within Americans’ everyday lives are more complicated. Technology afforded greater access and awareness to entertainment and leisure, but required musicians actively contribute skills and work to expanding local, regional, and popular trends, in those markets and through potential openings for further distribution.

The Depression of the 1930s fostered desires for new work opportunities, as well as affordable and easily accessible entertainment, and the radio provided ample means for the production and consumption of the latter. White and male musicians took advantage of these opportunities, finding outlets for skills previously untapped by agricultural or industrial output of the 1920s and early 1930s. In Texas, western swing
musicians obscured input and diminished roles played by African Americans, in particular, and women, to an extent, because they personified the American worker overcoming widespread economic suffering. Radio broadcasts by western swing musicians like Milton Brown in Fort Worth, Texas, and Bob Wills in Tulsa, Oklahoma, found audiences eager for entertainment, and traveled to perform shows for audiences familiar with the musicians due to the radio. Importantly, these musicians emerged into entertainment careers from experiences as wage earners in the working class, and connected well to audiences. Throughout the 1940s these musicians moved with their audiences, providing evidence of how Americans responded to entertainment and leisure during and after the war, and the impetus for increased accessibility in the postwar era. These western swing musicians symbolized Americans’ success in the Depression and World War II, identified as white men utilizing untapped skills to capture and maintain productivity and output.

In the decades following the war, popular music expanded American ideas and exposed a diverse population and set of ideals within the United States. Performers and musicians followed migrating American workers from rural communities to capture audiences at state fairs, across regions, on national television, and increasingly by visiting and touring foreign nations. In his study of rock ‘n’ roll, historian Michael T. Bertrand explored the role of popular music in the intersections of young Americans, taste, and issues of race in the 1950s, commenting that “Rock ‘n’ roll … fused the music and mannerisms of both the black and white working-class” and “provides an invaluable glimpse into how individuals and groups used popular culture to define themselves and the world around them.” Furthermore, Bertrand points out
“technological and communication innovations inside and outside the media, conflicts and resolutions within the music business, material prosperity and a consumer culture that such abundance generated, changing attitudes toward sexual activity, and dramatic postwar demographic shifts all contributed greatly to rock ‘n’ roll’s emergence and resulting popularity.” Again, technology served to undermine class, race, and sexual divisions in the postwar era, but rock ‘n’ roll as a method of work revealed negotiations and changes in homes and communities as a result of the “consumer commodity society” and expansions in popular culture and music.\(^5\)

Rock ‘n’ roll encountered varied responses from Americans, often related to its definition as “race music” among African Americans and white Americans. In a famous example, Elvis Presley first appeared on the television variety program *The Ed Sullivan Show* in September 1956, just three months after host Ed Sullivan called the singer “unfit for family viewing.” Elvis’s performances on *Ed Sullivan* created a mythology about the singer’s gyrating pelvis (“Elvis the Pelvis”) and his seemingly nonwhite musical cues. But reviewing this mythologized event illustrates how rock ‘n’ roll succeeded with the white, male worker and as a result rose from the bottom of American society to hold preeminence at the top, especially alongside the family. Presley and his audience made rock ‘n’ roll a force for change and popular music a revolutionary mechanism due to a reception that his performance was not white, yet those he inspired often encountered success because they continued his style and more closely resembled the white worker succeeding despite influence outside that identity.

Rock ‘n’ roll broke down barriers and created important new relationships between

black and white Americans, continuing twentieth century integration within popular music from ragtime through jazz and western swing. In his tome on postwar black consciousness, Brian Ward emphasized the role of popular culture in race relations and pushes for equality: “Popular music and popular entertainment more generally … constituted major fields of social activity in which black and white racial identities, values and interests have been defined and tested, attacked and defended in America.”

The exploration of rock ‘n’ roll in American history includes negative responses and fears from white Americans, parents of teenagers, anti-communists, and opponents of Civil Rights. Where affluence and safety factored in these fears are important questions, as the links to the working class and race demonstrated popular music elevating the downtrodden to better and equalized statuses. A combined social group experienced the expansion of popular music into a massive economic and political tool, and in moments where parents and children disagreed over intents of performers or impact of issues, they managed separate individual interests based on identity and meaning. For instance, television consumerism and broadcasting allowed Americans in the postwar era to experience culture and entertainment forms as their predecessors had via the radio. The importance of the family operated alongside the growth of television and popular music in the 1950s and emerged as a prominent symbol of American strength, still articulated throughout the 1960s and 1970s as male, white, and productive. The increased industrial activity that signaled worker productivity translated to family success and over time constituted a useful model to

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examine the stability of American society and culture. As the economy declined in the 1960s, effects of the Vietnam War and counterculture exposed worker and family dissatisfactions with experiences and social and cultural expectations.⁷

Musicians in the postwar environment produced goods and helped market items tied to domesticity through the “consumer commodity society,” and it is no shock that a lasting image of the Beatles continues to be the impact the band had upon women and gender dynamics. Elaine Tyler May’s seminal work, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, and her “domestic containment” theory prove useful to examining the dynamics of popular music on the white, American family and work and consumer demands. Tracing music as a tool for work and community back to the 1930s-1940s, interactions shaped by entertainment and leisure differed greatly than that with workers and the youth culture of the postwar period. May’s ideas about family life facilitate exploration of the Depression generation and how their children reacted to consumer goods, race and sexual relations, and dynamics of work, home, and leisure. Rock ‘n’ roll aligned with white middle class experiences in the 1950s because of the affluence of Americans within that group, but held real links with a diverse working class. Historian Susan Porter Benson illustrated complex dynamics of everyday household survival in the Depression, and popular music and musicians deserve consideration as contributors in that environment. In *Household Accounts*, Benson described Depression-era “working-class family economies” and argued the working class Americans carefully consumed based on need, and in the postwar

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economy accessed greater consumption, but typically through “goods and services similar in function but inferior to those available to the middle-class.” This historiography illustrates how identity and meaning in the Depression and World War II linked consumption and work through class, race, and sex, and successful musicians articulated those definitions.8

Looking at Americans before World War II exposes rural and regional Americans interacting with popular music and the urban spheres, while movement guided economic opportunities and war disrupted and diversified communities. The struggles to access work in any form and maintain those jobs defined Americans’ experiences in the 1930s and 1940s and informed the economic and political strength of the postwar period. For Americans after the 1960s, popular music played a valuable role in those struggles, but ties to the American worker often intensified confrontations as numerous groups identified with the roles popular music played in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. Americans and musicians offered different reactions to the counterculture, and the genre and racial differences created by the 1970s illustrated how the historically constructed American worker approached popular music. Reviewing the impact of the Beatles and Bob Dylan, the altered relationships to political positions and activities contrasted with audience expectations and reactions. The breakup of the Beatles has long been associated with the intrusion of an influential nonwhite, female upon one of the groups leaders, while Bob Dylan’s output caused confusion and distanced him from a fought over political and cultural role as the “Voice of a Generation.” The end of the 1960s and confrontations of the

1970s signaled that these dominant examples articulated alternate syntheses of the identity and productivity of the ideal worker as white and male.

The period between the 1930s and 1970s witnessed numerous forms and styles of music within a popular culture and music industry that attracted Americans separated by distance, race, backgrounds, and ultimately history and time. In the connections built, popular music emerged as a revolutionary force linking Americans of divergent backgrounds and historical eras and expanded the impact and role of popular music to the average American. In the twentieth century, music moved from local, community-centered leisure activities and entertainments to provide valuable forms of cultural influence and communities among Americans. At the center of that movement were countless musicians, often struggling to find work or succeeding economically because they offered entertainment, but the development functioned by tapping into specific notions of who was working and the impact that performer made among audiences. The emergence of rock ‘n’ roll integrated the struggles to find and control work and economic activities after World War II, and informed meanings of listening and connections to other Americans, groups, and societies. Taken in small doses on American television, long tours circling the globe, and new methods of communications, popular music linked Americans together in a culture of consumption based on work and productivity. Americans connected, communicated, and disseminated diverse and complicated communities and identities through the development of popular music after World War II. However, even though the successful American worker was defined as white and male, the cultural and social movements following the war signaled that popular music and developments in
technology and artistry challenged and the dominance of those characteristics among prominent musicians.  

The following dissertation relies on the effects of the “consumer commodity society” and the politics of Americans identifying with products and the process of consuming new and different goods as a society. Concurrent with building on the work of historians’ in the fields of labor, family, and gender history, this dissertation constructs the successful musician between the 1930s and 1970s as white and male, and considers how western swing musicians, rock ‘n’ rollers, and monumentally successful musicians like the Beatles and Bob Dylan negotiated their work and identities within a culture that related to and interpreted their productivity and output. Popular music and rock ‘n’ roll emphasized the productivity and output of workers, and reshaped economic and cultural interactions within the leisure and entertainment industry. Understanding how popular music functioned in the “consumer commodity society” relies upon identifications of musicians as workers, and the politics of race and gender. Compare the political career of Woody Guthrie to the political role assigned to Bob Dylan and his career: Guthrie wrote music and expressed ideal conditions for Americans workers in the 1930s, while emphasizing artist rights and income, and Dylan channeled Guthrie’s focuses and style to a complicated position in the folk music scene before embracing his influences as a musician based in the economic and political capital of the music industry and middle class. The dissertation looks at specific performers and musicians to track a history where work, distribution, and access generated interest in popular music and the recording industry while

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9 Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 330; and *Footsteps in the Dark*, 265.
facilitating cultural value in American society; more explicitly, the dissertation examines music as work and musicians as workers. To accomplish and demonstrate the changes music brought to work in American culture, the dissertation is divided into chapters framed around the title “Music Is Revolution, Music Is Work,” with the first two chapters exploring issues of work, and the following two chapters evaluating music as a consumer and cultural good that negotiated the meaning of musicians as workers and the identification of the American worker as white and male.\(^\text{10}\)

The first chapter examines western swing musicians in Texas, Oklahoma, and California during the Great Depression and World War II, and relates them to a historiography of labor and masculinity focused upon itinerant workers and the economic hardships of American families. The discussion reveals western swing musicians worked and succeeded by identifying with and representing the needs of American workers and families struggling economically. The musicians examined in this chapter came from industrial and agricultural backgrounds, often utilizing skills learned from parents or other workers (often nonwhite), and constructed work schedules that related to, yet avoided definitions about itinerant workers. Though reliant upon technological expansion and products like the radio, and openings for cheap and regular entertainment in the Depression and World War II, the movements and migrations required for their work mirrored experiences of Americans looking for work and sharing new communities, and the discussion in this chapter considers how western swing musicians personified the white, male American worker by finding

regular income, overcoming hardships, and constructing homes and communities around productive skills.\textsuperscript{11}

Western swing musicians found success through and following World War II, and remained influential among Americans increasingly interested in emerging trends of the postwar era. The second chapter discusses the community of Lubbock, Texas, in the 1940s and 1950s and interests in western swing musicians that opened new opportunities performing music in that community, before exploring musician Buddy Holly as representative of those links and the impact of rock ‘n’ roll and greater access to popular music styles in the postwar environment. Just like western swing musicians, prominent Lubbock and West Texas-based musicians were white and male, and succeeded by articulating productivity and consumption of worker output. Buddy Holly, particularly serves as a useful example, as he enjoyed local and regional popularity and worked diligently for opportunities that facilitated income and job security—including touring, radio shows, and recording—meanwhile indicating how the politics of class consumption negotiated the economic and market changes between the 1930s and 1950s. However, Buddy Holly did not represent an easy transition to mass consumption, only illustrating how popular music and rock ‘n’ roll facilitated interaction and engagement in a national marketplace, as well as influence with international audiences. The latter notion tying into the shifts that occurred as white male musicians confronted expectations and limitations about their roles as workers, performers, and professional artists in the 1960s.

\textsuperscript{11} Kaufman, 74-76. Western Swing musicians understood industrial work expectations similar to Popular Front musicians like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers that idealized working class struggles.
As an American worker, Buddy Holly left an important and unfinished position when he died in February 1959, but along with 1950s peers influenced successive musicians to look at music as an outlet and escape from expectations in national and international communities. The Beatles enjoyed strong ties to American rock ‘n’ rollers of the 1950s and Buddy Holly specifically, and the most visible aspect of their career through 1966 was the same work methods that generated economic stability and regular income for Holly and western swing musicians: touring and performing in concert. Until 1966, this was the predominant signifier for the Beatles’ widespread success in England, Europe, the United States, and the world. However, the Beatles success was multifaceted and the band’s recorded output signaled an alternate mode for articulating the worker, productivity, and consumer goods. A historical component of the music industry and musicians’ careers before World War II, recording and the recording studio emerged as a critical workspace for experimentation and professionalism for musicians of the 1950s and 1960s. The third chapter of the dissertation considers the shift the Beatles experienced becoming “recording artists” and how live performances and studio recordings marked alternate measurements for work and productivity. Popular music revolutionized and aided in the expansion of ideas for a myriad of political, social, and cultural developments, but the massive popularity the Beatles experienced challenged their work as performers, and eventually the band discarded touring and engaged interpretations of popular music as an art form.

Less than a month after Datebook published John Lennon’s “more popular than Jesus” comment in August 1966, the Beatles stopped touring and their popular
success and cultural influence was defined solely through recording and artistry, disconnected from performing as a form of work like Buddy Holly and the western swing musicians had experienced in the previous decades. While the Beatles experienced intense new heights of success and popularity, they still represented an ideal American worker as white and male as conflict raged in the United States about civil rights and the impact and cultural influence of groups like African Americans and women. But the Beatles championed musicians that challenged the dominance of the white, male worker in their tours and recordings, even if the breakup of the band in 1970 is more often identified with an individual neither male nor white. For example, the Beatles adored the Ronettes, covering “Baby It’s You” expertly, and later hired the girl group for the August 1966 tour that endured the “more popular than Jesus” controversy. Male contemporaries like Bob Dylan equally explored recording as an option for work and artistry in the 1960s. Like Lennon’s misinterpreted quote about religion, Dylan, too, was scrutinized for meaning in the 1960s, ultimately gaining a reputation as perpetually indecipherable and a “Voice of a Generation.”

The final chapter focuses on Bob Dylan as a working musician, and specifically the period 1966 through 1974 when he took an extended break from touring and composed a lifestyle and output that challenged expectations of audiences and fans that labeled him the “Voice of a Generation.” Until May 1966, Dylan was a prolific performer, much as the Beatles in the same time period, but increasingly confronted audiences over his music and perceived meanings. Following an infamous tour of England, and his turn to rock music and in 1965-1966, Dylan crashed his motorcycle in July 1966 while spending time with his new wife and family at home in
Woodstock, New York. The accident put his career on hold, and until 1974, recording operated as his predominant form of work. However, rather than continue producing music that earned him cultural interpretation and presence as the “Voice of a Generation,” a label he found disturbing and distracting, Dylan seemed to embrace aspects of productivity similar to the working class. In this nearly eight-year period, Dylan focused on building a safe and secure home for his wife and children, and cultivated that image of a white, male worker beset by cultural, social, political, and economic upheaval. Dylan’s personification was hardly modeled strictly upon working class Americans in the 1960s, but it specifically rejected ideas connecting him to the 1960s counterculture. Dylan’s cultural relevance remained tied to the 1960s after he returned to performing in early 1974, but the hiatus dislodged the reverence and desires for his leadership as the “Voice of a Generation.” Bob Dylan’s hiatus and return emphasized the gender and racial archetypes of the historical American worker and predominant in popular music, the music industry, and the consumer commodity society of the 1930s through the 1970s. Nearly a half-century later, Bob Dylan’s career still symbolized those ideas through recordings and tours.

The relationships between musicians and working, whether by performing or recording, are still relevant in the twenty-first century. Definitions of authenticity noted by historians such as Alice Echols in *Hot Stuff* about disco, workers, and American culture in the 1970s remain important to identifying musicians as workers today. During a 2012 episode of Travel Channel’s *No Reservations with Anthony Bourdain*, Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney, better known as the successful rock
band the Black Keys, identified their productivity and output by performances, despite success and critical acclaim gained from recorded materials and distribution of goods.

Tony: “Which is more satisfying: the record or the touring?”
Dan: “We’ve grown to really love playing shows.”
Patrick: “The only really way to make a living.”

Interviewed in part as promotion for *El Camino*, the Black Keys’ seventh studio album, the band inferred that performing over recording was the more satisfying form of work. The band even played up aspects of itinerancy and workers conducting a scrutinized trade—picking up Bourdain in a used minivan. Bourdain’s voiceover complimented the band accordingly: “for transients who claim to be in a band, these Black Keys guys turned out to be okay.” The commentary, in light of the band’s success, highlights the continued importance of performing as work for musicians and the influence of white, male musicians in American society.12

The emergence of rock ‘n’ roll and the expansion of popular music from the 1930s to the 1970s reflected the struggles and success of Americans workers, inspired experimentation and collaboration, and introduced extensive cultural influence and disruptions. However, the connections between popular music and work since the 1970s have found arguments and conflict over who occupies the worker as identity in output, with disco performers denied authenticity and rock musicians increasingly speaking for the “glory days” of the white working class. Historians like George Lipsitz, Alice Echols, Jefferson Cowie, and Sean Wilentz have evaluated the working class links to popular culture in the postwar period, and the following dissertation builds upon those discussions and expands upon rock ‘n’ roll, popular music, and

prominent musicians as sources for work, leisure, and entertainment in American society. Even with lingering questions of race, sexuality, and gender, following the demise of the 1960s counterculture, where divergent voices proliferated through popular music, Americans remained connected through music—though there seemed to be opposing positions about its meanings and influence. The impact of music as a revolutionary force, represented by the term counterculture, reflects issues related to subcultures that Kathy Peiss challenged in her book Zoot Suit. Like Americans interested in that fashion style during World War II, popular music similarly attracted hostility and dismissal because it appeared to confront dominant political ideologies. Yet the examples explored in this dissertation follow Peiss’s discussion of cultural trends resonating with diverse groups and marking a distinctive American style and consumer good.13

Examining changes in work and expanded opportunities for musicians through consumption and cultural influence, the following dissertation discusses popular music and American society between the 1930s and 1970s. The expansion of popular music in the postwar era was contingent on numerous factors, industrial growth and expansion, new and affordable technologies, and the “consumer commodity society.” But it was the numerous changes wrought by the Depression and World War II fostered an environment where Americans gained access to music as a product and interest in musicians as performers and consumable goods. The three decades following World War II witnessed a massive overhaul in the outlook and construction

of Americans’ lives and atmospheres, with political, racial, social and economic divisions playing significant roles. After steadily growing to capture the new markets created by radio and production of early records, popular music similarly exploded, finding a place within those divisions to grow and spread messages and affluence. At the core of popular music’s postwar expansion were musicians working in a trade not unlike the agricultural and industrial experiences of the politicized American worker from the Depression through the 1970s.

The actions of a radio station and those who took part burning Beatles records in 1966, because John Lennon stated that the Beatles were “more popular than Jesus,” offer an amusing anecdote, but illustrated how popular music coalesced in the lives of Americans. Throughout the postwar period, workers illustrated necessary sacrifices and support in order to sustain collective actions and movements and reacted against popular music and the counterculture regardless of roots, shared interests, or communities that minimized social isolation. Nearly fifty years later, Lennon’s fellow Beatle Paul McCartney continues to tour, playing sold-out shows to exceptionally large audiences. No hints of turbulence related to the Beatles, the 1960s, or challenges to the American worker or working class are present in his concerts, and audiences cheer and celebrate his identity as a Beatle and long career in music. In June 2013, he headlined the Bonnaroo festival in Tennessee, and Rolling Stone magazine praised his performance: “It’s a privilege for anyone born in the last half century to hear this music performed live, in the moment, and with such grace, by the man who composed them.” Contributor Adam Gold stated, “the main-stage headliner always plays unopposed, the idea being that entire Bonnaroo community can coalesce around a
single artist. Across cultural, generational and aesthetic lines, whose catalogue could possibly be more universal than McCartney's? The answer: Nobody’s. “\( ^{14} \)

Prior to the Bonnaroo festival, McCartney and his band appeared on the television show The Colbert Report for an interview and performance on June 13, 2013. The event was hyped like the Beatles’ debut on Ed Sullivan in 1964, and ads for the specific episode used phrases like “anyone born in the last half century” to mark McCartney’s appearance as a major event, and coincidentally took place on a television program noted for its satire of conservative values and defense of historically defined American identities, like the ideal worker as white and male. Fifty years after Ed Sullivan, television still influenced Americans’ everyday lives and experiences. The hype related to these appearances demonstrated how popular music played a central role in the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and “universal” awareness (and implied acceptance) within a lifetime and generation. In the 2010s, television, the Internet (McCartney filmed an exclusive performance not included in the broadcast), and live performances, still bring audiences and consumers together in a community. Popular music revolutionized American life in the twentieth century, emerging as a component of American history important in the contexts of work, politics, religion, and entertainment. The dissertation “Music Is Revolution, Music Is Work” examines negotiations and understandings of the changes in work, leisure, and entertainment that made popular music a core component of twentieth century American history and society.

CHAPTER II

“HARD TO KEEP ‘EM DOWN ON THE FARM”: MUSICIANS, PERFORMING, AND WORK DURING THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II

In the late 1910s, young Tennessee fieldworker Wesley Copeland earned two incomes: one working with his sharecropping father, Polk, and another performing music at local community dances. Copeland was born in 1903, received a guitar from an uncle as a child, and taught himself to play before performing at local dances, in homes, barns and other spaces by the ages 15-16. Quickly, Copeland earned opportunities to play beyond neighborhood and community dances and traveled around several counties in Tennessee, sometimes paid as much as $15. As a musician, Copeland primarily played blues and “breakdown music,” but as recordings appeared in the early 1920s, he incorporated what he heard from those sources, too. “I hear a record, I’d go back home and play it. If I heard it somewhere I’d keep it in my mind till I got home, got my guitar and play.” Copeland picked “stuff off of records” by musicians like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Big Bill, and Blind Blake, as well as radio broadcasts like “The Brownsferry Blues” by the Delmore Brothers on Nashville’s WSM. Many of the performers Copeland knew kept jobs in sharecropping or other work, and playing music provided extra income. Copeland, with his father on banjo, and a family friend named Frank Patterson playing violin, were so well known that people “came from all over to get them to play.”

As a rural performer that enjoyed a modicum of appeal in a local and regional market, Wesley Copeland transcended work, race, and class, in 1920s Tennessee, and
attracted diverse audiences made up of African American and white residents. Any
person interested in hiring that trio would contact Copeland’s father, who then found
Patterson and Wesley for the job, which were most often dances for “white folks.”
Dances generally took place inside a home or a barn, but sometimes the string group
played outside, too. All three worked in sharecropping, and at the end of a day they
generally washed and then played a dance. Despite race and class differences with
typical audiences, the African American performers rarely encountered problems or
negative reactions: “It was good times back then. Weren’t no killing and fighting.” All
in all, it was “peaceful.” A diverse repertoire generated a “safe” environment for
playing and extra income based on these men’s performing skills, but Copeland never
worked in music full-time, and it was always for extra income. By the mid-1920s, he
worked in a quarry and two decades later had moved to Nashville and worked in a
bottling company during World War II. The dances he had played to in small
communities and homes in the 1910s-1920s were unavailable in Nashville and he gave
up performing, though Copeland retained his instrumental skills by building custom
guitars, and occasionally showed off his guitar picking for impromptu audiences.¹

Working and performing in Wesley Copeland’s experience were isolated
components of his life and neither intruded or replaced the other, and together
introduce the intersections of entertainment and work in 20th century American
culture. Copeland was a well-versed musician, and took advantage of technological

¹ Charles K. Wolfe, interview with Wesley Copeland, tape recording, Nashville, Tennessee, April 13,
Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Copeland also
revealed how much he enjoyed traveling to play: “I was just crazy, I just like to go you know, I didn’t
want to be pinned down.”
developments in the radio and recordings to incorporate new popular styles like gospel and “old-timey” music (hillbilly, or early forms of country) into his repertoire, serving as an important example how more and more musicians enjoyed opportunities as the 20th century progressed supplying cheap and accessible entertainment. Details of Copeland’s life in his industrial work in the 1920s and 1940s fail to mention the effects of the Depression on his economic prospects, however, we can infer from the gap presented in his oral history that work in the 1930s may have been sparse. While Copeland never shifted into performing music as a full-time replacement, similar musicians in the United States did, finding that performing for regular audiences supplied valuable income that supplanted and surpassed agricultural and industrial opportunities. Some of those musicians emerged from backgrounds nearly identical to Copeland, too: self-taught in farming communities, picking and breaking down recordings, and transplanted to urban environments.

The prominent performers examined in similarity to Wesley Copeland were the western swing musicians of Texas, Oklahoma, and California throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The following chapter argues these white, male musicians found important economic opportunities in the Depression and World War II providing leisure and entertainment for Americans seeking escape from the pressures of the time period. In particular, radio broadcasts and touring to local and regional venues opened doors for these musicians to broadcast skills and earn regular incomes. The work western swing musicians found allowed them to establish homes and families, but required frequent traveling to perform for audiences reached by radio broadcasts. Additionally, this chapter argues their frequent traveling fit into patterns of migrations
for work in the 1930s and 1940s, and demonstrated an alternative to histories of itinerant workers in the United States, where hostilities and fears created negative perceptions of unemployed and homeless Americans. The white and male musicians examined in this chapter illustrated the value of working as a musician and demonstrated economic possibilities provided by performing in a capacity linked to a historical image of the productive and respectable American worker, before recording seemed to take precedence in determining social and class status across regional and national markets.

Cheap opportunities to enjoy music proliferated during this era, particularly in regions hit hard economically in the 1930s, in this case Texas and Oklahoma (which were also devastated environmentally due to the Dust Bowl). Musicians in urban spaces like Dallas and Fort Worth, Houston, and Tulsa found stations owners and sponsors willing to let them broadcast, granting influence within expansions of entertainment and leisure culture and links between urban and rural spaces. Stations of varying power sent out signals that reached communities in the outskirts of urban centers, and communities far flung from these bases, and parts of the development of the postwar consumer culture can be traced to these links and shared interests. Finding those venues brought income to these musicians, as radio broadcasts were typically conducted with no pay for the performers unless you worked directly for an advertiser of the program you constructed (for example, the long career of the Light Crust Doughboys, initiated in Fort Worth Texas, by Milton Brown, Bob Wills, and W. Lee, or Pappy, O’Daniel, in 1930). Though performing provided expanded work opportunities for western swing musicians, artists and repertoire (a&r) men from
recording and publishing firms in New York and Chicago routinely travelled to Dallas, San Antonio, and Houston, in the 1930s to record local and regional musicians that broadcast popular radio programs. Gary Hartman, a historian of Texas music, has commented that the southwest was “instrumental in the evolution of musical recording, broadcasting, and marketing,” and as a result, “Texas has played a key part in changing the very sound of modern American music and in helping make it popular worldwide.”

Western swing musicians prospered in the 1930s and 1940s due to radio broadcasting and constant traveling to play local and regional venues within range of their stations, as both these components of working provided valuable income and helped provide for individual and family economics. The experiences of western swing musicians expanded examples of individuals like Wesley Copeland, driving intersections in race and class through music and audience receptions, but these musicians ultimately captured full employment and engaged ideas of professionalism that elevated their social statuses from labor definitions to the middle class and precursors of postwar consumption, acting as direct precursors to race and class questions with rock ‘n’ roll in the period after World War II. Western swing was popular “because it offered memorable tunes to people seeking escape from the

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2 Jean A. Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 9. “Local musicians were not paid for performing on radio, but they received free air time in which to advertise their upcoming dances. Thus, the radio became extremely important for the success of southwestern dance bands. In fact, the broadcasting range of a given radio station was the main factor in determining the scope of a band’s dance circuit and the size of the crowds in attendance.” Cary Ginell and Roy Lee Brown, *Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 61-62 and 106-7; Gary Hartman, *The History of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 223. Hartman points out “… Texas also took a leading role in the development of noncommercial recording and in the preservation and study of regional folk music” by folklorists.
stresses of economic depression and war.” Alongside many Americans moving to find work in the Depression and War, western swing musicians followed, earning income and building careers from performing to larger and larger audiences of radio broadcasts and at dances and concerts. Ideas of mass consumption conflicted with realities for working class Americans in the Depression, as historian Susan Porter Benson illustrated in *Household Accounts*, but migration and work opportunities challenged aspects of class-based consumption, and musicians as workers and music as entertainment and leisure played an important role in remaking those divisions. Following World War II, these conceptions of performing as valuable work contributed heavily to the expansion of the music industry as part of renewed economic productivity and output, and also inspired younger generations of Americans to aspire toward “careers in music” like those western swing musicians held.3

**New Opportunities for Musicians and Old Patterns of Itinerancy in the 1920s-1930s**

The introduction of the radio and modern recording practices after World War I heavily altered the role of music within Americans’ lives. As far as a music industry was concerned in the first two decades of the 20th century, sheet music sales determined and represented the popularity of songs, success generated for songs by musicians and performers were irrelevant next to writers and publisher copyrights.

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Recording technology, though not new in the 1920s, proved useful to represent a popular song, market regional versions across the United States, and drum up sales of the sheet music for the song. Control over this technology remained within the industry, and limits were quickly placed upon radio stations and networks using recordings to protect economic investments in sheet sales. The Radio Acts of 1912 and 1927 both included language supporting live broadcasted materials over recordings, including advertising, until 1936 when the new Federal Communications Commission decided that recordings could be used in broadcasts. Inside these lengthy limitations, compromises existed, notably transcription services that allowed local stations to incorporate live advertising into popular shows like *Amos and Andy* from Chicago’s WMAQ throughout the United States. Accordingly, musicians and performers across the United States focused on broadcasting interpretations of popular songs and new materials to listeners and audiences via radio shows and live performances.4

Radio broadcasts offered important opportunities for many Americans to engage entertainment and leisure with any semblance of mass consumption or community construction. In her discussion of Chicago industrial workers in *Making a New Deal*, historian Lizabeth Cohen demonstrated the values of 1930s radio entertainment in urban centers because “rather than familiar, Chicago-bred musical performers of other locally known personalities, workers heard a greater variety of shows packaged for a national audience.” The national scope provided greater access to ideas of “American” for ethnic groups and industrial workers, and similar effects can be seen in Texas and the southwest, as performers extended touring circuits to

wider audiences, and some eventually moved west to California, where they
capitalized on displaced audiences looking for familiar cultures during and after World
War II. Alternatively, in the rural or smaller-sized urban centers like Dallas and Fort
Worth, Texas, local broadcasting on radio slowed the adoption of national
broadcasting programs. Owners and programmers relied on local talent to fill slots and
attract advertisers during normal broadcasting hours (typically between 6 AM and 6
PM), after which stations with more powerful signals could be received across the
nation.5

As musicians expanded their outlets to radio station broadcasts in the late
1920s and early 1930s, the recording industry largely ignored developments in styles
or performers in regional environments away from the urban and economic centers of
the United States. Regional musicians, such as the western swing bands of central
Texas and Oklahoma that emerged in the 1930s eventually found points of contact and
opportunities to record, but initially had to travel at their own expenses to meet a&r
men and portable equipment. Some even traveled hoping to gain exposure, only
hearing that representatives were present in central communities (like Houston, San
Antonio, or New Orleans) and recording musicians. Radio was the crucial component
of regional musicians in and around growing urban communities like Dallas and Fort
Worth, Houston, and Tulsa, who connected with audiences by broadcasting and
traveling to perform within territories formed by radio station power and range. These
musicians, unlike Wesley Copeland, greatly expanded music as a singular source of
work, ultimately coming to record and utilize that technology to expand further,

5 Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939, 2nd ed. (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 2008), 327.
migrating to the west coast in World War II, and in specific examples appearing in films. Of musicians linked to Copeland by similar family backgrounds and experiences, Bill Boyd and his brother Jim started with house dances, found careers on the radio, earned recording contracts, and appeared in films and on television between the late 1920s and the 1950s. Materials from Bill (or Billy) Boyd’s fan club in the 1930s and 1940s indicate he worked prolifically to achieve this much, and with his brother illustrates the unique opportunities in the 1920s and 1930s that opened new work spaces for skilled musicians.

The Boyd brothers serve as a useful link between Wesley Copeland and the western swing performers of 1930s Texas and Oklahoma because they shared similar experiences and played the same string-based music, as well as divergent race and class issues. Billy Boyd remains “a giant in early Western music” according to biographers like oral historian Jean A. Boyd, but he started and built his career and this legacy by broadcasting on the radio like many regional musicians in the 1930s. He and his band, the Cowboy Ramblers, regularly performed at country and school dances in addition to a daily radio program. In the first issue of a newsletter for a fan club based in Ohio, *Bill Boyd’s Ranch House News*, the writer described the young Bill Boyd as “[loving] the free life of the west but he loved music more. After a day’s work was done, young Bill could be found listening to the songs of workman or joining them to the accompaniment of his guitar.” Boyd tied himself to the experience of working class agriculture laborers, and carried their leisure activities into an entertainment career. Jim and Billy were only two of thirteen children born to Lemuel and Molly Boyd, who moved to Texas from Tennessee in 1902, and to Dallas in 1929.
Prior to creating regular performing engagements in Dallas, both brothers had secured spots working on the radio in Greenville, Texas, by hitchhiking. Bill Boyd apparently “became obsessed” with the radio and longed “to sing his beloved western songs on the air after being exposed to radio programming on a battery set brought to the ranch by his father.”

From a young age both Boyd brothers captured employment in what had previously been leisure activities that complemented agricultural work as ranch hands. Their love of music was shared with their mother, who instilled a “love of old time songs” and taught her children songs she knew, reportedly from “the mountains of Appalachia.” By 1930-1932, the Boyd brothers worked for radio (now TV) station WFAA out of the Baker Hotel in Dallas and were paid $15 a week. Like Wesley Copeland, both Boyd brothers found success by playing local dances in Dallas and surrounding communities, before finding radio work and forming respective bands, Jim’s the Rhythm Aces, and Bill’s Cowboy Ramblers. In 1934, Bill Boyd signed a contract with RCA Victor and Jim took a salary position working at Dallas’s WRR station, accompanying other musicians broadcasting from the station on guitar, bass, banjo, and mandolin. Jim also joined a late 1930s incarnation of the Light Crust Doughboys out of Fort Worth “at a salary of $35 a week, plus all road expenses paid and uniforms furnished and cleaned.” The manager (and owner) of the Light Crust Doughboys from the early 1930s through the 1940s was Texas Governor W. Lee O’Daniel, and Jim Boyd also worked as a state employee in the governor’s campaign.

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band, the Hillbilly Boys, at a pay of $250 a month with housing and all bills paid until 1941-1942 when he joined Billy’s group. Jim Boyd left the campaign band when the governor ran successfully for U.S. Senate in 1941 because he did not want to relocate to Washington, D.C. (in retaliation, his state pay was reduced and housing and bills increased). Joining his brother’s band proved more reliable and gave Jim better pay and cheaper housing payments in Dallas.⁷

The western music Bill Boyd pioneered offered a sound “patterned” after traditional Lomaxian ballads, and one that “[provided] background sound for Western movies.” Boyd’s career emphasizes the shifting terminology used to classify styles of music, as western swing and his own “Western style music” were sanitized into a broader Country genre with more hillbilly remnants from the eastern half of the United States. Tying regional music to specific areas and markets was the music industry’s form of genre identification in the 1920s and 1930s, and most hillbilly music was labeled “folk” while blues or jazz carried the “race” label. The Cowboy Ramblers success on radio in Dallas allowed them to attract the interest of recording producers in Los Angeles, where they went to cut thirty sides in 1942. Radio success translated further into offers to perform in Hollywood films as well as provide soundtrack music. Bill Boyd appeared in six films and made over 225 recordings for Bluebird, a division of RCA Victor between his first sessions in 1934 and 1951, shortly after which he and Jim both ended their radio shows. The music Boyd provided for film appearances

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⁷ Boyd, 171-174. (No relation through the name.)
reflected the romanticized view of Texas and the southwest Hollywood imagined and offered to American moviegoers.\textsuperscript{8}

The Boyd brothers are only one of many diverse examples originating from Texas that illustrate economic success through music, in their cases from radio, recording, and regular performances and traveling to urban and rural venues. Radio and recording opportunities generated new areas of awareness, but routine traveling increased the connections and communities musicians constructed with their listeners, providing links between identities defined through work and expanding entertainment and leisure opportunities. The audiences of Depression-era Texas and Oklahoma greatly enjoyed bands that played western swing music, a style that biographer Cary Ginell classified into three distinct periods and bandleaders: the first led by Milton Brown out of Fort Worth, Texas, the second by Bob Wills, out of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the final in California under Spade Cooley during the 1950s. Brown “converted traditional Texas fiddle bands into dance bands designed to entertain in dance halls as opposed to individual homes.” Wills expanded the elements of the bands, added more instrumentation, moved “to the West Coast,” and “deemphasized the role of the fiddle as lead instrument” in postwar recordings. The final era occurred in the 1950s, when musicians like Spade Cooley and Hank Thompson blended the fiddle with hard rhythm and bass sounds of “honky-tonks” that merged with hillbilly and other folk styles as country music.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{8} Boyd, 174-175. The Bill Boyd Papers at the Center for American History includes an advertisement for Bluebird, describing the label as “the World’s Finest Low-Priced Hillbilly and Race Records” (File 9).

\textsuperscript{9} Ginell, \textit{xxx-xxxi}.  

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Oral histories of western swing in Texas reveal origins in urban and rural interests, as well as cross-cultural interactions, and interactions with performers outside the region. Jazz improvisation figures prominently in this construction, and oral historian Jean A. Boyd collected testimonies from performers of various instruments in western swing as evidence of this influence. The cross-cultural development inherit with this link expands economically with Boyd’s analysis that “in a sense, western swing evolved from and responded to a portion of the white Texas population that did not share in the socioeconomic or political power of the upper class, most of whom lived in cities and were involved in business and industry.” The make-ups of audiences in Texas dance halls confirms the cultural impact of music as entertainment and leisure, as European migrants merged with Mexican and white traditions in the 1920s to form venues that catered a more diverse regional population. The diversity of these audiences was crucial to forming openings for performing as work in the Depression, and radio stations offered extensions of the links witnessed on dance floors by broadcasting musicians’ skills and advertisements about upcoming shows and appearances.\textsuperscript{10}

Examining musicians and workers like Wesley Copeland and the Boyd brothers illustrates how performing music operated to provide extra income or lucrative work outside traditional areas of work in the United States during the 20th century, namely agriculture in these cases. True for the regions of the south and

\textsuperscript{10} Boyd, 2-5; Elijah Wald, How The Beatles Destroyed Rock ’n’ Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143: “… though the national press tended to portray Western Swing as a hillbilly style with jazz influences, the people who played it tended to consider themselves jazz musicians with a sideline in fiddle tunes”; Gail Folkins, and J. Marcus Weekley, Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit, Voices in the American West (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007). Folkins emphasizes dance hall culture in Texas was nation-oriented in the early 20th century, but merged to bridge divides by the 1930s.
southwest, agricultural work demanded heavy labor and signs of leisure and entertainment were welcome signs in times of economic prosperity, but more so in times of economic depression, when those outlets offered escapes from worries and concerns among Americans struggling for employment and survival. The radio was an easy technological development that helped distribute music to audiences away from urban centers or broadcasting stations, but this piece of technology was not universally available nor did it change the economic conditions those Americans faced, only facilitating access to entertainment and leisure. The musicians briefly sketched in 1920s Tennessee and Texas, however, illustrate how economic conditions and opportunities for entertainment changed within the Depression, when families consumed based on class definitions and needs, not specifically mass appeal of goods. Western swing and regional musicians additionally existed due to work that replicated patterns and migrations identified with itinerant workers migrating between seasonal work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, even if musicians operated outside perceptions that made their arrival or output challenging to the functions, needs, and safety concerns within communities.

Traveling, or itinerant, workers made up a sizable class of individuals that migrated throughout the United States in the first three decades of the 20th century. These workers found significant attention from Progressive-era social reformers, 1920s industrial management, and Depression-era government officials endeavored to understand, and in some cases remove from the American labor force. The Depression proved particularly problematic for these workers, as first the Hoover administration struggled to deal with displaced and out of work Americans, and the subsequent
Roosevelt New Deal administrations sought to organize those workers into a managed and “respectable” class in American society. Linked to both industrial and agricultural work, musicians in the 1920s and 1930s shared patterns of work with prior itinerant workers, yet their modes of working by performing and broadcasting on the radio changed how these migrating workers related to and conflicted with definitions and perceptions of itinerants. Wesley Copeland migrated from sharecropping in rural areas to industrial work in Nashville, and the Boyd brothers “hitch-hiked” to find jobs at radio stations, but neither these examples nor subsequent musicians confronted problems associated with itinerancy in the early 20th century.

Labor historian Frank Tobias Higbie explored the social realities and make-up of itinerant workers in the late 19th century and early 20th century by emphasizing their centrality to labor relations, social reform, and cultural development in the United States. The itinerant workers he examined and their input into American society explicitly linked the rural atmospheres of the United States to the growing modern urban centers after 1900. The decades prior to the Great Depression witnessed the discussion over place and value of itinerant workers, men and women who often worked (and relied upon) seasonal and limited jobs to provide for self-survival and dependents. Higbie emphasizes the importance of these workers to the framework of American society and its structures, especially in the period he examines: 1880-1930. Rural communities, he argues, relied upon the “migrant seasonal laborer” because they provided additional workers when needed and moved on when jobs ended. Musicians in the 1930s followed these ideas, if not specifically the direct patterns, by bringing skills that provided lucrative income with audiences familiar to their music from the
The Boyd brothers, as well as concurrent and subsequent bandleaders like Ted Daffan, Milton Brown, and Bob Wills, utilized the radio to actively promote their crafts to audiences with limited economic capacities, not only advertising specific goods or music, but by visiting communities for dances and early forms of concert shows within a dedicated traveling circuit. Higbie called his itinerant workers “indispensable outcasts,” pairing them with hobos, and this term easily applies to musicians who were at once settled with families, but were not entirely removed from vagrancy or fears of radicalism and perversion as they lived hard lifestyles on touring buses and rough, working class venues.11

By the 1930s, “migrant seasonal,” or itinerant workers made up a decades-long “social problem” that reformers, social scientists, and industrial managers, struggled to understand and sought to disrupt and extinguish. Progressive era reformers worried those workers would be subjected to exploitation as well as disrupt “quiet prairie towns with revolutionary direct action.” In the postwar boom of the 1920s, industrial leaders implemented “new thinking [that] saw irregular employment, poverty, and class conflict as a drag on efficiency.” Workers in the 1930s suffered in an economy that maintained these notions, and attempts to manage an out-of-work and migratory population witnessed more problematic definitions and labels affixed by the government, reformers, and local populations. Historian Margot Canaday explored issues related to migrants and itinerancy in the Depression and New Deal, specifically

11 Frank Tobias Higbie, Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930, The Working Class in American History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 4 and 206-210: “The paradox presented by seasonal laboring men was that they were at once strangers and familiar, homeless and linked to communities, marginalized socially and central to the extractive economy. Both their labor and degradation were pillars of American society.”
the management of transients through welfare administration programs like the Federal Transient Program. The FTP compared to the Civilian Conservation Corps but faced reactions and fears of sexual perversion among participants who were “mostly male migrants,” as opposed to a larger program designed to “prevent transiency among young unemployed men.” Yet, a key for consideration with western swing musicians was the support granted for the American worker by the federal government, and the white, male musicians discussed in this chapter fit images that alleviated fears. Traveling regularly, Depression-era musicians reproduced some of the experiences these historians tracked, yet their itinerancy did not make them transients, even as they traveled for work in similar terms.12

Americans looked upon transients during the Depression quite differently than migrant, seasonal workers of previous decades and generations, and the FTP never succeeded as a beneficial New Deal program akin to the Civilian Conservation Corps. For many Americans and critics, the FTP condoned sexual perversion by fostering homosexual behavior and possibly facilitating the subjection of young men to deviant older males, whole in turn taught them the trade. Some pointed to the FTP as a program that created opportunities for young men, including husbands and fathers, to “walk out on the dull responsibility of wife and family,” because it offered relief for being out of work and seemingly without residence. Camps established for the FTP

12 Higbie, 3; Margot Canaday, The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92 and 94-95: “… it is impossible to cull the taint of perversion from all of the other factors that led to the public’s condemnation of the transients: their dependency, their potential criminality, and above all, their mobility.” See also 98-99: “Transients, by contrast, were said to have an “urge” that had to be gratified or “wanderlust”—a term that quite literally connected their movement with unrestrained sexuality. … Transiency was not only associated with nonmarital sexuality in general, but with sexual perversion in particular.”
therefore appeared as havens for sexual perversion, while comparable camps of the
CCC remained untainted in that description—likely because the occupants were seen
as workers. The CCC required “enrollees be unmarried,” and send allotment checks
every month to their families or a dependent—activities shared with traveling
musicians where applicable. The traveling musicians likewise occupied unmarried and
untethered lifestyles, and many spent considerable time living on tour buses and away
from residences or families they may have supported. Those welfare and work
programs were designed to support specific groups of male Americans, but differences
in age, identifications of participants, and perceptions about camps allowed the public
to scorn the FTP while the CCC negated fears and provided a public good performed
by its enrollees. Alongside the FTP and CCC, western swing musicians were equally
young and relevant sources for criticism, but because they occupied a “new” form of
productive work, and provided entertainment and forms of leisure, never entered or
escaped related experiences and perceptions as leveled to migrant seasonal workers
and transients in the 1930s.13

Canaday also comments that Depression-era relief had a debilitating effect on
male psyches, specifically the breadwinner role and their place in the family home,
because unlike in previous decades, men, especially husbands worried over
unemployment. Contrary to these developments, musicians capably fulfilled family
economic responsibilities and occasionally seemed less than concerned even with
family welfare and survival. Where industrial and agricultural counterparts lost homes

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13 Canaday, 93-95, 117-118, and 125. The CCC provided larger monthly wages to its enrollees, roughly
$22, while the FTP was distinct for its nonfamilial approach: “It was aimed not at shoring up
breadwinners or helping needy mothers, but rather at addressing the severe economic needs of
individuals considered apart from family units.”
or statuses in their families because they felt degraded by unemployment and were obliged at times “to assume feminine responsibilities around the house,” hitting the road meant an escape for “out-of-work husbands” from “dominating wives and the feminization of housework.” According to Canaday, one report warned, “some married men would … never return to claim the family relationship.” Although a small group compared to larger numbers of Americans and men, in particular, facing unemployment and questions over place and gender, musicians held skills that demonstrated options and expansions in work that supplemented and then replaced (often in their examples) agricultural work and prevented needs for welfare programs and relief. Traveling musicians therefore avoided unwanted definitions associated with transients and unemployment in the 1930s, even as they shared unsettled status.14

One bandleader in the 1930s and early 1940s that shared backgrounds and experiences with migrant workers and transients was fiddler Cliff Bruner, born in 1915. Bruner grew up north of Houston, Texas, in Tomball, and told reporter Allan Turner in the early 1980s that he often got “out of the woods” to go down to Houston and play in small bands. His family worked in agriculture, as well as on the coast, and father Charlie yearned to live and farm in Arkansas, but after a brief stay there in the early 1920s went back to work as a longshoreman on the Texas gulf coast. For Cliff Bruner, agriculture work in southeast Texas, specifically “[chopping] cotton” proved unfulfilling and he learned to play the fiddle from the age of five based on songs he heard his parents sing. He commented to Turner that “nobody taught the pioneers anything,” and as a musician improvisation and dedication played important element

14 Canaday, 97.
in his style and presentation. As a child, he entertained family members, and his brothers took him to an amateur talent contest in Houston where he won, though Bruner attributed this to his being a child, rather than any developing skill. Bruner traveled frequently looking for opportunities to play in the late 1920s, and by the time he was 14 or 15, regularly played in Houston’s public parks with several other young musicians. Without his skills playing, Bruner might have entered the Depression and New Deal eras as another young American transient, traveling frequently, looking for work, but because he wanted to perform music, Bruner like other contemporaries carried new desires for entertainment and leisure with him and avoided problematic labels or confrontations.\(^{15}\)

In line with the historiography of itinerants and musicians previously sketched, Bruner offers duplicate experiences and refutations of the problems faced by young Americans in the 1930s. Growing up, Bruner made money playing fiddle and guitar at country-dances and house parties in his neighborhood community. On one occasion, his older brothers pulled him out of bed to perform at a house party when the fiddler did not arrive; despite Bruner’s later admission that he was bashful in this instance, the dance illustrated the lucrative opportunities created by performing and music skills. However, the young musician grew restless performing near home, telling interviewer Turner that it was “hard to keep him down on the farm,” and he constantly left home to seek his fortune. Those impromptu performances in Houston parks represented early efforts to accomplish this, and unlike expectations presented by transient welfare programs, Bruner and other young musicians earned money and were not hassled by

\(^{15}\) Boyd, 42.
local police because they kept up with radio trends and could replicate the newest broadcasted popular songs. The growing urban community in Houston proved greater income could be gained than in limited dances and parties in his rural hometown, and this according to oral historian Jean A. Boyd marked his shift to working as a musician, initially alongside working in cotton fields around Tomball: “he would work in the cotton fields around Tomball, in the stifling heat of the summer, for a dollar a day, and then go out at night and play for a dance and earn ten or fifteen dollars.”16

In the 1920s, Bruner’s father Charlie faced difficulties finding agricultural work in Arkansas that he desired to do, relegated to working on the docks, and these problems indicated overall there was declining agricultural work as the Depression broke out, too. Cliff Bruner certainly witnessed these trials, and probably sought to avoid similar experiences, but his interest in music and performing negated prospects of agricultural work faced in the Depression. Instead, he duplicated patterns of migration, on a limited scale, to find work performing and earning income from his skills as a musician. The contentious environment for traveling workers during the Depression did little to dissuade professional musicians from taking to the road to earn their living. Bluesmen like Robert Johnson in the Mississippi delta region, and string bands in the Piedmont region of North Carolina traveled to perform and find work preceding and following the western swing musicians examined in the following section, but western swing groups operated unlike those performers. Where a Bluesman might make unorganized trips or stops, or the string bands of North Carolina might find themselves in a recording studio in an urban center, the western

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swing musicians of Texas, Oklahoma, and the southwest, coordinated their careers around opportunities broadcasting on the radio and traveling to perform at venues in expanding regions around urban centers, continuously contingent on radio for proliferation.

Like many Americans during the Great Depression, musicians moved constantly looking for work, or to earn money performing, but they were not transients or hoboes. The western swing musicians examined below are referred to as “traveling musicians” because they bridged those spaces as settled and migrant workers. Furthermore, these musicians and equal counterparts in the Mississippi Delta playing blues, or swing band in urban centers like Chicago, instituted professional status in performing that made traveling regularly crucial to the work they conducted, and accordingly counteracted negative ideas about itinerancy, transients, and vagrants during the Depression by appealing to notions of the idealized American worker. Musicians confronted job opportunities and economic conditions by using skills otherwise attributed to entertainment and leisure activities and remaking performances as sites for work, while still contributing to entertainment and leisure culture. The histories presented by Higbie and Canaday remain useful to situate musicians outside the parameters of wandering workers while complementing connections they held with those roles.

Traveling musicians, broadcasting from radio stations and appearing at local dancehalls, created new opportunities for work amidst a devastated economy in rural and growing American communities, modifying itinerant patterns and expanding locations for sharing of music culture. The postwar atmosphere of the 1920s
diminished the prominence of music centers like New York, Chicago, and Nashville, because new technologies expanded how Americans interacted with cultural developments like music. Music industry producers, engineers, and scouts offered recording opportunities to rural performers, and had created designations for “folk” and “race” music, linking regional musicians and markets together in a growing national market for cultural goods. In the 1930s, musicians across the nation increased their visibility even though the economy depressed and eventually came to access recording opportunities, but the radio and traveling remained dominant in the work they conducted and completed. Furthermore, the impact of western swing musicians in Texas, Oklahoma, and the southwest during the 1930s, expanded cultural impact and they influenced more and more amateur performers to find similar opportunities. The most influential in the 1930s were Milton Brown and Bob Wills, though other bandleaders like Ted Daffan carried immense sway and contributed to working experiences and careers in music. It was these men, along with their groups and other performers that made regional styles like western swing profitable nationally and created openings for larger venues and further technological development that increased music as a commodity for audiences. To achieve that they traveled, and touring circuits throughout the 1930s and 1940s provided regular incomes and expanded brand recognition and capitalization of consumer desires.

**Bringing Entertainment to Communities over the Air and on the Bus**
In *Linthead Stomp*, historian Patrick Huber’s examination of textile workers and musicians in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, he documented “dozens of stringbands” that traveled the region after 1920s on improved roads, finding
opportunities making more money than working in textile mills. They also performed on radios, without pay, and similarly translated those shows into marketing tools for performances across the region. Therefore, while western swing musicians were not the first to utilize traveling or other sources for marketing and income, their regional development transplanted and modified the idea within technological developments and introductions and the economic conditions obvious to many Americans, especially the audiences they encountered. Fittingly, these ideas meld well with discussions Huber provided about industrial mill workers in the previous decade, despite labor differences between agriculture and industry, and Huber’s examinations illustrated that while it may not have been common, the textile musicians who dabbled in company picnics or impromptu neighborhood porch performances indirectly evolved into the practices of western swing musicians. Without those pioneers, who played similar hillbilly music and were also white men, it is impossible to see how relationships to working and the American worker occurred throughout the country, and not in the vacuums of separated regions. Ultimately, the importance of both groups and a trajectory of influence in regional and popular music, saw hillbilly music from the Piedmont and western swing from Texas and Oklahoma contribute to a broader genre of country music after World War II.17

17 Huber, 37-38. See Huber’s discussions of industrial effects and retained ties to communities and families; Higbie, 207: “During [1870-1930], rural people sought to preserve their local communities and use modern society to their own ends. The so-called parity years between 1900 and 1920, when prices of farm products were roughly equal to those of manufactured goods, stimulated agricultural expansion and farm family consumerism. Automobiles and radios eased the isolation of farm life and helped strengthen local communities by making visiting easier and connecting families to a wider rural community. As the cost of maintaining a farm business increased, farm laboring became a less viable pathway to farm ownership, and marginal farms failed in increasing numbers.”
The western swing musicians assumed professional identities different from millhands as a result of radio broadcasts and methods of presentation and travel, witnessed through popular leaders and uniforms that further elevated these musicians from itinerancy or transients. In their work, these musicians provided products for Americans shaped by cultural developments linked to the radio, the automobile, and important connections created between rural and urban environments. In an interview given to biographer Cary Ginell about western swing and bandleader Milton Brown, Jimmy Thompson remembered the role of radio in the 1930s:

“Radio was popular, period. That was all you had back then. You went to school activities, you went to church, and you listened to radio. I remember the first radio that my daddy bought. You talk about having to hock the family jewels to get it, we did. I don’t know what it cost, but I will never forget that thing. It didn’t matter what we heard either. We just had to sit on one end and hear somebody else on the other.”

Radio served as both an immediate tool for entertainment, news, weather, etc., and a method for the broadcasters to advertise products, services, and in this discussion, upcoming appearances by musicians at dancehalls or parties. Performance venues proliferated social interactions among listeners seeking the forms of entertainment performers and the radio distributed on a daily basis. The effects of the Depression complicated consumption as it existed in the 1920s and ideas of mass consumption returned in more identifiable forms after World War II, when manufacturing and incomes increased for a large percentage of Americans.18

Traveling circuits for western swing musicians hinged on their access to and reliance upon radio programs and advertising tools. Musicians in Texas quickly took advantage of the prospects radio offered to attract listeners and market “live”

18 Jimmy Thomason, oral interview in Ginell and Brown, 53.

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performances (even though radio was equally live). According to oral historian Jean A. Boyd, by 1922 there were twenty-five radio stations in Texas, but radio programming was determined by strategies pioneered by northern radio directors. Early Texas broadcasts featured popular music from the north, particularly jazz, but also classical and “sacred music.” Boyd comments this basically northern music influenced southern listeners’ tastes and performers’ styles. Traditional music in the south and southwest was appropriately affected, and western swing emerged as a style influenced by northern tastes and local styles prominent in the urban and rural communities of Texas. Furthermore, Boyd comments that western swing “was an indicator of socioeconomic transformations” occurring in the region. Limited economic inabilities heavily impacted the peoples of Texas, causing constant movement searching for work, and dependence upon the radio as a community organizer and form of entertainment. Western swing signified socioeconomic changes in the region, as the musicians predominantly emerged from agricultural and working class backgrounds, played to similar audiences, but took in income and economic gains that gave them greater security and access to accommodations outside that social status.19

Musicians easily existed as migrant labor arriving for work opportunities in the communities they visited as part of their traveling circuits and professional performances. In his discussion of migrant seasonal workers, Frank Tobias Higbie argued that “demand for labor and commodities set the context for all migrations,” and while musicians stayed for less than a day, in Texas and Oklahoma they represented

19 Boyd, 7-9.
urban elements entering rural environments to provide modern commodities, then as quickly departing and avoiding overwhelming the environments they visited (at least in person, radio broadcasts represented larger community constructions). As the western swing musicians settled in urban communities, they formed a community with rural communities where in any other work, primarily agricultural in these examples, they might be viewed as a transient or an outcast: “They came from somewhere, but they resided nowhere.” Musicians did not completely affirm historical migratory identities, as argued, but acted as “seasonal laboring men” that “helped make stable communities possible by arriving at times of peak labor demand and then moving on at season’s end”; traveling musicians arrived, formed a part of the community, provided a commodity, and left. Traveling to communities provided these constructions, but radio made the point of access.20

For Americans during the Depression and War periods, entertainment and forms of leisure took on important roles, often providing escape from the realities of both periods. Compared to the decade prior to the Depression, and certainly cognizant of the environmental damages occurring because of the Dust Bowl, residents in Texas and Oklahoma in the early 1930s possibly viewed expanded openings for entertainment and leisure as “[sources] of stability in an otherwise unstable and foreign environment.” In communities like Dallas and Fort Worth, in particular, instabilities caused by economic and environmental hardships increased between 1930 and 1932, when “one in every four Americans, including those living in Texas, was jobless, and middle-class incomes had dropped by 50 percent.” Agricultural economic

20 Higbie, 7 and 11.
prospects in Texas dwindled dramatically, and this especially proves important as many western swing musicians came from these backgrounds, predominantly cotton fieldwork. However, in that same period, those musicians who previously worked in agriculture as children started engaging those opportunities that changed their economic outlook during the Depression. For instance, bandleader Milton Brown in Fort Worth, handily earned enough from performing that his family, parents, wife, siblings, all lived comfortably based entirely on his income. Music evolved to appeal, too, and “updated lyrics and modifications in rhythm and instrumentation” made the entertainment more appealing to depressed Americans. While music offered opportunities for audiences to forget or temporarily overlook worries and concerns, it also started accommodating previously acquired or sought after lifestyles and carried culture, ideas, and shared concerns among the communities musicians visited. Conversely, for musicians like Milton Brown, migratory behavior that provided that income proved problematic, and his marriage was suffering from its requirements by the time he died in early 1936.\textsuperscript{21}

The work contributed by traveling musicians was intense, the western swing bands based in cities like Dallas and Fort Worth typically returned home to broadcast

\textsuperscript{21} Boyd, “\textit{We’re the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Hill}”, 20: “A Texas cotton crop planted in the fall of 1931 promised to earn a market price of 9 to 10 cents a pound, but by harvest time in the spring of 1932 it was worth only 5.3 cents. … Farmers planning their crops for 1932-1933 had to produce three times what they did the year before merely to pay off their bank loans. Small subsistence farmers went bankrupt; sharecropping, which had been widespread in Texas before the Depression, proved unprofitable to landowners, who ran the tenants off their property and rented or sold it to commercial farmers with the latest machine technology. The agricultural depression was very real for Texas farmers and ranchers”; Boyd, \textit{The Jazz of the Southwest}, 7-8; Huber, 41; Higbie, 9: “Less than a decade later, the Country Life Commission worried that native-stock American men were no longer assured that hard work would lead to farm ownership—one of the fundamental elements of citizenship, in the opinion of the commission. Instead, poor rural living conditions and low farm profits combined with the lure of the cities to depopulate the countryside and undermine the agrarian bulwark of American democracy.”
radio shows daily during the week. Radio shows encompassed bands major
advertising and marketing endeavors, informing listeners and fans of upcoming
performances at various dance halls, honkytonks, and other venues suitable for bands
to play music for dancing. Texas, in particular, created an atmosphere ripe for this
development: where listeners and fans congregated and sought entertainment not
confined to their homes. Additionally, dancing venues provided substantial income for
performers at a time when jobs and money were scarce. Ultimately, men such as
Milton Brown, Bob Wills, Cliff Bruner, and their bands worked solely based on
performance and touring schedules. While the radio introduced these musicians and
western swing to larger “communities” of audiences, traveling to perform at local
venues brought the musicians into direct contact with listeners in isolated communities
and a relatively stable source of income. Direct contact with musicians on the radio
and at dancehalls or other venues created a comparable consumer good in the
Depression for individuals and families. Excitement and success of local performances
demonstrated the relevance of accessibility among audiences for performers and
within the music industry, and illustrate points for comparison with postwar
developments in mass consumption and recorded music.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Joe Carr and Alan Munde, \textit{Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas}
(Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995), 45-46: “The pattern of success for West Texas bands of
the thirties is well defined: They all performed regular on local radio. … it was essential to the success
of a musical group. It gave a group an opportunity to acquire and promote performances. A band could
tour a regional area defined roughly by its radio station’s listening area. … Phonograph recording was
not essential for the success of these groups.” See George Lipsitz, \textit{Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and
Culture in the 1940s} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 310; in particular Lipsitz’s discussion
of 20th century commercialism and its effects upon transforming music into a commodity, particularly
in the 1940s. “The transformation of music into commodities like sheet music, vaudeville-variety house
performances, phonograph records, and radio programs undermined some of the situatedness of country
music and blues by separating music from everyday life functions, buy turning human communication
between artists and audiences into a commercial transaction, and by imposing narrow marketing
categories on innovative, improvisational, and infinitely plastic art. But that same commercialism
Honkytonks and dance halls littered Texas highways and county roads, often at the outskirts of towns where access to bootlegged liquor was possible (and legal after Prohibition ended in December 1933). For this reason specifically, some dancehalls and taverns were not friendly to families, a notion that some radio owners and advertising managers used to prevent or discourage groups and musicians from announcing upcoming performances on broadcasted shows. Those products that sponsored specific radio shows, for instance Burrus Mill and its Light Crust Dough paid for a radio show that originated with Milton Brown and Bob Mills in 1930, but owner W. Lee O’Daniel, like other sponsors, feared connections to dancehalls and taverns detracted from the product they were supposed to be promoting and thus the Light Crust Doughboys specifically only existed as a radio group with those members. Economic hardships aside, finding entertainment and procuring alcohol, whether legally or illegally obtained, provided another escape for Americans during the Depression. Likewise, professional musicians found that those venues provided better income than industrial jobs, because they could control ticketing or take a percentage of gate sales: Milton Brown and Bob Wills were paid $15 a week for their “jobs” at Burrus Mill, which entailed preparing and practicing for Light Crust Doughboys radio broadcasts, but Brown earned far more in one evening performing at Crystal Springs dancehall outside Fort Worth.23

preserved music that might otherwise have been lost. It enabled people from diverse backgrounds to discover how much that had in common and consequently accelerated the mixing of peoples and musical forms.”

23 Ginell and Brown, 49-51, 74-75, and 122-123. W. Lee O’Daniel took great interest in the advertising potential of the Light Crust Doughboys, eventually working as the announcer and deciding what they could and could not play on-air. “…that type of music was considered ‘common.’ Not sophisticated enough. Simple music. The same thing went for Crystal Springs, but you could go out there and see all types of people. You could find the rich out there, the poor, and everybody else in between. But the
Between 1930-1932, Milton Brown and Bob Wills worked as members of the Light Crust Doughboys, a group that existed only on the radio at that time and played music that marketed Light Crust Dough to listeners. Ostensibly, the musicians worked at the Burrus Mill and Elevator Company in Fort Worth as employees for Light Crust Flour, which consisted of practicing eight-hours-a-day for the radio broadcast. Brown was familiar with working and broadcasting for this purpose, in the late 1920s he worked for Aladdin Lamp Company as part of the company’s radio group, “the Laddie’s.” Outside working with industrial companies as radio spokespersons, Brown and Wills played local dancehalls, but not with affiliation of their radio broadcasts. Some of the venues they played, especially around Fort Worth were later shared by Brown’s band, the Musical Brownies, and Wills’ Texas Playboys. In this division of work and leisure, these musicians jobs incorporated both their work on the radio and at dancehalls, but they controlled only the latter experiences, and came to understand how much potential lay with their own reputations against identifications with the Light Crust Doughboys radio program. W. Lee O’Daniel, later Governor of Texas and U.S. Senator, retained control over the group and prohibited any material remotely scandalous or advertisements he disapproved of, including performances at venues he considered rough, unwholesome, and not welcoming to families.24

Brown and Wills both exhibited a passion for music, but the nature of their performances while in the Light Crust Doughboys illustrates the conflicting status of majority of the people that went out there could barely afford the price of admission” (74-75). At Crystal Springs, owner Fred “Papa” Calhoun specifically ruled out bootleg alcohol before Prohibition, anyone caught selling it or bringing it in risked being banned from the premises. Once prohibition was lifted, Crystal Springs operated an in-house bar, but sales varied on a county-by-county status; Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest*, 2.

24 Ginell, 45-66; Boyd, “We’re the Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Hill”, 25; “… by at least January 1931 the Light Crust Doughboys played a radio program daily on Fort Worth’s KFJZ.”
traveling musicians: how did they, and how do we, identify distinct areas of migrant and settled workers, as well as work and leisure. In one manner, we can see distinctions articulated by historians like Higbie and Canaday emerge with the characterization (though not inaccurate) of the venues they preferred and found individual successes within. Performing as the Light Crust Doughboys provided both western swing musicians a status as professional musicians as well as identifiable workers in the mill, but disconnected from that status in dancehalls they initially operated without those ties. As they progressed and eventually left their incarnation of the Doughboys, their names and the groups they formed reasserted that professional status, but fears of deviance or problematic behaviors clearly occurred in the rejections of their selected venues. Class and social status determined the connections afforded between radio and dancehall performances, ostensibly differentiating middle class expectations from working class environments. Huber’s work in the Piedmont further indicates points for comparison here, too, since Burrus Mill and the Light Crust Doughboys represented work (even if it was still music-defined) while outside opportunities linked skills to entertainment and leisure culture, but also resulted in economic opportunities.

The emergence of prominent western swing musicians from Fort Worth, Texas, granted that community a level of dominance for the music in the 1930s, and retained connections with bandleaders like Bob Wills and Ted Daffan who moved to Oklahoma and California. Until 1932, Fort Worth, and the larger city of Dallas to the east remained largely unaffected by effects of the Great Depression. Fort Worth operated three major radio stations, each with varying signal strengths, and was home
to Milton Brown and his family. It was in 1932 that Milton Brown, then a member of the Light Crust Doughboys with Bob Wills, decided to leave that “job” with Burrus Mill and start his own band. Before Brown’s death in a car accident four years later, the Musical Brownies broadcast on the radio, traveled nearly daily to surrounding communities, and held a residency at nearby Crystal Springs dancehall on the weekends. In his biography of Milton Brown, written in conjunction with his youngest brother Roy Lee Brown, Cary Ginell articulated how vital Brown and the Musical Brownies were to western swing: “Although every fan of the Brownies will say that people came to Crystal Springs to see Milton Brown, it was Milton’s band that established the sound and rhythm admired for so many years by southwestern musicians.”

As Milton Brown organized his band, the Musical Brownies, in the fall of 1932, the Depression hit Dallas and Fort Worth. His youngest brother Roy Lee Brown remembered their mother feeding people who came to their home looking for handouts. Along with Milton, who still lived at home, another brother Derwood was recruited on guitar for the Brownies. Roy Lee Brown reported to biographer Cary Ginell that since the two older brothers “made good money playing music … we made it through that period pretty good.” Playing music provided security and stability for the Brown family and other members of the group, and in light of strains upon the family economy in the Depression, these musicians maintained breadwinner roles and gender dynamics by contributing the only source of income. Eventually the Brownies constant broadcasting and traveling disrupted his marriage before his death, but the

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25 Ginell, xxi and 9. An older sister, Era Brown died from an unknown illness died in May 1918, before the Brown family moved to Fort Worth.
extent he supported other family members signaled an important distinction for 1930s family economics and the connections these musicians held with the American worker. Tying music between work and leisure counteracted rejections of family duties if male breadwinners took their needs before dispersed among their families or did not fully reveal their earnings.\textsuperscript{26}

The impact of intense schedules on economics and popularity was not revelatory for the Brownies, in the years as a Light Crust Doughboy, Brown and Bob Wills traveled extensively for their work at Burrus Mill. For example, in March 1931 W. Lee O’Daniel took the Doughboys to a baker’s convention in Galveston, and wired a bus for the trip so the group could stop on the route south and play impromptu performances. Traveling and performances outside radio broadcasts provided the benefits needed for individual and family survival in the Depression, and for musicians like Milton Brown demonstrated extensive dedication perfecting his craft for the outlets available. The traveling musicians succeeded capturing a new sense of professionalism while transcended connections held to histories of itinerants and migratory workers. These musicians, in particular Milton Brown, enjoyed a more comfortable lifestyle than others in their communities, but also worked primarily outside those communities. Western swing musicians’ opportunities on the radio, including performers like Bill and Jim Boyd, illustrated commitments to working and perfecting their crafts, and those efforts paid off, giving these musicians options in a

\textsuperscript{26} Benson, 18-33.
depressed economy where other working Americans took economic relief and sought the musicians’ work as entertainment and leisure.27

In 1935, following a performance at a Women’s Club in Austin, Texas, by the Musical Brownies, Milton Brown was introduced to fiddler Cliff Bruner. The group arrived in Austin early for their performance in order to catch one of Bruner’s radio broadcasts, and Brown called the twenty-year-old fiddler and offered him a job with the Brownies. Bruner had traveled extensively between 1932 and 1935, from Houston to San Antonio, Amarillo, Dallas, and even Fort Worth, often finding opportunities for work on the radio, and always looking to start bands. The fiddler traveled primarily by jumping on freight trains, and he told oral historian Cary Ginell in the early 1930s that, “any direction that freight train was goin’ was all right with me as long as it was going to a big town … I knew I’d make it as long as I had my fiddle.” Throughout this period, Bruner’s work history was peppered with performing in numerous venues and spaces, finding work in city parks, at house parties, and part of medicine shows. The medicine shows brought spectacle and showmanship to the towns they visited, with musicians performing a free show and attracting hundreds and thousands of people according to Bruner.28

Already a member of a band based out of Houston, Bruner was convinced to “audition” for Brown due to the opportunities such work would provide, and in reality that process was likely a formality since Brown was familiar with Bruner’s abilities. Nevertheless, Bruner joined Brown’s band on the radio and at regular performances the band played outside Fort Worth, first at their own Brownie Tavern (created by

27 Ginell, 49 and 69-70.
28 Ginell, 178-181.
Brown but later shutdown), and later at the band’s resident venue, the Crystal Springs. He was the second fiddle in the group, after Cecil Brower, and in his time with the band (until 1937, after Brown’s untimely death), essentially lived on the touring bus they used to get from their radio station in Fort Worth to venues as far as Abilene and Bryan, sometimes even into Oklahoma. In addition to the radio program and regularly traveling, by the time Bruner joined the band, they performed regularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays in Fort Worth. These jobs entailed playing radio shows daily at noon, jumping in the bus to travel, playing a show until late at night (midnight or 1 AM), then traveling all night to get back to Fort Worth, and repeating the process the next day and on. According to Roy Lee Brown, Milton “went on at noon because he figured people were on their lunch hour and could get to a radio while they had their lunch.” Members of the Brownies made as much as $150-$200 a week, or a percentage of the tickets sold at venues. With increasing economic stability, these professional musicians quickly surpassed their own experiences in agricultural or industrial work. Crucially, their work benefitted from Americans looking for escapes in the Depression, and western swing musicians in Texas contributed to the construction of a vast regional entertainment and leisure-based culture, one that increasingly factored in national developments.

After Brown’s death from a car accident in April 1936, Cliff Bruner eventually departed the reformed Brownies put together by Milton’s brother Derwood, and formed his own group, the Texas Wanderers. Bruner set up the Wanderers in Houston in 1937, before moving the band to Beaumont and establishing his own “territory” in

29 Ginell, 74-75.
western Louisiana. The fiddler took some of the Musical Brownies with him to the Wanderers, specifically electric steel guitar player Bob Dunn, who pioneered audibly electrifying his guitar under Brown’s tutelage (he adapted it from an old African American guitarist he viewed at New York’s Coney Island), as well as hired musicians unconnected to the Brownies, like fellow fiddler J.R. Chatwell. Born the same year as Cliff Bruner, Chatwell learned to play the fiddle (and the mandolin) from his father at home—though he remembered his father as “the worst fiddle player ever.” Prior to playing in the Wanderers, Chatwell performed as a member of the High Fliers, another Fort Worth group that broadcast daily and traveled to venues around the city for evening and weekend shows. In 1981, Bruner told Allan Turner he met Chatwell in Brownwood, Texas, and the fiddler wanted any job that “got him out of the cotton patch.” Though Brown and Bruner encountered Jazz performers and incorporated some style in their playing, Chatwell “never had much contact with Jazz,” listened to Bing Crosby, and practiced breaking down straight country music. Like Tennessean Wesley Copeland, Chatwell listened to an extensive repertoire, except swing music it seems.30

For western swing musicians focused on radio broadcasts and traveling to venues in regional communities, recording opportunities occurred infrequently and more a peripheral activity. Field recordings by major publishing houses and recording labels from New York and Chicago became more prominent by 1935-1937 when they

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30 Boyd, 30: “Western swing musicians in the Houston-Beaumont area of southeastern Texas were heavily imbued with blues and were aware of the Cajun musical styles emanating out of southwestern Louisiana. Thus, the Texas Wanderers, with Jazz fiddler Cliff Bruner and blues pianist Moon Mullican, featured earthly earthy blues numbers interspersed with Cajun favorites like “Jolie Blon” as well as popular ballads and their own renditions of big-band swing arrangements.” It is worthwhile to note group names, especially “High Fliers” and “Wanderers,” since both feed into ideas of transients, and typical work schedules for the musicians; Carr and Munde, 39-40.
scoured Fort Worth, Dallas, San Antonio, and Houston radios for bands to record, falling upon the Brownies and later Bruner’s Texas Wanderers. In New Orleans, the Brownies recorded 48 sides (with Bruner on second fiddle) in early March 1935 at the Roosevelt Hotel. The Brownies traveled to New Orleans because engineers established temporary recording studios in “centralized” locations for wide regions and booked groups accordingly. Recording in these makeshift set-ups required the entire groups perform into a single microphone, and for the Brownies this entailed seven musicians. Typically, musicians were recruited to travel to studio spaces in major cities like New York or Chicago, but producers like Dave Kapp felt “something was lost in removing the musicians from their natural milieu.” Kapp traveled with one assistant and Decca’s portable recording equipment twice a year to the south in the 1930s. When recordings finished, the equipment was shipped back, as were the delicate wax acetates that carried the performances to manufacturing plants for reproduction (and distribution). Due to the exacting nature of the wax discs in the period, numerous takes of any one song were rare (usually prohibited) because it required shaving the used wax away for a new groove. For groups like the Brownies, or Cliff Bruner’s Texas Wanderers, recording offered another avenue for marketing their music, but these early encounters and the limited outcomes were not indicative of musicians’ economic potentials in Texas and the southwest. Furthermore, those groups and bandleaders that enjoyed success from recording took part in the migration of Americans west, eventually finding work performing in concert venues to larger audiences in California during and after World War II.  

31 Ginell, 186-187; Huber, 2, 4, 26-27, and 74; Young and Young, 155. Even though most “western
Recording and Moving West for Work in the 1930s and World War II

In 1930s Hollywood, the motion picture industry utilized regional music like western swing to augment films produced with sound technology, and “singing cowboys” like Gene Autry represented the imagined and romanticized history of the “west.” Autry enjoyed massive success as a “singing cowboy,” achieving minor hits with songs like “That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine” (1931) and “Tumbling Tumbleweeds” (1934), the former performed in at least eight separate episodes of the twelve-part serial, The Phantom Empire. To the film studios, Autry equaled success and he gained starring roles in numerous films throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. While Autry enjoyed record sales and chart success, he existed as more of a film star, his roles increased the viability of western musicians in the film industry, a move an incarnation of the Light Crust Doughboys shared in 1936, performing alongside Autry in the film Oh, Susanna! Former Doughboy, Bob Wills also worked in films by 1940, and with his group the Texas Playboys, appeared with Tex Ritter in Take Me Back to Oklahoma, a fitting title on the eve of World War II after many migrants had moved west from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl.32

Bob Wills career as a professional musician only slightly followed Milton Brown’s brief life. After leaving the Light Crust Doughboys in 1933, he started the Playboys in Waco, Texas, before moving to Oklahoma City in January 1934, and

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renaming the band the Texas Playboys. Eventually, the band migrated again to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and found a daily broadcast on a regional radio station. From here, Wills’s career as a popular and legendary bandleader, recording artist, and film star, began—virtually overshadowing contemporary musicians in Texas like Milton Brown in legacy and impact (partly due to Brown’s death). In his biography of Milton Brown, Cary Ginell argued that, “Bob Wills’s massive success in popularizing the genre created by Milton Brown cannot be overestimated.” Within the first month in Tulsa, Wills and his Texas Playboys played “somewhere every night except Sunday,” and within another year Wills expanded the advertisers and goods marketed by his radio program. Reviewing class economics of the 1930s, and the consumer goods needed by families, Wills’ marketing techniques followed and revolutionized his history as a Light Crust Doughboy; in Tulsa, he procured an agreement with Red Star Milling Company to franchise Play Boy bread and sell Red Star flour as Play Boy flour. Reports indicated there were no differences in the product, but the new name appealed to fans and housewives claimed the Play Boy products were better. Fans of Wills and the Playboys additionally sent in letters, poems, and other testimonials applauding these goods, hinting at desires for consumer goods that transcended economic needs. Like successors in the 1950s and 1960s, the Playboys also wore “uniforms” on stage and appeared well kept and respectable to audiences heavily affected by economic and environmental problems.33

Wills also increased the instrumentation featured in the Playboys after moving to Tulsa, adding horn, saxophone, and drums to the traditional guitar-fiddle-bass

33 Benson, 70-76; Townsend, 90-95; Ginell 183 and 227.
arrangement. The addition of drums proved logistical, Wills wanted to create a solid dance beat for the group’s sound, and biographer Charles Townsend noted this “moved the band further from traditional fiddle or string band music and even closer to jazz.” The added instrumentation expanded the Playboys’ sound and distinguished Wills as an innovator while providing a unique style for audiences in Tulsa and other locations the band traveled and migrated in their career. In 1935, the first recording industry representatives approached Wills about a recording contract for the Playboys, agreeing to send engineers and equipment to meet the band in Dallas, a decision that required “barrels of ice” to preserve the wax masters. The Brunswick recordings sold well enough for the company that the label scheduled the group for a second series of recording sessions, however, the Playboys were required to travel to Chicago and Wills, in turn, chartered a railroad car for the September 1936 trip. Although the first sessions ended in tense disagreements of instrumentations and sounds on the records, after the second sessions, representatives for Brunswick recognized Wills talent, stopped hassling him in the studio and continued scheduling the band for regular sessions throughout 1937, 1938, and 1939. Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys recordings represented the economic viability regional musicians still enjoyed in the 1930s, as well as increased the group’s visibility in the Depression, not simply centered in Tulsa and traveling within a “territory” around that community.34

34 Townsend, 103-117. Wills first experimented with drums in the late 1920s. They recorded for the Brunswick label Vocalion until 1938, when Brunswick was bought by CBS and switched to Columbia Records distribution (still on Vocalion) and listed as “folk music” starting in 1938; Young and Young, 156: “During the latter half of the 1930s, the Wills band filled dancehalls and roadhouses every night it took to the road. … Yet Wills and the Playboys had no real following outside Texas and some neighboring states. Within their territory, however, they capitalized on radio broadcasts and record purchases to create a hybrid that utilized both country music and swing.”
Sessions recording for Brunswick and Columbia started with the material well known to Wills’ band and western swing musicians: “jazz, blues, and race music”—or, music for dancing. By the 1938 sessions, again in Dallas, however, Wills repertoire changed, reflecting continued introduction of new materials, as well as growing popularity derived from recording and record sales. Charles Townsend noted this “session revealed a new trend,” and Wills and the band recorded material “closer to pop music and Tin Pan Alley.” While Bob Wills later capitalized on the expansion of western swing outside his native region due to World War II and population migration, there remains ample evidence his recordings enjoyed exposure to a national audience, even as Brunswick and Columbia cataloged the group under regional headings that followed industry practices of the 1920s and 1930s, in this case “folk music.” The introduction of more popular material and the New York publishing houses material indicated this shift, allowing greater argument that even as he capitalized, the music the Playboys performed and recorded had already developed to aid in the expansion and migration taking place in the early 1940s. Adding to this shift was the growing number of renowned artists recording cover versions of the groups songs by 1940-1941, notably Bing Crosby’s version of “New San Antonio Rose,” which sounded nothing like Wills original version beyond the lead vocals.\(^35\)

As recorded songs like “Ida Red,” “San Antonio Rose” and “New San Antonio Rose,” sold well between 1938-1940, Bob Wills career on the radio and traveling in his territory continued. Wills took advantage of the expansion of recording throughout the late 1930s, adding “canned music” to the Playboys hefty performing schedule and

\(^{35}\) Townsend, 107 and 118: “Wills greatest popularity came on the eve of and during World War II, at just the right time for servicemen to take his music and his folk expressions around the world”; Zak, 45.
its early forms of brand management. Additionally, on the eve of World War II in 1940 and 1941, Wills and the Playboys appeared in their first Hollywood films, and by 1946 appeared in over fifteen features and shorts according to Bob Pinson, who prepared a “filmusicology” for Charles Townsend’s biography of Wills. During this period, Wills officially moved to Hollywood after receiving a medical discharge from the armed services. From the early 1940s to the late 1960s, Wills and the Playboys remained prolific performers and toured extensively, building a remarkable legacy in American culture and influencing and inspiring many other musicians, including fans in Texas and Oklahoma. His time in California was brief, however, and Wills moved back to Oklahoma in 1949, but crowds were drawn to his “personality and magnetism” and his fiddling wherever he was headquartered. In California, booking agents took any date available from the band for venues, often taking chances that audiences would appear during the work-week (which they regularly did in Texas and Oklahoma the previous decade). Wills and the Texas Playboys successes expanded after World War II, as “every record they cut was a hit or at least sold out in most shops,” and “thousands came to his dances.” The group enjoyed postwar opportunities and engaged a renewed and larger national market where recording seemed to indicate success.36

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36 Townsend, 240-242 and 373-376. “San Antonio Rose” and “New San Antonio Rose” are the same song, with lyrics adapted into the originally instrumental song by Wills and the Texas Playboys. See “Bob Wills Fiddle Stilled: King of Western Swing Dies,” Frederick Daily Leader, May 14, 1975. Bob Pinson claimed his list was “preliminary,” so it may be incomplete, a point seemingly confirmed by the Texas Music History Online database, which lists appearances in “nineteen horse operas.” “Bob Wills,” Texas Music History Online, http://ctmh.its.txstate.edu/artist.php?cmd=detail&aid=25 (accessed March 18, 2011). Wills reported to Time his 1945 income was $340,000. In a 1975 obituary, guitarist Tommy Allsup commented “I would say he probably performed before more people than any other entertainer in the business and that includes the Beatles.”
Other bandleaders aside from the veterans of the Light Crust Doughboys (Milton Brown and Bob Wills) achieved success working on the radio and traveling to perform in the 1930s. One of those musicians was Ted Daffan, who was born in 1912 in Louisiana, and was interviewed by reporter Allan Turner for the same project documenting these musicians as Cliff Burner in 1981. For Daffan, “neither side of his family” were musically inclined, and he was not around much music growing up, but preferred to work on electric equipment and built radio tubes after graduating high school in the late 1920s. On the eve of the Depression, Daffan hoped to attend Rice University and pursue a degree in science, but could not afford the fees and worked in construction between 1930-1933. After hearing his cousin play steel (Hawaiian-style) guitar, Daffan bought a $5 guitar, tuned it to replicate the steel sound, and learned to play from instruction books bought or borrowed from local libraries, by practicing six to eight hours daily. In his pursuit to learn guitar, Daffan increasingly encountered work opportunities centered on that skill, first in an instrument repair shop in Houston, and by 1934-1935 giving lessons to sixty students between 9 AM and 9 PM over eight months for $25 a week. Additionally, while he taught, Daffan was hired by a group, the Blue Age Playboys to provide electronics and transportation, and during a year working for the group also played western swing and country in dancehalls around Houston and the Texas Gulf coast, as well as on radio broadcasts from station KXAZ at 6 AM, noon, and 9 PM (not daily like other performers and bandleaders). Daffan also bought an amplifier and reportedly one of the first “manufactured” steel guitars in Houston while with the Blue Age Playboys, but in his interview with Turner, revealed
he knew nothing about nor liked country music at the time, but the group brought regular work.  

The first broadcasting and performing experiences Daffan enjoyed in the mid-1930s presented a diverse work experience, ultimately utilizing technology and industrial developments, but not reliant upon labor or work in manufacturing or agriculture. Like the other examples cited in this discussion, working in music created job opportunities and a burgeoning career for Ted Daffan, and following those experiences, he organized his own group, the Texans. The most distant destination Ted Daffan and His Texans traveled to during the 1930s was dance halls in Corpus Christi, Texas. Daffan explicitly remembered not considering himself a “traveling musician,” commenting instead he preferred “sit-down” jobs, an indication he gave with descriptions of economic possibilities created by recording, specifically venue residencies, but also rejected similarly based industrial jobs. Recording was a tool for Daffan, a process that occurred strictly to increase publicity for his name and his group. Following Milton Brown and Cliff Bruner, Daffan recorded within Texas, for him the field units (still from Decca) came close to home—Houston, in a suite at the Wright Hotel. Since recording remained a component not specifically sought after by these musicians, it is easy to understand Daffan’s assertion that “Nashville was not the

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37 Bob Wills as an example illustrates how influential his work and music was, overshadowing his former Doughboy and fellow bandleader Milton Brown (much as it neglects the place of Milton Brown in discussing the development of western swing). This is an opinion borrowed from Cary Ginell, based on the length and legacy of Wills career and his stature beyond “western swing” as a country and western and pop musician marked accordingly by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee; Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 35-68. Gladwell forwards the idea that if an individual, or group of individuals practiced, or in this case performed, a particular skill for roughly 10,000 hours, they would master the skill. For added weight, he considered The Beatles and their time in Hamburg between 1960-1962 as a case study in popular culture and music success (pp. 47-50).
center for these musicians.” As a form of work, to these musicians, recording simply was not valuable compared to the prospects provided by radio broadcasts and performing in a traveling circuit and territory. Daffan succeeded as preceding and contemporary musicians did, by attracting listeners in their immediate vicinity, but even those opportunities were not definite and during World War II, Daffan moved to California just as Bob Wills, in order to find work in music.

However limited emphasis was placed upon recording by bandleaders in the 1930s that did not preclude Daffan from emerging as a successful recording artist at the same time as Bob Wills. Daffan enjoyed the biggest selling record in 1939 with the song “Truck Driver’s Blues,” which he wrote and was recorded by Cliff Bruner’s band, and sold over 5,000 pressings (or 100,000 copies) nationally. The same year, sessions for the Texans with Columbia Records yielded the song “Worried Mind,” which sold over 335,000 copies and would have reached the top spot on corresponding Billboard charts had Bob Wills “New San Antonio Rose” not been #1. Working with his band the Texans, Daffan introduced new instrumentations to the western swing sound: steel guitars with fills and accordions, as well as clearer sounding electric guitars. Importantly, these recording opportunities provided Daffan more economic income, as he gained writing opportunities and royalties from units sold, typically to juke box vendors and following World War II, recording success opened doors for the venue residencies he enjoyed.38

After “Worried Mind,” Daffan earned “respectable money” and the Texans traveled to California in 1941 to record sides at CBS Studios. Even though they were

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38 Daffan also noted that “Truck Driver’s Blues” was the first song ever written about truck drivers, and he got the idea while watching the workers play nickel jukeboxes (per songplay) in roadside cafes.
not in the limited hotel suites with portable equipment, all eight musicians in the band performed into a single microphone, with limited alternate takes, and absolutely no mixing available. The songs “No Letter Today” and “Born to Lose” were recorded at CBS in January 1941, but after the Army took over the studio, the songs remained unreleased until 1943, when released together as a “double side,” they sold over a million copies. Daffan’s experience with recording emerged as a prominent source of income, but the onset of World War II stopped recordings, in part with the Army taking over studio spaces, but also the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) mandating a ban on broadcasts by NBC and CBS radio stations and affiliates. As a result, Daffan found his group broken up as members found jobs in war industries. Daffan ended up back in Houston working as an electrician in the shipyards, which he found “boring.” The bandleader joined the Ferry Command and trained to fly at Texas Christian University, but failed his physical exam due to a drinking habit he developed in reaction to “boring” defense work and the break-up of the Texans. He took a job in the electronics department at Consolidated Defense Plant in Fort Worth, but in 1944, started performing again, booked a residency in Hollywood, and formed a new group to go back out west.  

At Venice Pier in Hollywood, Daffan found a lucrative “sit-down” job for his group, earning an exclusive contract to perform weekly at the venue that held up to 14,000 attendees. On the west coast, these venues barely resembled the intimate dance halls where listeners interacted with the band, but the larger development was income raised by larger venues and audiences designed to listen to concert performances.

39 By the early 1940s, recordings reflected broadcasts both in shared content as well as being broadcast.
Venues like Venice Pier put a greater focus on ticket sales and attention paid to performances, which instituted limited interactions among attendees and saw dance floors increasingly phased out or removed from the outset to accommodate the audience sizes. Daffan had initially returned to Texas to find work in the war, unlike migrating American workers going west for work opportunities, but his residency reflected the latter notions better because as defense industry jobs multiplied in California, those American workers that found jobs sought out entertainment and leisure that was new and exciting, but also reminiscent of the regions they came from and homes they missed. Hence, promoters searched and located groups and musicians to fill venues and capitalize on listener and audience demands during the war and in the immediate postwar years.40

The time Ted Daffan and His Texans’ spent working at the Venice Pier (in the ballroom) provided regular employment based on their skills as musicians and performers. His musicians worked for scale, Daffan took in $200 per week supplemented by the constantly increasing value of his recording and writing royalties. The sum of his earnings in California enabled him to enjoy a penthouse overlooking the pier, but in 1946 he signed a two-year contract to return to Texas, this time making home in Arlington while working in Dallas-Fort Worth area dance halls. Like his contemporaries Milton Brown and Bob Wills it remains fairly obvious Daffan considered performing a livelier career choice than working as an electrician, a job he started at in the 1920s and took up again in the 1940s. In Daffan’s case, performing

40 Lipstiz, 313: “From the oil fields of Texas and the steel mills of Chicago to the booming shipyards on both coasts, black and white workers with money to spend longed to hear the music they left behind them when they moved to the city.”
explicitly constituted work: it made ends meet and provided more income and sense of fulfillment than the laboring work available in Texas in the 1920s and 1940s and on the west coast during World War II. Daffan’s work as a musician possibly disconnected him from the audiences he sought to make his income, as productivity and output emerged as central tenets of working class distinctions in the postwar era, yet Daffan disliked industrial positions that marked those links.

Additionally, Ted Daffan illustrates the impetus and desire to record that ultimately shaped the explosion of popular music in the postwar years, he released over 100 songs on various major labels, was credited for writing over 200 songs released, and enjoyed roughly 32 million “mechanical” royalties, or to make a complex arrangement relatively simple: the percentages of actual products sold, which in the current industry range from between 10%-25% depending on artistic popularity. In the period 1944-1946 when Daffan enjoyed exclusivity and success at Venice Pier, the groups recorded output was distributed nationwide by Columbia, and most sold between 100,000-200,000 copies. His song “Born to Lose” may have sold more than seven million copies (through at least three re-releases in 1948, 1955, and 1959) and by his recollection, he stated 139 different recordings (including cover versions) had been made of the song since it was released in 1942 and his interview with Turner in 1981. Daffan shared cultural influence and relevance in the 1940s much like Bob Wills, and the shifts he underwent as a performing musician and professional recording artist hint further at changes that occurred in the music industry as a result of the end of World War II and a renewed consumer culture.
In the immediate postwar era, Bob Wills also utilized technological developments to strengthen his radio exposure across the nation. During the Depression, the Federal Radio Commission made it more advantageous to utilize live performances on the radio than to utilize “canned” material. The Federal Radio Commission did not prohibit scripted or transcribed (pre-recorded) shows, but they had to be announced as “transcriptions,” i.e. not authentically live shows. Recorded materials or shows were outlined after the Radio Act of 1927 as fraudulent to the listener, but after World War II, performers who commanded large statuses in the music industry, such as Bing Crosby and Bob Wills, began pushing for new methods of broadcasting. The transcribed Wills shows found huge markets as early as 1946, and they included scripted materials for local broadcasters to include familiar voices for regional audiences. The Texas Playboys were billed as “America’s #1 Western Swing Band” as part of advertising components, an effort to offer advantageous merits to local sponsors. Wills schedule in the postwar years mandated the utilization of this type of broadcasting and advertising: the materials for these shows acknowledged that the “[Playboys keep] dance engagements almost nightly throughout the west.” Likewise, *Time* magazine recognized Wills’ role expanding his audiences, professional career, and notions of respectability outside rural or “country” definitions: “Wills is more of a backwoods Guy Lombardo than a balladeer like Burl Ives. His trick is to bring ranch-house music nearer to the city.”41

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41 Zak, 12-15 and 29-42. From an advertising brochure: Tiffany Music, Inc. Presents “America’s #1 Western Swing Band: Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys,” circa 1947-1948. Included in the Bob Wills Collection, folder 1 of 2, Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
Bob Wills, the most well-known of the western swing performers of the 1930s expanded the style beyond its regional basis in the 1940s with the help of brand recognition and capitalization of displaced, migrating Americans during World War II. Of course, moving out of Texas and Oklahoma occurred following the advent of his recording career and travel to sessions in Dallas, Chicago, and Los Angeles, but it was labor demands in the war industries that facilitated his opportunities out west. World War II brought industrial jobs to urban centers like Houston and Los Angeles, and with those jobs came new migrants moving to find work. Although Arkansans, Louisianans, Texans, and Oklahomans moved west throughout the Depression, the movement west during World War II increasingly took the culture of the region with it. Bob Wills and the Playboys enjoyed stable careers as professional musicians in their touring circuits and via recording, but nonetheless fit easily into the 1940s migration because they also moved west to capitalize on new job opportunities, even if they remained outside industrial labor and made far more money than contemporary migrants.42

In the late 1930s, western swing may have remained at best a primarily regional style, as some historians have cited it as, but Bob Wills and World War II demonstrate its popularity grew tremendously even as that supposed regional following limited outside interest. Jean A. Boyd likewise claimed the music “thrived” outside Texas in the 1940s as Texans migrated; it naturally followed “because it was

42 Carr and Munde, 61: “In Texas, after the war, Bob Wills-style western swing was firmly established as a popular dance music. On a national scale, however, despite Will’s’ movie appearances and national hits such as “New San Antonio Rose,” his prominence was limited to areas in which he had toured and performed on radio extensively: Oklahoma, Texas, and California. As a result, Wills had very little contact with the eastern country music community. Many of his innovations were too modern for that country music establishment.”
the native dance music of Texas.” Furthermore, Bob Wills’s easy ascension to massive
crowds and immense success in California occurred “because he was playing to
displaced homefolks.” If we look back at how “traveling musicians” operated during
the Depression, we can also see that the limited means of the period, even as
musicians like Milton Brown, Cliff Bruner, and J.R. Chatwell, found radio broadcasts
and venues, simply prevented the musicians from venturing too far from known and
established points of commercial opportunity. As the war created labor needs, and
regional populations moved to take advantage, then the limitations on traveling
distances evaporated.43

The growth of radio in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by opportunities to
record a group’s output, illustrated prospects for work in entertainment and leisure
throughout the Depression and World War II that negated lost careers or backgrounds
in industrial and agricultural work. Additionally, these musicians, Wesley Copeland,
the Boyd brothers, Cliff Bruner, Milton Brown, Ted Daffan, and Bob Wills, all
indicated the changing occupations and options in rural and growing communities in
the 1930s and 1940s, strictly away from music industry centers like New York,
Chicago, or Nashville. Although Milton Brown tragically died after only a couple
dozens recordings, the impact he left meant followers and admirers could make their
own opportunities along the same path, amending it where possible, including
recording as a form of work. The shift toward recording illustrates a more definite

43 Young and Young, 155-156; Boyd, 5 and 25; Ginell, xxviii. See Ginell’s commentary on how
recording opportunities (the few that existed in the early 1930s), further limited expansion: “Low
phonograph record sales during the Depression was another factor that helped restrict the geographical
dissemination of western swing. During his lifetime, Milton Brown never achieved a national hit record,
nor did he ever write a hit song. But by the time he died, his sound had already been established, and
bands throughout the Southwest were using the Musical Brownies as their model.”
divide between work and leisure for these performers, as well as broader definitions as professional musicians, even as traveling to perform created and relied on professionalism and planning. Audiences paid to hear musicians, contributing to income for their performers, but in the cultural construction of pop music that became more pronounced after World War II, ideas of entertainment and leisure overlooked notions that music offered multiple escapes from economic hardships.

Historian George Lipsitz illustrated movement for work in World War II sparked interest in musical styles from the regions where migrants originated, including the blues, rhythm and blues, and western swing (it actually gained its name in California). Ultimately, these styles formed the core of early rock ‘n’ roll music because migrants, or workers, wanted to enjoy their native cultures. Musicians’ opportunities increased according with these desires and wants, and they, too, traveled west to find audiences and establish territories as they had in Texas and Oklahoma. The cases presented for Bob Wills and Ted Daffan demonstrated this migration during the 1940s and the opportunities those musicians enjoyed in the immediate postwar period. As western swing musicians and audiences interacted with numerous other styles, the style “acquired greater polish, refinement, and complexity,” under the direction of California-based musicians like Spade Cooley and Tex Williams. In the midst of migration and continued development, western swing and its audiences interacted with other styles and diverse audiences to create the impetus for a consumer market based on larger appeals of entertainment and leisure. The move west for western swing musicians presented economic opportunities and expanded impact in national awareness and the music industry. The “traveling musicians” mentioned here,
originally limited to specific territories in Texas, Oklahoma, and the southwest by radio broadcasting commitments, found new areas for success and enjoyment, expanding their popularity among larger and diverse groups of Americans. Musicians like Bob Wills and Ted Daffan helped transplant a regional culture within a new urban-industrial economy adopted by many migrating Americans during World War II. Western swing made up one of many different styles transplanted during the war and postwar, and alongside cultural interactions among diverse populations, contributed to demand for more popular music and new styles like rock ‘n’ roll.44

**Western Swing and Rock ‘n’ Roll in Postwar Work and Consumption**

In the postwar era, radio broadcasts and performing at dances and concerts remained the prominent sources for musicians to learn and perfect skills while working and earning income. Recording increasingly marked a new definition for professionalism and indicated a significant division between working class and middle class identities, and many local and regional performers enjoyed recording opportunities, but it never entered their economies as a significant source of income, largely remaining another tool for advertisements and marketing. The history of itinerancy and migrant workers that western swing musicians counteracted in the 1930s shifted after World War II, as well, with movement and touring regular patterns

44 Lipsitz, 313; Townsend, 261-265: Wills returned to Oklahoma in 1949, moving to Oklahoma City rather than Tulsa, where his younger brother had established his own radio program in Bob’s absence, but Wills and family moved to Dallas not long after returning, where financial mismanagement caught up with him, and he was forced to sell off his California property to pay back taxes and fines. His popularity did not decline, fans in California demanded a tour in the early 1950s and he and the Playboys resumed traveling to perform; Boyd, 30; Wald, 143: “The Western Swing players might wear cowboy hats for publicity purposes, but essentially they were dance band professionals satisfying the varied musical tastes of their particular region. And with the influx of war workers from Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arkansas, and Louisiana, even swing bands that had no cowboy associations had to pick up some of that repertoire.”
of work for Americans again, and musicians often traveled far and wide from their homes and families. By the late 1940s, too, a new, younger generation of musicians dominated the trajectory of the western swing style, such as Spade Cooley in California, which represented the impact of wartime migration for industrial work and the influence of the style. The opportunities in the era demonstrated to men like Bob Wills how lucrative traveling and performing remained, even when they tried to slow down and raise families. The western swing musicians of the 1930s, however, largely remained in local and regional markets, even as they enjoyed national exposure, and similarly continued to influence audiences and musicians in places like Texas, where Bob Wills remained a prominent musician to another generation of performers in the 1950s. In those regional spaces, musicians continued to find success, with some going on to national prominence in the postwar and 1950s, and others satisfied with the careers they enjoyed in a smaller capacity.

The interest in rural forms of music like western swing became evident on the west coast as musicians migrated with working Americans, and shared influence with blues and hillbilly, and films and other musicians carried the style to the east coast. In Pennsylvania, a young man originally from Michigan named Billy Haley idolized cowboy singer Gene Autry in the late 1930s and taught himself to play guitar and yodel, finding work at an auction mart in the summer of 1940 after he finished eighth grade. Working at a defense plant job in 1943 at the age of 18, Haley opened for “singing cowboy” Roy Rogers at Radio Park in Philadelphia to an audience of 10,000 people and immediately quit his industrial job. Haley labeled himself “the Rambling Yodeler” and found work with Midwestern string bands in 1945 and 1946, primarily
the “Range Drifters,” a group whose name reflected itinerancy like Cliff Bruner’s Wanderers. Traveling with the Range Drifters took Haley across the nation and introduced him to various styles, including western swing, New Orleans-based rhythm and blues, Chicago’s electrified version of Mississippi-based guitar blues, and St. Louis swing. Returning to Pennsylvania in late 1946, Haley proposed to a radio manager that the station should play all styles of music to attract a diverse audience. The manager agreed on the condition Haley “sold advertising, wrote and delivered the commercials, hosted some of the shows and hired people to do the others, gathered together a musical library, announced the sports and weather,” and at the end of the day cleaned the studio. For the Western Swing Hour, Haley assembled a studio band called the “4 Aces of Western Swing” (the band changed their named to the Saddlemen when it was discovered an R&B group held the name Four Aces), and started working like 1930s predecessors: running the radio broadcasts daily and performing in dance halls and Pennsylvania honkytonks nightly.45

The 4 Aces of Western Swing, later the Saddlemen, looked the part of “singing cowboys,” dressed in cowboy outfits with hats, playing music that was labeled “country” by the early 1950s, and featured a line-up similar to Bob Wills’ Playboys: guitars, bass, piano, accordion, and drums. The band recorded sporadically, and in June 1951, publisher Jimmy Miller approached Bill Haley about recording a version of “Rocket 88” by Chicago-based r&b group Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, who

45 Jim Dawson, Rock Around the Clock: The Record That Started the Rock Revolution (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2005), 28-31; Wald, 167. Dawson notes “Haley noticed that every region of the country had its own rhythms, its own musical strains that weren’t being heard regularly on the national radio networks.” Haley’s work schedule through the late 1940s also led to increased drinking and the end of his marriage.
were actually Ike Turner’s Kings of Rhythm with saxophone player Brenston singing lead. Miller hoped to capitalize on the song’s popularity with white listeners, and the cover sold well enough that the Saddlemen covered another r&b song, “Rock the Joint” in 1952, though Haley rewrote some lyrics to appeal to country listeners. With this success, Haley changed the group’s name to the Comets for their next recording, “Real Rock Drive” in November 1952. Bill Haley and the Comets maintained links to country and western styles, but the new name reflected the group’s diverse musical style and meant to appeal to younger and white audiences. The song “Rock Around the Clock,” originally released in 1954, became a massive hit when used in the opening credits of the 1955 teen film *Blackboard Jungle*. Haley’s influence earned him legacy as the “father of rock ‘n’ roll” among young Americans, but illustrated race relations inherent within white cover versions of black musicians’ work that redirected economic potential of the music while reshaping social and political meanings.⁴⁶

Racial interactions in the late 1940s and 1950s paved new directions for popular music in the postwar period, and the input of r&b musician and blues artists heavily impacted and influenced rock performers, even though efforts by the music industry in the early 1950s sought to overlook and diminish those roles among white audiences. Racial interactions are quite important to the postwar developments of popular music, as African American performers in the south similarly emerged from agricultural backgrounds and learned to play at an early age, yet many never left home or shared their craft. As a result, many musicians never played for larger audiences or

⁴⁶ Dawson, 40-49; Wald, 168.
enjoyed opportunities broadcasting on the radio, functions also denied due to racism and segregation. However, the similarities of the two groups are vast, just like western swing examples looked for any radio work (performing) they could find, Bluesmen worked for any money they could earn from their craft, illustrating how performance and traveling factored into careers. Aside from two trips to San Antonio to record in 1936 and 1937, Robert Johnson barely traveled outside the delta region of the Mississippi, but his reputation of traveling to the crossroads and back created a legend far beyond many contemporary performers. In places like Memphis, however, jazz and blues orchestras held down employment posts comparable to the musicians in Texas, and they enjoyed greater access to the tool of the record industry that was already becoming a normal component of a musicians career: the studio.47

The former “Rambling Yodeler” developed into the “father of rock ‘n’ roll” from a love of Gene Autry and influences from regional markets around the nation, and he witnessed direct shifts between Depression and War consumption mentalities and patterns to mass appeal and consumption of entertainment and leisure based goods. By the postwar period, audiences across the United States had survived economic depression and wartime rationing, and returning soldiers shared experiences with diverse environments, cultures, and entertainment. Historian Susan Porter Benson suggested in Household Accounts that consumption and production were identical in the 1920s and 1930s, and Americans struggled against “the threat of want, at every

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47 Nathan W. Pearson Jr., “Mance Lipscomb: An American Musician” (master's thesis, Wesleyan University, May 1974), 2-3. Included in the Lipscomb-Myers Collection, box 2, file 1 at the Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. Lipscomb, born in 1895, learned music from his father, and followed him to local venues and performances, but as a sharecropper never sought out performances beyond his porch or community. In the 1960s, folk musicologists sought him out and convinced him to perform at festivals, and while he was recorded in this period before his death in the 1970s, he still refused recording contracts or other management.
turn.” Turned toward entertainment and leisure, consumption of music in the 1930s, 1940s, and even early 1950s remained contingent on those goods providing escape, as much as “redeploying labor” for both musicians’ at work and audiences confronting want. Consumption of music in the form of commodity goods was unavailable for working class Americans, yet outlets existed for musicians and performers to earn regular income by providing entertainment and leisure amongst Americans affected deeply by both depression and war. And like Bill Haley, more and more Americans found interests in western swing opened doors to performing and aspired to have careers in music.48

Accordingly, Americans previously unable to consume goods due to family economics and rationing, but capable of hearing musicians suddenly had greater options available to them with renewed economic productivity and output, including expanded consumer goods like LPs and single records recorded and distributed by the music industry. In the aftermath of over two decades of Depression and then War, those Americans desired and decided to spend money, buy on credit, and create a massive consumer-based society that enabled the United States to emerge as an economic powerhouse that lasted for almost three decades. Recording provided the primary tool for postwar expansion of the music industry, increasing the revenue and income of the industry and its corporations, but not contributing much to how musicians earned income. The teenagers listening to the material of their parents and new recorded and broadcasted material in the 1950s consumed industrial goods, as well as repeated efforts learning skills and trade in music. Young American

48 Benson, 166-170.
performers and musicians in the 1950s took to the road looking for venues and relied on radio managers to give them shots at daily or weekly broadcasts. The work of musicians from Wesley Copeland, the Boyd brothers, Cliff Bruner, and Milton Brown, through Bob Wills, Ted Daffan, and Bill Haley, transitioned into aspirations for careers in music and a massive industry in the postwar years—still focused on touring and appearances while recording opportunities expanded new musicians influences beyond local and regional markets. The regional basis for western swing expanded after World War II to interact with larger national interests.

Professional musicians highlighted how rural and urban communities linked in the 1930s, and expanded recording opportunities after World War II strengthened those connections. Historian Frank Tobias Higbie argued that “rural life was increasingly integrated in the emerging urban, corporate, and state-centered society” by the early 1930s, making itinerancy more complicated while traveling workers like musicians fared well economically because they carried and integrated urban and rural community interests. Higbie argues that industrial managers in the 1920s and labor economists devised ideas about “a community of interest” where “American democracy, community, and capitalism could be strengthened by enlightened management practices and an expanded state role in stabilizing the economy.” Musicians in Texas, Oklahoma, and eventually California facilitated this construction as the production needs between Depression and War reversed trends and needs of migrant, seasonal workers, in favor of fully migrated Americans finding work supporting wartime needs and postwar economic renewal. In the wake of the developments discussed with western swing musicians and regional influences upon
economic gains and popular success, the music industry focused more and more on structuring output and performances based on recordings, making music a commodity and consumer good designed for increased revenues and attention. As a result, musicians and performers expanded how and where they performed, increasingly seeking out larger venues to accommodate larger audiences, breaking away from dance halls in favor of concert halls.49

As economic conditions improved in the late 1940s and 1950s, the music industry capitalized on increased productivity and output for consumption, and increased the visibility of music as a commodity and site of work, vastly expanding the meaning of popular music within local, regional, and a national American market. When Bill Haley visited communities like Lubbock, Texas, in the mid-1950s he interacted with audiences that included emerging musicians like Buddy Holly, sharing not just a love for western swing, but also interests in music that stepped across race and class lines with another white, male musician. In this period, recording emerged as a principle designation for work in the music industry, and though professional musicians relied upon methods of touring and advertising, work in the studio signaled a form of return to industrial managed labor, where managers and executives scrutinized and directed recordings and arrangements, and the pace of work was strictly reviewed by time schedules and unionized settings. Working in music softened economic hardships in the Depression and provided stability and security for

individuals and at times their larger families. Where Americans feared limited employment, from ideas of transiency to the deterioration of families, musicians in regions like Texas negotiated expanded work opportunities from skills and training that provided income, maintained levels of autonomy, and offered entertainment and leisure that negated such fears.50

50 Higbie, 12-13. Higbie describes migrant and seasonal workers possibly looking to escape industrial-factor jobs: “[Men and women who worked for wages] certainly understood the need to earn wages to ensure the health of their families and communities. But their experiences with season and irregular work demonstrated that unemployment was an inevitable part of life, and many harbored dreams of escaping the labor market altogether in small business, homesteading, and farming. … Because of these opportunities, workers’ class consciousness often was built around a desire to escape the labor market, a desire not to be a worker.” Performing necessarily provided an escape from the labor market during the Depression, even while unemployment reigned.
CHAPTER III

“WHAT GOT US INTO ROCK ‘N’ ROLL”: WORK AND CLASS IN POPULAR MUSIC AND POSTWAR CONSUMPTION

In January and early February 1959, musician Buddy Holly took part in the “Winter Dance Party,” a tour consisting of twenty-four stops throughout the midwest United States. After an unscheduled concert in Clear Lake, Iowa, Holly chartered a private plane to carry him (and members of his band) to the tour’s next stop in Fargo, North Dakota, ideally hoping to rest up, wash clothes, and avoid poor heating and health problems on the tour bus. After midnight, Holly and fellow “Winter Dance Party” performers Richie Valens and the Big Bopper (in place of Holly’s band members), went to the nearby municipal airport and departed on the chartered flight, but shortly after takeoff, pilot Roger Peterson lost visibility due to weather and the plane crashed, killing all four occupants. This event is well-documented and chronicled as a tragic accident in the history of popular music, and was later referred to as “the day the music died” in the 1971 song “American Pie” by musician Don McLean. All three musicians killed on the flight were highly popular and influential, and the lyric “the day the music died” reflected the youth of rock ‘n’ roll and of those musicians’ lost in the crash. In one tragic accident, three musicians died because they needed the incomes provided by touring despite enjoying statuses with recording contracts and careers. In the midst of a tour, Buddy Holly’s chartering of a flight and the effects of the crash revealed economic options for popular musicians in the 1950s.

Touring and performing in the 1950s functioned in tandem with the recording industry, where recorded outputs defined industrial growth and musicians’ successes,
thus granting the crash a significant role in marking musicians’ work and the spaces building and sustaining careers in music. Tours like the “Winter Dance Party,” with multiple acts in one concert, capitalized on performers plugging two to three hits before the next took the stage. The ability to charter a plane illustrated Holly held an economic position that afforded an upgrade to traveling on the tour bus, but his participation overall demonstrated that performing provided easily accessed income compared to limitations and contractual arrangements of recording contracts. In late 1958, Holly mutually broke up with band the Crickets, and together they also fired their business manager and record producer Norman Petty, but faced difficulties accessing previous earnings thereafter. Effectively, Buddy Holly joining the “Winter Dance Party” represented work and his roots to the working class, a means to providing control over productivity and output through recording and plans for establishing and directing opportunities through his own recording studio. Buddy Holly’s participated in the “Winter Dance Party” to fulfill his plans and projects in the music industry, and the crash caused distress and devastation upon those closest to him, including his pregnant wife Maria Elena (who miscarried shortly thereafter).

Buddy Holly was hardly the first young American in the postwar era, or even in Lubbock, Texas, who aspired to perform music, but his experiences and options represented massive changes for Americans accessing the music industry and taking part in its cultural offerings and consumer goods. The music industry offered new sources for income and success for performers after World War II, as demands for entertainment and leisure in America’s renewed economic environment provided careers and lucrative dividends for skilled performers and musicians across the nation,
often isolated and in distinct regions from one another. Holly endeavored to work in music as an adolescent in the 1940s, and encountered similar occupations as western swing musicians, primarily radio broadcasting and playing dances. The region he lived in, West Texas, and the community of Lubbock, responded to radio broadcasts and technological developments during the Depression, and exhibited unique attitudes and interests on daily life in the United States. In the 1930s, radio stations and musicians emerged in Lubbock as they did in larger and urban communities, and Holly’s working class roots interacted with aspirations for better opportunities and conditions. Reflecting the proximity to the touring circuits of western swingers, string bands and orchestras attracted followers in Lubbock and West Texas. As it turned out, Holly’s identity as a teenager and young American matched the influence of a new generation of Americans in the 1950s, and he actively took part and directed the trajectory of rock ‘n’ roll and popular music more than he eventually enjoyed due to his death in 1959.

The following chapter argues that western swing influenced musicians in Lubbock and West Texas during and immediately after World War II, but economic and political changes after the war altered prospects and aspirations beyond that music and its influence. Specifically, this chapter argues that postwar recording fundamentally shifted the perceptions of work and output contributed by musicians, and Buddy Holly illustrated the complicated work of musicians and white, male workers in influencing economic productivity and growth after the war. In this chapter, research sketches and compares Buddy Holly with predecessors and his contemporaries in Lubbock, Texas, who shared interests and aspirations throughout the 1950s, as well as witnessed his legacy beyond the fatal plane crash that took his
life on February 3, 1959. Many of the musicians discussed in this chapter knew exactly what they wanted to do for a living after seeing popular and successful musicians in concerts. Not every musician sought recording as a career definition after World War II, though, complicating notions that technology completely reshaped the economics of the music industry with new consumer goods and distributed interactions between musicians and audiences. Despite recording, performing and touring remained the keys to working in music throughout the 1950s and the excitement generated by rock ‘n’ roll.

Aspirations for music careers included recording because it generated mass appeal and success, akin to consumption as an identifier of affluence. Working class musicians therefore enjoyed economic benefits of increased popularity but confronted conditions that elevated their music if not always their careers into the middle class. As Buddy Holly and fellow musicians in West Texas demonstrate in this chapter, the development of popular music from local and regional tastes to national interests following World War II provided desires for music careers. Musicians connected across regions affected the cultural value of nationally popular music, like country, rhythm & blues, and rock ‘n’ roll. In Lubbock, musicians shared aspirations and embraced struggles and confrontations in order to find opportunities engaging and interacting with audiences through regular performances, tours, and recording. Technology expanded their regional and national presence, but conflated class divisions within American culture and society, as young Americans consumed music and other goods that represented paths out of economic limitations and working class family economies. Mass consumption of popular music after World War II coincided
with other new affordable products that represented economic mobility, like automobiles and televisions. Recording as a career also signaled a professional status distinct from performing, defined by a workspace in the studio managed by industrial representatives interested in larger economic potentials for the industry. Exploring Buddy Holly as an example of musicians’ holding diverse work roles and class identities in the 1950s demonstrates the economic and cultural values of popular music in postwar American history and the distinctive role white men played in that process. Additionally, Holly’s value to rock ‘n’ roll and its impact as a form of work in American culture carried to the United Kingdom, and in the mid-1960s his influence on the Beatles and other British invasion bands factored economically and culturally.1

Upon completion of the “Winter Dance Party,” Buddy Holly reportedly planned to return to Lubbock with his wife Maria Elena (they were married in August 1958 and lived in Greenwich Village before his death) and make his hometown a music destination. His death at age 22 prevented those plans, but Holly still influenced the music industry for years afterward. In addition to a work history performing, Holly’s innovations expanding the studio as a space for musical and performance expression contributed to ideas about musicians as artists and recordings as art forms as successive musicians enjoyed their own careers in the 1960s and on. In his short time working, Holly importantly linked working class Americans to rock ‘n’ roll and the “consumer commodity society,’’ and engaged diverse communities and audiences,

interacted with musicians from multiple backgrounds, and incorporated those experiences into his output. Research of other musicians equally illuminated important components of working in music, but Buddy Holly represented a cultural influence tied to work as both a performing and recording musician. Holly’s intense work finding and occupying a career in music helped tie rock ‘n’ roll to the working class and generational and class divisions, as well as linked popular music and musicians to postwar economic success and culturally influential identities.

**Work and Music in Postwar West Texas**

In Texas and the southwest, rock ‘n’ roll found a lucrative environment after World War II with numerous musicians cultivating and innovating the style for regional and national success. Race relations in the region remained as segregated and fragile as in the south, but the youth attracted to dancing venues, live music, and emerging “fads” in this region encountered a diverse racial backdrop, not confined to the bi-racial structures of the south where white supremacy supposedly trumped the cultural effectiveness and success of other groups. Southern historian Michael Bertrand characterized the impact of rock ‘n’ roll in the south as a failure of whites to maintain that status quo: “rock ‘n’ roll mounted serious assaults upon the vulnerable yet still heavily fortified attitudes associated with Jim Crow segregation.” Furthermore, Bertrand expertly demonstrates that rock ‘n’ roll challenged this status quo “at venues and through media not usually acclaimed as sponsors for social change.” While racial segregation occurred in the southwest, sometimes through legal (for African Americans) or cultural barriers (whites and Mexican Americans), residents enjoyed industrial work growth during World War II. African American and Mexican
American performers reflected new economical, cultural, and social opportunities, often interacting and intersecting with white interests in culture and music.²

Interests among young Americans after World War II for new music and economic opportunities created a unique environment for the music industry to expand production and distribution of goods. Recording long figured into the tools for musicians to expand audiences, but outside urban environments rarely existed as a worthwhile form of employment, and rural performers relied upon cheap and easy access to audiences, creating schedules and tours that reflected local and regional interests while providing increased income for the musicians. Western swing influenced broader definitions for country music after the war, and Buddy Holly’s initial contacts with music revolved around that development. Decades after his untimely death in 1959, some of his contemporaries continued identifying Holly as a country artist. The musicians of 1950s West Texas emerged with connections to their region and the history of country music, but they enjoyed rock ‘n’ roll and utilized this interest to find music careers and make important contributions to popular music long after Holly’s death. Whether they stayed as locally or regionally based musicians, the nascent rock ‘n’ rollers mirrored Depression-era western swing counterparts and demonstrated performing as work and an important source of income, while they interacted with other groups and facilitated racial integration and resonance.

² Michael T. Bertrand, Race, Rock, and Elvis, Music in American Life (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 39; see also Gary Hartman, The History of Texas Music (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 20-55; and José Angel Gutiérrez, “Chicano Music: Evolution and Politics to 1950,” in The Roots of Texas Music, ed. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 146-74. Gutiérrez, the founder of the Raza Unida Party emphasized how radio stations in the Southwest sold airtime to Spanish language broadcasters and performers during “periods that did not command premium advertising dollars.” Additionally, Gutiérrez focuses on the Bracero program and how those migrants found jobs and made homes in the United States during and after World War II, even when the government and society eliminated opportunities.
Radio performers and traveling musicians in the 1930s and 1940s encountered interest and earned incomes from the entertainment their work provided, and western swing musicians like Bob Wills and Ted Daffan represented different levels of renown and success. Wills entered the postwar era as the “king of Western Swing,” and Daffan enjoyed similar success, but not with a similarly lasting legacy. Instead, Daffan illustrated direct links between working class identities and performing, having explicit experience working toward economic success through performing and industrial manufacturing jobs during the war. As a guitarist and bandleader, Daffan used recording to access larger audiences, but technological developments only distanced his links to the working class, like Wills, because more listeners inspired larger venues for greater audiences. However, those audiences were not specifically buying recordings, as the technology during the war encountered rationing and Americans still organizing purchases around family needs. Utilization of radio, film, and larger venues broadened exposure to listeners, and following the war, opened their pocketbooks in the economic resurgence of the late 1940s.3

Bob Wills’s career loomed even larger in the immediate postwar era, as his 1930s experimentations found broader acceptance with new technologies and expansions. Wills experimented by adding new instruments like drums and percussion to his band’s sound. For some listeners, this broke with the history of western swing (and country music) and damaged the style of the music, for others the introduction excited and inspired. One of those listeners was Sidney Keeton, a teenage drummer in

3 Waylon Jennings released the song “Bob Wills Is Still the King” following Wills’ death in May 1975, reflecting the “outlaw” musicians interests in western swing as a child growing up and the genre’s career influence. (Western swing was retroactively grouped into a broader “country and western” genre after the 1950s.) See footnote #20.
Lubbock, Texas. Interviewed as part of a museum project in 1984, Keeton commented that the “beat,” or “the new rhythm” “helped make western swing popular nationally.” Keeton’s reflection fit into regional and national postwar developments, particularly as country music developed to incorporate numerous genres like western swing.

Musicians Joe Carr and Alan Munde, in a history on country music, point to the immediate postwar period and “honkytonk” as demonstrating broader instrumentation and technologies incorporated into work and band models. Honkytonk bands were smaller than the swing orchestras, generally five to seven members, and played a faster paced music with a “heavy beat” by “adding electric instruments, pianos, and drums,” all still for dancing.⁴

Across the southwest, the evolution of country music in the late 1940s and early 1950s coincided and interacted with rhythm and blues styles that eventually resulted in the explosion of rock ‘n’ roll and related derivatives like rockabilly. In this atmosphere, country music took on great significance, partly through stylistic interactions with African Americans, as well as ties to rural families, communities, and “moral values” connected to a deep and complicated history. Ultimately, country music “became a music for dancing, drinking, and carousing in the rough honky-tonk atmospheres,” of the postwar period, when white, male workers confronted social and political developments and challenges to the pasts they revered. Young white musicians catapulted to fame with rock ‘n’ roll shared backgrounds listening and

⁴ Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995), 61-63; Sidney Keeton, interview by Kris Fredriksson and Susan Miller, June 1, 1984, Lubbock, TX, tape recording, Oral History Collection, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX; see also Hartman, *The History of Texas Music*. On December 30, 1944, the appearance of the Texas Playboys featured the “first appearance of a full drum set on the Opry Stage,” while other members of the Opry introduced electrified instruments to country music audiences as early as 1941.
playing country music, clearly Buddy Holly in West Texas, as well as Elvis Presley in Mississippi and Tennessee. Along with other 1950s musicians, these performers articulated the rebellious nature of the adolescent consumer market in the period. Their music was branded “rockabilly”—between country music and rock ‘n’ roll—and seemed to give those musicians a similar aura to racialized and sexualized African American musicians playing on American radios. Writing about rock ‘n’ roll, critic Greil Marcus called rockabilly an attempt to “beat the black man at his own game”—inferring that notion of white performers stealing black music. African American musicians played important roles in influencing young Americans in the postwar period, and the contacts developed with white country musicians illustrated extensive shared cultural opportunities beyond social integration.5

These interactions and developments spurred societal concerns and cultural influences, and illustrated the increased role of recording in the careers of musicians and economic impact of the music industry across the United States after the war. As a young high school student in 1953, Buddy Holley composed an aspirational biographical essay, proclaiming his interest in pursuing a career in music. “I have thought about making a career out of western music,” Holley wrote, “if I am good enough but I will just have to wait and see how that turns out.” Within six years, Buddy Holly accomplished that goal, but further aspirations and permanence were lost

when he died. Nevertheless, Holly epitomized possibilities for young Americans in the 1950s, migrating from working to middle class, and cultivated by talent and a skillset that provided options for income and contact with affluence and mass consumption. Conversely, Holly personified the opposite of rebellious youth intent on breaking conformity (though he was hardly the “good boy” or entirely clean-cut). He did not shake his hips like “Elvis the Pelvis” while on stage (in fact he barely moved while he played), and looked far less attractive wearing large black-framed glasses (a feature the young John Lennon shared in order to correct his vision). Behind these cosmetic differences, the young man from Lubbock, Texas, exemplified an image close to the rebellion and nonconformity of the period, but also a creative spark that ultimately left a massive legacy on popular music. When Buddy Holly died barely three years into a recording career, he did so working on tour and earning income from performing. In working terms, Buddy Holly fell victim to the hazards of industrial demands, namely traveling. Certainly not the first, nor the last to encounter the hazards of travel, the circumstances reflected working class requirements in the music industry, and performing negatively impacting the work of musicians and creating specific points for historical and cultural influence, impact, and legacy.6

Music in Lubbock and the West Texas region was varied as Buddy Holly grew up in the 1940s-1950s, but rock ‘n’ roll played a major role in the establishment of the region as a crucial component to the “evolution” of popular music in the United States. West Texas also hailed as the birthplace of Bob Wills prior to Buddy Holly’s legacy

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6 John Goldrosen and John Beecher, Remembering Buddy: The Definitive Biography of Buddy Holly (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 27; viewed as part of the Joe Carr Papers, Box #1, File #27, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX, accessed August 30, 2011.
taking shape: the “father of western swing,” grew up in Turkey, Texas, east of Lubbock, in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Additionally, historians Joe Carr and Alan Munde documented a diverse musical environment developing in Lubbock in the two decades before Buddy Holly started performing or recording, particularly following the move of radio station KFYO moving to Lubbock from Abilene, Texas, in May 1932. The station compared to stations in other markets across the southwest, notably Fort Worth, Dallas, Tulsa, Houston, San Antonio, etc., broadcasting local programming and performers, including musicians, throughout the workday. Those groups also traveled to venues within a day’s driving distance, and included the Kelly Kids, named after a Kelly Tire dealer that sponsored their program, and the Drug Store Cowboys, named after the Halsey Drug Store. The Drug Store Cowboys performed at and advertised a chain of drugstores on west Texas radio stations throughout the 1930s and 1940s, a very similar scenario to the schedules of Milton Brown and Bob Wills touring from Fort Worth and Oklahoma, respectively.  

Live bands were scarce in early 1940s Lubbock (in person, not the radio), those like the Drug Store Cowboys or the C.A. Rogers Band reportedly only performed on the weekends, for special occasions, or school dances. Drummer Sidney Keeton recalled that they performed western swing music and emerging popular styles at any given instance to attract listeners who wanted to hear the latest new music for dancing. Dance bands in Lubbock and West Texas largely followed similar patterns to the western swing groups previously discussed, but not always with identical trajectories. Another relevant example was musician and bandleader Tommy Hancock,

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who returned from World War II a proficient fiddler, and gained a reputation over the
next four decades as the “godfather of West Texas music,” but with Keeton provides
an alternative to recording as a career in music. Hancock and his band remained rooted
in local and regional touring circuits, and relied solely on touring and live
performances until the 1970s-1980s. Hancock often took his family on tour and
eventually organized the Supernatural Family Band with his wife and children. The
band gave Hancock “freedom to travel” and maintained shared family interests,
carried forward by performing music and itinerancy.8

Sidney Keeton was a high school student in 1940 and started playing the
drums and filling-in at local bands performances around Lubbock, though the bands
playing in the city were few according to him (presumably due to emerging
preparations for World War II): the Drug Store Cowboys, the C.A. Rogers Band, and
musicians Clyde Perkins (steel guitar) and Jack York. Keeton played drums with
various bands for roughly a decade, but never “professionally” (defined as recording)
or with thoughts of a career in music. His feelings about working in music link well to
ideas put forward with and by Buddy Holly, particularly related to professional status.
As Keeton never recorded, by considerations about music careers made in the 1950s
and relevant in thinking about this work in American culture, performing made him an
amateur next to those musicians that recorded and gained any success (or fame) from
that activity. Buddy Holly later referred to his pre-recording experiences as amateurish
in comparison. Dividing the status of working musicians between performing and

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8 Tommy Hancock, interview by Joe Carr and Alan Munde, December 11, 1990, transcript, Joe Carr
Papers, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX. Charlene Condray, who
married Hancock in 1956, enjoyed her own performing career before meeting him and later joining the
Roadside Playboys.
recording this way limited the economic possibilities gained through the former in favor of the latter and consumption of related goods. Sidney Keeton may have not desired a career in music, but as examples from his life demonstrate, performing remained a relevant and equally viable source of income, and economic growth through working in music by that method should not limit revised economic statuses.  

Born on December 20, 1924, Keeton’s mother purchased his first set of drums for him around the age of eleven or twelve, and he learned to play by listening to Bob Wills’s records and taking lessons from a local drummer he knew as “Nigger Charlie.” This drummer fostered Keeton’s abilities and allowed the young drummer to sit in with bands at dances and parties on the east side of Lubbock, referred to by Keeton as “colored town.” The young drummer was a big Wills’ fan though and owned “every one of Bob Wills’ 78s when he first started recording.” Keeton recalled listening to the fiddler from his earliest radio broadcasts with the Light Crust Doughboys through his own tenure with the Texas Playboys. His parents moved to Lubbock from east Texas in 1923, and his mother played piano her entire life “until she was 75.” His mother’s father was a fiddle player and her five brothers played a variety of instruments: fiddle, guitar, banjo, etc. Keeton’s mother started playing in the early 1900s and learned to play popular songs in the early 1910s, performing house parties and dances at times for as much as $5 a night. Growing up in West Texas, Keeton accompanied his father to buy cattle from local farmers and ranchers and witnessed the harsh realities of the Depression: “people on farms, no clothes, starving kids.” These influences illustrated

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9 Sidney Keeton, interview by Kris Fredriksson and Susan Miller; Carr and Munde, 43-44: other string style bands attempted to make names for themselves in Lubbock, notably a traveling group called the O Bar O Cowboys that performed on KFYO, which included Leonard Slye, who was later rechristened Roy Rogers on film.
trends identified with the postwar era, as family economics and interests in music fueled inclinations to perform and work in music, lessons with an African American drummer afforded greater interactions with groups defined by racial divisions, and interest in Wills indicated the popularity of country music in the region.10

As a performer, the largest amount Keeton ever made drumming was filling-in with the C.A. Rogers horn band in 1941, when he earned over $300 in one week at the original Cotton Club. Jobs like this largely occurred on weekends when local western swing bands played specific events like parties and school dances, so this was more exception than rule to experiences, but when most adult men in Lubbock made around $15 a week from non-music work, it was a substantial amount of income. After graduating high school in 1941, Keeton moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, for five years, and performed “every night,” the only period he ever took up being a “full-time musician.” Upon his return to West Texas, Keeton quickly joined a band based out of Levelland, a community forty-five minutes west of Lubbock, but also started working full-time in the cattle business and by the early 1950s time spent outside this work, defined as leisure or extra work as a performer became less and less available.11

10 Keeton admitted regret at not knowing this man’s name fifty years later, and could only recall that “Nigger Charlie” had been a well-known “shine boy” outside drumming, but most likely made his living through performing and music. Keeton’s mother paid “Charlie” $3 twice a week to teach Sidney to play the drums and “he had some beat that you just didn’t hear white people hit.” Cary Ginell and Roy Lee Brown, Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 50-68.
11 The “old” Cotton Club was located on Slaton Highway (U.S. route 84, or Avenue Q in 2014) between 34th and 40th streets, and burned down after World War II. The Cotton Club was the only dance club the public could go to in Lubbock, and although the city was dry you could bring bottles into the club. Keeton did not elaborate on his time in New Mexico, a period likely precipitated by service in the armed forces for World War II, only that he “played the same type of music as Bob Wills.” Other musicians Keeton knew in the late 1940s earned livable incomes by playing late night gigs, including a seventeen-year-old fiddler named Bernard Hicks. Although a television repairman by the 1980s, Keeton reflected that Hicks played “clear through the 50s, in Buddy Holly’s time.”
When interviewed for a Museum of Texas Tech University project in 1984, Sidney Keeton reported that his drumming originated because he wanted to learn, and in his early thirties he stopped playing for career requirements and because he lost part of his hearing. After 1951, Keeton worked in the cattle business, but his music interests continued and were shared with his son. Steve Keeton took up drumming as he grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, finding work performing and recording with another Lubbock musician, Joe Ely, for a few albums and tours (including Europe) in the late 1970s. Sidney Keeton admitted he enjoyed the music his son and Ely made, but ultimately his son stopped playing, too, because he felt touring was “not a very good way for family life.” Contrary to other musicians cited in this discussion, this emphasis on the requirements of touring as detrimental to home and family points out further developments in American society and economics throughout the postwar era, and specifically questions about stability and productivity relevant to the 1970s and 1980s. Steve Keeton made three records with Ely in the 1970s, but the needs of touring may have disrupted personal lifestyles more than economic possibilities offered or fulfilled. Steve Keeton’s change occurred at a similar age as his fathers, but since he recorded remains important to thinking about changed definitions and status of musicians as workers in regional environments and American culture.

Tommy Hancock returned from service in World War II and joined the Roadside Playboys in 1946, a dance band “self-proclaimed” as “connoisseurs of Hillbilly Swing.” The fiddler learned his trade during the war, encouraged by a commanding officer, from guitar players, a sergeant that hummed tunes back to him, as well as a violin master in Japan. The Roadside Playboys toured through rough
working class dance halls and honkytonk bars. In an interview with Carr and Munde, the fiddler commented honkytonk venues carried excitement hard to find, or navigate, later in his career, but revealed how little he cared for playing those clubs. Eventually, Hancock invested in a dance club in Lubbock and renamed it the Cotton Club in homage to the Lubbock club from the 1940s and early 1950s, and as his music interests changed, so did clientele—including hippies at the club in the late 1960s. Hancock and the Roadside Playboys built a fan base in Lubbock and the surrounding region largely by keeping to a rigid “territory.” Other musicians maintained similar practices and Hancock’s band respected those “boundaries.” For instance, Hoyle Nix was based in Big Spring, and Hancock did not feel his band could compete with Nix’s popularity that extended as far north as Lamesa (roughly twenty-five miles south of Lubbock). Nix likewise stayed out of Lubbock, and, in this way, these performers followed patterns similar to western swing musicians. Popularity and Economic success derived from performing, and Hancock resisted defining his career solely by recording opportunities even as that output defined economic viability in the 1950s.12

This choice, which should not imply he did not record at all, allowed Hancock to enjoy a strong regional status, and he remained rooted to performance schedules for years at a time. Reflecting on the strong connections he held with audiences, he told interviewers about an encounter with Waylon Jennings during the 1970s. Both musicians were performing in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with Hancock’s Supernatural Family Band playing a smaller venue. Jennings, already a well-known recording musician, played a local baseball stadium, and the two musicians “compared

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12 Carr and Munde, 67-68 and 173. See also “Supernatural,” an exhibit prepared by the Crossroads Music Archive for the Buddy Holly Center, June-August 2011.
notes” about their concerts. It became apparent the dynamics of Jennings’s audiences varied little between tour stops, and Jennings lacked connections to audiences beyond his popularity and success. Hancock’s audiences were smaller, and equally similar between stops, but performer and listener enjoyed increased relations and familiarity. Although cultural influence connects both these musicians to the working class, especially their styles of music and regional roots, audience sizes demonstrate divergent class differences and the consumption of music as both leisure and entertainment. Venue size afforded those differences, and larger audiences held in baseball stadiums or similar facilities hinted at mass consumption outside class economics. As for recording, Hancock recorded eleven albums by 1990, including work with other Lubbock area musicians like the Flatlanders. But, his career and family succeeded due to constantly performing, with tours in the 1970s and 1980s taking Hancock and the Supernatural band to Peru and Europe before the family finally settled permanently in Austin.¹³

While Hancock and his family remained tied to Lubbock, for much of his and their careers, other musicians found local success, but moved and recorded closer to renowned industrial centers like Nashville to mark postwar examples of popularity and success. Buddy Holly eventually took that path to New York, and his friend Sonny Curtis settled in Nashville after leaving the Crickets in 1956. Like Holly, Curtis endeavored for a career in the music business from a young age, but came from a family of musicians. His Aunt Lorena’s brothers were the Mayfield Brothers, a

bluegrass band based on a ranch near Dawn, Texas. She taught Sonny the guitar, and he grew up with the Mayfield Brothers as “terrific role models.” Throughout the summer of 1950, the bluegrass group performed at the Western Jamboree Program for radio station KSEL, and Curtis remembered seeing them play these shows wearing cowboy hats, boots, and Levi jeans. He “couldn’t imagine growing up to be anything else.” Born east of Meadow, a town about half an hour southwest of Lubbock in 1937, Curtis was the “second youngest of six children born to struggling cotton farmer during the devastating Dust Bowl era.” As a child he listened to radio programs with his family, including Lubbock’s KFYO station and Nashville’s WSM network, and programs like the Prince Albert Show, the Grand Ole Opry, and Fibber McGee and Molly. Live radio and performances heavily impacted Curtis, bringing spontaneity and improvisation into his listening experience. He reported later that he could discern who was fiddling in a specific song when certain groups played on the radio, and could figure out who was singing based on instrument arrangements.14

With Tommy Hancock and Sonny Curtis, the Keeton’s offer a sense of how performing continued to offer economic options beyond the 1950s, Buddy Holly’s death, and the emergence of the recording industry after World War II and a major signifier of success and status. Music long offered entertainment and leisure, but as seen with the western swing musicians of the 1930s, here was work that equally impacted individual and family economics and American culture. Reflecting on the 1930s and 1940s, Sidney Keeton expressed belief that “many people in the Depression

14 Sonny Curtis, interview by Andy Wilkinson, Burns, TN, July 26, 2006, tape recording, Oral History Collection, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX. For detailed information on the Mayfield Brothers and the Western Jamboree in 1950, see the Printed Materials (file #28) in the Joe Carr Papers.
days couldn’t get work or find jobs and they just didn’t do much so they started playing.” When asked regarding the seeming explosion of interest in music from Lubbock during the 1950s, many reported that for teenagers and adolescents in the city, there literally was “nothing else to do” but perform, or be creative. According to Larry Corbin, a disc jockey whose family owned the first country music station in Texas, KLLL in Lubbock, during the late 1950s, it “[took] a special type of person to live in West Texas.” This seemingly meant that the region and the city of Lubbock generated a unique attitude about life and daily experience (existence), and one where interest in music factored into citizens’ daily lives.¹⁵

**Music Culture and Popularity in West Texas**

Country music represented economic and environmental conditions within rural audiences, as it was, according to Greil Marcus, “music for a whole community, cutting across lines of age, if not class.” As a comment on the Depression and World War II, this assessment illustrated cautions among listeners about economic recovery and community changes: “country spoke to a community fearful … withdrawing into itself, using music as a bond that linked all together for better or worse, with a sense that what was shared was less important than the crucial fact of sharing.” According to 1950s deejay Larry Corbin, “the music itself had been described as a ‘white man’s soul music containing three minute soap operas,’ which rural people could relate to.” Within a postwar economy and vast social and cultural changes, rural Americans confronted greater contact and diffusion of ideas from urban and distant environments. In these contacts, country music retained a past those audiences yearned to hold on to,

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¹⁵ Corbin and Coleman, interview by Kris Fredriksson, May 1984, Lubbock, TX. The museum project was called “‘Nothin’ Else to Do’: Celebrating 75 Years of West Texas Music.”
even if economic conditions improved because social and cultural realities faced fewer challenges. Accordingly, the separation between country and rock ‘n’ roll became apparent for young Americans, as rock ‘n’ roll excited and inspired positive feelings and expanded connections and opportunities for interaction with diverse populations.16

Rock ‘n’ roll provided an optimistic statement for young Americans just as an older generation struggled to overcome the realities faced during the Depression and War: “the songs of country music, and most deeply, its even, narrow sound, had to subject the children to the heartbreak of their parents.” This translated into economics where recorded music matched demands for new and exciting music, and ideas of class consumption confronted mass consumption and political and cultural identities in an atmosphere ripe for rebellion:

“Within the realm of country music, the new spirit dried up just like Saturday fades into Monday, but since rock ‘n’ roll found its own audience and created its own world, that hardly mattered. Rock ‘n’ roll caught that romantic conspiracy on records and gave it a form. Instead of a possibility within a music, it became the essence; it became, of all things, a tradition. And when that form itself had to deal with reality—which is to say, when its young audience began to grow up—when the compromise between fantasy and reality … was necessary to preserve the possibility of fantasy, the fantasy had become part of the reality that had to be dealt with; the rules of the game had changed a bit, and it was a better game.”

Where country music supported the community and a repertoire that transcended generations, the postwar consumer market targeted a diverse group of Americans and coupled that with increased demands for racial equality. In Lubbock, rock ‘n’ roll acted against expectations that revolutionary or radical behavior would damage the

16 Marcus, 132-133 and 137; and Weiner, “West Texas and Lubbock Music in the Fifties,” 8-12.
community, instead supporting it with young performers that understood the dynamics of performing and the community, especially with their roots in country music.¹⁷

In rural communities like Lubbock, country music faced class-based problems as well, it was “looked down upon by many in [Lubbock]” largely due to working class venues where audiences enjoyed the music. The consumption of alcohol in rowdy honkytonks and bars drew this ire, and was intensified because at the time, Lubbock was dry (it was illegal to sell alcohol in any form within the city limits). Consumption of alcohol occurred in those venues, and club owners “supported a booming bootlegging business.” Within honkytonks, “rough” atmospheres confronted self-defined “respectable” folk as patrons were “working class,” “hard-drinking,” and “playing music for them could be difficult and occasionally dangerous.” Performers like Tommy Hancock and Sonny Curtis “were greatly relieved when they were able to escape that scene.” In Lubbock, these clubs attracted “adult” and teenage crowds. One major venue was Fair Park Coliseum, where segregation laws applied and shows often migrated to the Cotton Club or other less “clean-cut” venues following advertised concerts. When Bill Haley and the Comets played Lubbock in October 1955, a trio made-up of Buddy Holly, Bob Montgomery, and Larry Welborn, opened as a supporting act, and area teenagers remembered seeing Holly perform publicly here and the Cotton Club. Ron Welch knew Buddy Holly from school, listened to that trio’s Sunday afternoon show on local radio station KDAV, and attended makeshift shows at car dealerships and department stores. In the summer of 1956, Welch saw Holly

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¹⁷ Marcus, 132-133, 136, and 164: “You can’t have a community that grows and renews all who are a part of it without the tension that comes from the need to break away, without the resentment produced by the tendency of any community to grow in on itself and shut out the rest of the world.”
perform repeatedly, often at the Bamboo Club on Friday nights. According to Welch, “authorities” suggested club owners hold specifically designed teenager dances so young residents would not check out “adult” dances” and keep them “away from the bad influence” of rowdy venues like the Cotton Club.¹⁸

The Bamboo Club in Lubbock was a particularly “rough” scene according to Welch, where dancing occasionally became somewhat “suggestive” even though it was “good natured.” Arranged teenager dances saw little alcohol consumption at this venue, but that did not stop it being concealed and consumed in cars, however Welch later reflected that, “most of the kids got high off the music.” In August 1956, the Bamboo Club closed after repeated raids and in its place a new club, the Rockola, entertained dances for area teenagers. This club opened first as a western club but since “the kids were looking for … something you could dance to” it changed to a teenage club and switched music styles. Ron Welch, however, acknowledged that western music “probably … was the number one music around Lubbock at the time, but the kids were into some of the early rhythm and blues.” Welch’s recollections are valuable in placing young musicians like Buddy Holly and influences into these regional environments and exploring how new styles entered and found audiences. In Lubbock, and with Holly, the complete shift from country to r&b or rock ‘n’ roll never

happened, but the intermingling of audiences interested in both facilitated openings for performers to capitalize on those wants.\textsuperscript{19}

The explosion of radio stations in Lubbock following World War II allowed deejays, managers, and promoters, to take advantage of the popularity of country music within the broadcasting market of the early 1950s. In 1953, the radio station KDAV launched in Lubbock as the first full-time country music station in the United States. The “all-country station” originated with Dave Stone, who worked at KSEL in the late 1940s, and found other deejays disliked country and refused to broadcast it. Larry Corbin, another deejay whose family started and owned the station KLLL, commented that KDAV was massive for country music, as radio stations broadcasting only country did not expand to larger markets until 1965 when an all-country station went on-air in Dallas. Advertisers in larger markets “didn’t want that type of customer because [country music] wasn’t a fad.” Corbin also revealed that within two years of going on-air, the first country station in Dallas was the number one station in its market. His interviewer, curator of history at the Museum of Texas Tech University in 1984, Kris Fredriksson, commented in their discussion that she grew up in Los Angeles and the format was just as popular there, suggesting it was due to migration west of Oklahoma and Texas residents.

\textsuperscript{19} Welch, interview by Larry Z. Scott, March 15, 1979, Lubbock, TX. See Waylon Jennings, “Bob Wills Is Still the King,” \textit{The Essential Waylon Jennings} (Legacy Recordings, 2007). Waylon Jennings, one of Buddy Holly’s contemporaries and an influential country musician, composed “Bob Wills Is Still the King” in 1975 as the B-side to “Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way.” Released three months following Wills death in May 1975, the song reflected Wills’ influence upon country music after World War II. For young Americans like Jennings, Wills and western swing (and country music) linked them to the past, and his song depicts a history rife with nostalgia, country music, and clubs, dance halls, and honky-tongs. A more critical reading of the lyrics yields a Texas unaffected by the strife of the 1950s and 1960s, such as racial discord, assassinations, and the Vietnam War and counterculture. The A-side similarly examined the impact of Hank Williams, but it was Wills’ influence in West Texas that affected the development of postwar country music and honkytonk venues.
By the late 1950s, Corbin emphasized that, “country came out of the closet” and “everyone jumped on the bandwagon” following increased success alongside rock ‘n’ roll. Even before KDAV was founded, Buddy Holly knew and performed for KSEL deejay Ben Hall. When Hall and most of the KSEL staff left in September 1953 to join KDAV, Holly persuaded his sometimes manager Hi Pockets to get him an audition for Sunday broadcast shows. Teamed up with another young musician named Jack Neal on “The Buddy and Jack Show,” Buddy Holly quickly emerged as a vital performer for KDAV’s programming. Although Neal eventually left the station, Buddy Holly teamed up with other musicians on the variety show, “Sunday Party.” With junior high friend and fellow guitarist Bob Montgomery and bassist Larry Welborn, Holly broadcast a half-hour show called “The Buddy and Bob Show,” within the “Sunday Party.”

Interest in country music among residents of 1950s West Texas acted in sync with religious and social practices, including continued racial segregation after World War II. As country music gained popularity, it joined religion as another symbol for “white civilization” and cultural refinement. For the city of Lubbock in the 1950s, religious faith and institutions dominated life across the community. Religion was a daily component, and church and congregation sizes grew with attempts to maintain the city as “a stronghold for traditional values and morals.” Buddy Holly grew up in a

20 Larry Corbin and Jerry Coleman, interview by Kris Fredriksson, May 1984, Lubbock, TX, tape recording, Oral History Collection, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX; Carr and Munde, 70-71. Stone was so successful at KSEL he was made station manager in 1948, and began expanding the time allotted to country music, including the creation of the live “Western Jamboree” Saturday night broadcast in the summer of 1950; Goldrosen and Beecher, 19: “… like the Grand Ole Opry, the Sunday Party was divided into thirty-minute segments hosted by a regular act. Sometimes they were referred to as Buddy, Bob and Larry, but Buddy and Bob [fit] the name pattern … set by country acts such as Flatt and Scruggs, Johnnie and Jack, and Jim and Jesse.”
religious family, and he retained the connection until his death. A defining marker for working class American values, Holly maintained his religious faith with interests in popular music while detractors labeled it “devil music” (and anti-American). The notion that rock ‘n’ roll destabilized community and family lives in the 1950s is well documented, and segregation laws and social standards in West Texas attempted to prevent interests by linking cultural and social challenges seen in music consumption and entertainment at dances to alcohol consumption and “rough environments.”

Religious growth coincided with new entertainment and cultural opportunities in Lubbock, West Texas, and the United States, as entertainers like Buddy Holly retained strong faiths, but experienced uncertainties when they negotiated faith with new work opportunities. Buddy’s faith may have conflicted with rebellious attitudes and behaviors, but the young musician utilized his experiences in church settings for the arrangements of his rock ‘n’ roll and pop material, notably “background vocal patterns” stylistically adapted from congregational hymnal songs. Popular ideas associated rock ‘n’ roll with dramatic threats of damnation and imminent societal destruction as sexuality and racial intermixing intersected young white and African American groups. As attendance in local dance clubs increased throughout the 1950s, churches and church groups “[stirred] up the attack on those clubs, r&b, and rock ‘n’ roll.” The growth of Texas Technological College (into Texas Tech University by the mid-1960s) also brought new desires to find venues for entertainment outside the

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21 Philip Norman comments in Rave On that country music, “with its formality and decorum, epitomized white civilization and refinement to God-fearing Southern minds, just as the blues, with its simplicity, humor, sexual frankness, and insidious rhythm, epitomized every possible nuance of the word ‘sin’” (pp. 36-37); H. Paul Chalfant, “Religion in Lubbock,” in Lubbock: From Town to City, edited by Lawrence L. Graves, The Museum Journal 23 (Lubbock, TX: West Texas Museum Association, 1986), 313; Weiner, “West Texas and Lubbock Music in the Fifties: An Oral History, Part II,” 120.
paradigms of religious practices and boundaries. As the population of Lubbock grew and expanded, more diverse groups rivaled the dominance of white citizens in religious, political, cultural, and social affairs.22

In an interview with Christopher Oglesby for his oral history of Lubbock musicians, Bob Livingston commented that music softened the edges of Lubbock, allowing its residents (primarily the youth) to “come into [their] own little world and make it anything [they wanted].” These worlds emulated television broadcasts and touring rock ‘n’ rollers, but also brought backlash against the music and its accompanying racial politics. The Bamboo Club and the Cotton Club both remained sites of conflict between the status quo and the challenges created by the popular music of the 1950s. In August 1956, the police raided the Cotton Club during a Little Richard concert, while also raiding the Bamboo Club with newspaper photographers, who published blurred photos of teenagers dancing suggestively. Local churches “stirred up” these “attacks” on local clubs and music, clearly as a result of the challenges to the status quo represented by racial mixing or suggestive dancing. Buddy Holly and other musicians remained largely unfazed by these reactions, aspiring to find work and careers in music generally.23

22 Goldrosen and Beecher, 22-23; Ellis Amburn characterized Holly’s “conflict … came from religion, not from spirituality or God,” in Buddy Holly: A Biography (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 139-140; Weiner, “West Texas and Lubbock Music in the Fifties,” 12; Larry Holley, interview by Larry Z. Scott, February 22, 1979, Lubbock, TX, tape recording, Oral History Collection, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Lubbock, TX; Norman, Rave On, 80; regarding “stirred up attacks,” see Welch, interview by Larry Z. Scott, March 15, 1979, Lubbock, TX; for information on the growth of Lubbock, see Lawrence L. Graves, “The Expansion and Deepening of Cultural Life,” in Lubbock: From Town to City, 337.

Expanded industrial production and consumer goods introduced new and challenging aspects of pop music and culture to Lubbock and West Texas, primarily via radio broadcasts and musicians touring through the region. Technological developments in recording and using vinyl to produce cheaper products factored in the dissemination of r&b and rock ‘n’ roll into a market interested in country initially, but contacts were made with musicians that incorporated those styles into repertoires with local and regional interests. R&B and rock ‘n’ roll offered challenges to Lubbock and other West Texas communities in tune with confrontations and conflicts within other regions of Texas, the South, and the United States. There should be no surprise that as white and black musicians from the south and midwest traveled throughout the country, attracted to venues in growing communities like Lubbock, that the music they brought with them would take hold. The precedents for traveling circuits existed within music long before the 1950s, even western swing musicians and r&b artists in the 1930s and 1940s followed traditions of jazz bands and orchestras in the previous generations, and the early rock ‘n’ rollers followed suit, in some cases taking the same literal roads to success.\(^\text{24}\)

**Recording and Performing: A Dual Career Seen through Buddy Holly**

The Holley family lived with severe economic conditions like many countless fellow Americans and families when Charles Harden was born in 1936, the fourth and youngest child of Lawrence Odell (L.O.) and Ella Holley. The couple moved to

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\(^{24}\) See Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin’ Circuit and the Road to Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011); also Albin J. Zak, *I Don’t Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America, Tracking Pop* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). After World War II, recorded materials increasingly found use in radio broadcasts over live broadcasts, particularly hit songs by renowned musicians, and Bob Wills utilized this method from 1947-1948, but it was a slow progression in the 1950s.
Lubbock in 1925, attracted by the prospects for new jobs designed to support the establishment and construction of Texas Technological College. After a decade living in Lubbock, the family had three children (with the fourth arriving soon), but remained economically depressed and constantly moved into new houses (roughly every year). Despite economic limitations, “the Holleys … always managed to come up with the money for what they thought was important for their children”—including musical instruments and lessons. As for their youngest child, Ella decided his name “was too long for such a small boy,” and he quickly became known by the nickname Buddy.25

Buddy Holly’s parents inspired and insisted their children pursue musical interests, and he started performing with school friends in the late 1940s, first as a guitar duo with Bob Montgomery. Holly’s interest in music originated with the diversity of styles and musicians in West Texas as he grew up in the 1940s and early 1950s. Country and western swing, rhythm and blues, as well as gospel, blues, and bluegrass all shaped Holly’s interests and the sound he developed. But, the explosion of rock ‘n’ roll in the mid-1950s added a style that expanded Holly’s repertoire and those of his contemporary musicians. After graduating high school in 1955, Holly and Montgomery along with Sonny Curtis, performed in any location or venue they could find: from nightclubs to grocery store parking lots. The trio played music that fit the venues, but focused primarily on country music for bookings at local dances.

“Holly, Montgomery and other young musicians played their country music and, if they had high ambitions, waited for the break that would give them a chance to become recording stars. Meanwhile, change was coming to the music industry. Before Holly had graduated from high school, a demand had been exposed, one which was gradually filled by

25 Goldrosen and Beecher, 13; see Amburn, 11; and Norman, 33-35.
the type of singer Buddy Holly was and the sort of music he was able to play.”

Like Curtis, Holly hoped to find work playing music, a similarity that caused an “ego-clash” between the two young guitarists, and led to Curtis departing an early incarnation of the Crickets amicably to go on tour with Slim Whitman and “allow Buddy to develop his own style.” Though never a rock ‘n’ roller, per se, the young Texan held a prominent place in the proliferation of popular music by the end of the 1950s and a legacy that surpassed his brief career.26

Curtis’s departure followed Holly’s first opportunity recording in Nashville in January 1956, and the guitarist backed Holly on the eventual single “Blue Days, Black Nights,” but thought he was “too hot” to be “relegated to rhythm guitar.” The session proved disappointing for Holly because his skills and work ethic clashed with record label and studio staff expectations for his performance in the studio. Holly’s initial recording opportunities in Nashville followed Elvis Presley stopping periodically in Lubbock throughout 1955 and early 1956 on regional tours. According to Curtis, “what got us into rock ‘n’ roll was when Elvis came to town”: the singer “blew [them] away.” A young performer like Elvis came to Lubbock partly due to Dave Stone and KDAV playing their records, before Lubbock and its venues became “too small” to support the popularity and demands by these musicians careers (and expected fees, allowances, etc.). By Elvis’s first appearance in Lubbock on January 2, 1955, Holly, Curtis, and Bob Montgomery played various gigs together, but the reaction they felt at his concert convinced them of “the advantage of playing rock ‘n’ roll music,”

strategically it was girls’ reactions. The next day, they “booked themselves out as a rock ‘n’ roll act,” initially as Elvis clones.27

Holly’s ability to easily interact with the young Presley demonstrated an ambition within the Lubbock teenager to capture what the “Hillbilly Cat” had or was enjoying. Aside from controversial activities Holly and Presley may have gotten up to according to some biographers, possibilities to open for Presley, even in friendly “competition” at times, provided an introduction to the music industry and prospects to record. When Elvis was late for a show in Lubbock, Holly and his friends Bob Montgomery and Larry Welborn performed as an interim act, and helped carry the energy of the show to an encore at the Cotton Club. Buddy, Bob and Larry enjoyed other openings supporting Elvis throughout 1955, and supported Bill Haley and the Comets when the band came through Lubbock in October. In addition to Presley and Haley, other increasingly popular and well-known musicians came through Lubbock during this period, notably Fats Domino and Little Richard, two African American performers that directly challenged local customs and practices.28

Little Richard played at the Cotton Club because Fair Park Coliseum was geographically subjected to segregation laws. KDAV founder Dave Stone brought these musicians to Lubbock and Buddy Holly typically attended with Sonny Curtis, or

27 Sonny Curtis (interview), The Real Buddy Holly Story; Sonny Curtis, interview by Andy Wilkinson, July 26, 2006, Burns, TN; Similarly, Holly’s impact on Lubbock girls as he became famous inspired musician Mac Davis: “When I was a kid in Lubbock, I saw Buddy Holly driving down the street with a bunch of girls in his convertible. That was the exact moment I decided I wanted to be a singer. It says it right there in the song [“Texas in My Rear View Mirror”]: ‘If Buddy Holly could make it that far, I figured I could too.’ That had a lot to do with it; that an ol’ Elvis.” In Oglesby, 233. Curtis commented in Amburn’s biography of Holly that Elvis’s arrival turned the young Lubbock musicians from “hillbillies” into “rockers”; Amburn, 35-37.

drummer J.I. Allison. Musicians like Little Richard found audiences in Lubbock represented by Holly and his friends via late night radio broadcasts, including the *Louisiana Hayride* out of Shreveport, Louisiana. Holly and friends even once drove to Shreveport to meet with Elvis again after one of his shows in Lubbock. Rhythm and blues, and later rock ‘n’ roll gave young Americans, ranging from these burgeoning musicians to listeners, audiences, and dancing crowds opportunities to engage music on their own terms, without their parents or older generations. Meanwhile, these styles, so entwined with racial integration, competed in markets like Lubbock with country and western music. Holly, in particular, seized upon the appearances of big name recording stars, including a delicate encounter with his parents after he invited Little Richard to their home for dinner following a show in Lubbock. Nevertheless, these musicians opened the doors for Holly to make connections with agents who opened the first doors into the recording industry. Opening for Bill Haley and the Comets in October 1955, Holly had an opportunity to impress a talent agent from Nashville, Eddie Crandall (he was already familiar with Holly due to Elvis Presley concerts). Dave Stone put Holly, Bob Montgomery, and Larry Welborn on a bill with various country and rock ‘n’ roll acts, including Bill Haley and the Comets as headliners, hoping the diverse bill “might impress upon Crandall the range of Holly’s talents and possibilities.” The move worked, and Crandall took a demo tape back to Nashville, where Decca Records found interest and offered a recording contract to “Holly,” and in January 1956, Sonny Curtis and bassist Don Guess traveled with Holley to Nashville.29

Elvis Presley started his new recording contract with RCA coincidentally at the same time, but while Elvis recorded the hit “Heartbreak Hotel,” Buddy Holly encountered confusion and miscommunication during his first session. Studio staff and label management “apparently wanted Holly to be a rockabilly artist along the lines of Elvis Presley,” but Holly and his backing musicians from Lubbock unknowingly disregarded the political dynamics of the Nashville music industry—the session musicians, communications between publishing firms and record labels, and producer and a&r arrangements. In their biography of Holly, John Goldrosen and John Beecher attributed the confusion to a number of factors, including the politics of the Nashville scene, but also a cultural gap between the country music industry and the newly arrived West Texas musicians. The situation was not problematic because Holly was unwanted and “any success he gained would have been to [the label’s] profit.” However, Holly, Curtis, and Guess did not leave particularly good impressions with label management and working circles in Nashville. Suffice to say, here were skilled musicians that did not require introductions to playing, only to recording and industrial operations. The single recorded in January 1956 for Decca, “Blue Days, Black Nights,” written by KDAV deejay Ben Hall, came out in April, but it demonstrated to Holly how little control he would enjoy if he recorded in a setting outside the environments he was familiar with and where he had developed as a musician.30

30 Goldrosen and Beecher, 34-36; Amburn, 43: “At RCA, where Chet Atkins had the good sense to say, “Just go on doing what you been doing,” Elvis sailed through his first session, which produced the No. 1 hit “Heartbreak Hotel.” At Decca, Buddy’s mentors would prove less amenable to the new music; in fact, they hated rock ’n’ roll.” Interviews produced in Goldrosen and Beecher’s Remembering Buddy offer a less harsh picture of the disagreement in Nashville regarding how recording sessions commenced; Norman, Rave On, 74-75; The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal reported in October 1956 that “Lubbock had its ‘own answer to Elvis Presley,’” though that significance only grew following Holly’s death in February 1959. Mary Lou Fairbanks, “Young Singer Is Lubbock’s ‘Answer To Elvis Presley’.
Buddy Holly’s first recording took place in his family home when he was 13 in 1949. The song recorded was “My Two-Timin’ Woman” by country musician Hank Snow, which demonstrated a raw talent for instrumentation, even if the remaining document reveals skills in need of practice, refinement, and emergence from adolescence. Other home recordings took place in 1952 and 1953, before Buddy and friends utilized local radio stations like KDAV and KSEL, and the Nesman Recording Studio in Wichita Falls to produce demo recordings between 1953 and 1955. By 1954 and throughout 1955, Sonny Curtis (fiddle), Larry Welborn (bass), and Don Guess (steel guitar) routinely joined Buddy and Bob Montgomery in Wichita Falls, building a rich portfolio of country, rhythm and blues, and early rock ‘n’ roll songs. Shortly after returning from Nashville, Buddy Holly traveled to Clovis, New Mexico, to record at producer Norman Petty’s studio for the first time. Unlike the confusing experience in Nashville, Holly’s sessions with Petty proved amenable to his style and developing sound, and made Buddy Holly a recording musician. Holly’s next single was a revamped tune called “That’ll Be the Day.”

A year after first recording in Nashville, Decca informed Holly they were not renewing his contract, and Petty urged the guitarist to form a new band (the fluid make-up of Holly’s friends and backing musicians largely ended as demos were recorded in 1956). By January 1957, Holly regularly played with high school friend and drummer J.I. Allison, and the two worked on new songs and old demos at Petty’s

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Buddy Holly ‘Packs ‘Em In,’” *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, October 23, 1956. [http://www.buddyhollyarchives.com/1956/10/young-singer-is-lubbocks-answer-to-elvis-presley/](http://www.buddyhollyarchives.com/1956/10/young-singer-is-lubbocks-answer-to-elvis-presley/) (accessed February 17, 2010). The contract with Decca created the change in name from Holley to Holly, but the young musician was thrilled to have a contract, and did not protest the change by Decca. 31 Bill Dahl, Liner Notes from *Down the Line: Rarities*, Buddy Holly, Geffen Records, 2009, CD. See also Goldrosen and Beecher, Session File, 178-186.
studio while they looked for other musicians to complement their band, eventually named the Crickets. Guitarist Niki Sullivan (also a Holly relation), and bass player Joe B. Mauldin joined the Crickets, and the foursome hired Norman Petty to oversee the group’s affairs as they recorded extensively in February and March 1957. Through Petty, the Crickets signed with Brunswick, a subsidiary of Decca, and Holly signed as a solo act with Coral Records, another Decca subsidiary. In 1957, the Crickets’ recording career gained significant traction when songs “That’ll Be the Day” (originally rejected by Decca) and “Peggy Sue” were major hits, and catapulted the group to a national presence, prominently illustrated by playing *The Ed Sullivan Show* in December. Even with national credentials and exposure, Buddy Holly and the Crickets remained tied to Lubbock and their working class roots. This hardly detracted from their growth or success over the next year: Lubbock remained home to the young men’s families, and enabled the musicians to continue recording with Norman Petty in Clovis.32

The components for Holly’s lasting impact on popular music and legacy revolve around the dual careers he tackled through performing and recording in the late 1950s. In the postwar years, recording emerged more widespread and due to the trajectory of the music industry throughout the 1950s, became the predominant indicator of economic success and industrial output. The economic boom and consumer culture that emerged following World War II opened a market for goods like recorded music that Americans cultivated and demanded, fueled on by radio play

and television appearances by musicians. Recording was Buddy Holly’s ambition, from his first rudimentary home demos in 1949, and in his first encounters with the music industry. The unique arrangement he found working with Norman Petty and the multitude of complex label agreements following his dismissal from Decca actually increased his and the Crickets visibility in the market, because he encompassed a solo career and role in a band.\(^{33}\)

Through Norman Petty and his contacts in the music industry, Buddy Holly and the newly formed Crickets gained national exposure. The Crickets recorded frequently with greater freedom at Petty’s studio in Clovis, New Mexico, and this led to hit songs in *Billboard* and the group touring across larger and larger regions and markets as part of package tours where numerous charting artists are packed into a bus and travel between venues across numerous states. The arrangement Petty practiced for recording sessions revealed his own experiences and instead of charging by a specific time allotment (typically a rate per hour), Petty charged for the use of his studio for the entire recording session. That lent a greater flexibility for creative output and practicing before musicians cut a final, complete take for mastering, production, and distribution. Holly and Allison’s song “That’ll Be the Day” was recorded this way in March 1957, though Holly previously demoed the song for Decca. Brunswick Records agreed to release the song as a single in May 1957, but the song was released under the name the Crickets, since Holly’s 1956 contract with Decca stipulated he could not release any song recorded for them for five years (in spite of Brunswick

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\(^{33}\) See Marcus, 135: “What links the greatest rock ‘n’ roll careers is a volcanic ambition, a lust for more than anyone has a right to expect; in some cases, a refusal to know when to quit or even rest. It is that bit of Ahab burning beneath the Huck Finn rags of “Freewheelin’” Bob Dylan, the arrogance of a country boy like Elvis sailing into Hollywood, ready for whatever kind of success America had to offer.”
being an affiliate label of Decca). “That’ll Be the Day” gained Holly and the Crickets national exposure as their first major hit. Further tracks recorded at Petty’s studios emerged as singles released by Brunswick, as well as singles released only under Holly’s name by Coral Records (another affiliate of Decca). The multiple record label arrangements meant Buddy Holly and the Crickets were contracted to a major label, but recorded and released material essentially through independent labels.34

Independent labels enjoyed successfully releasing, marketing, and distributing songs considered rock ‘n’ roll tracks before the major labels took notice in the early 1950s. Indeed, when reviewing original releases by “Big Boy” Crudup, Jackie Brenston, Ike Turner, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley, these materials lacked any national distribution method because the labels were focused on local and regional markets. Additionally, this apparatus was the primary method African Americans utilized for recorded materials and equally demonstrated lack of support by the major record industry. Nevertheless, for Buddy Holly and the Crickets, this gave them control over their recordings and the availability of recording opportunities they found. By early 1958, Buddy Holly and the Crickets recorded beyond Petty’s studio, but that beginning fostered their entrance into the larger recording industry and the working relationships they understood between musicians and producers. When Buddy Holly recorded in New York late in 1958, for example, the problems encountered in Nashville were avoided because he had extensive experience about

34 This move mostly reflected a careful attitude regarding the executives at Decca and publishing companies in Nashville, as neither Holly nor Petty wished to test whether that division would object to the release of the song, by Holly, under a label still under the Decca banner. Goldrosen and Beecher, 56-57.
recording techniques and could work with arrangers, engineers, and different 
producers accordingly, without concerns of potential misunderstands or confusion.

In his book *I Don’t Sound Like Nobody*, musicologist Albin Zak articulates 
precisely how influential recording was upon the popular culture and consumer market 
of 1950s America:

“The emergence of rock and roll, the decade’s most disruptive 
development, was directly related to the record groove. In fact, it might 
be said that the groove gave birth to the idiom, which, in turn, liberated 
recording from the structure of replication. Few would have thought to 
say so at the time, but rock and roll was at the cutting edge of a musical 
culture reshaped by recording consciousness. For an older pop 
generation the irony would have been too bitter to acknowledge: in the 
music’s din lay crude confirmation that record making had become an 
art form.”

Where live bands once dominated the dance halls and concert stages throughout the 
country, recorded music could replicate those experiences in the privacy of Americans 
homes, just as radio provided to previous generations. For listeners, consuming music 
through recordings and technological developments seemingly improved the 
connection between performer and listener, even if the practical distances between the 
two multiplied. Dramatically revised levels of immediacy and accessibility fostered by 
new technologies and recording opportunities provided audiences with pop music as 
ever imagined. In the postwar consumer market, young Americans thus held 
immense economic power, and bridged class divisions within consumption, furthering 
political and cultural identities tied to mass consumption in the period.35

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35 Zak, 169. Zak is also a record producer, songwriter, singer, and guitarist, according to his biography 
at his publisher’s website: [http://press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=295986](http://press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=295986) (accessed December 9, 
2011).
The Crickets success with “That’ll Be the Day” granted the band new performing openings at venues in Washington, D.C., and New York, and the band left Lubbock in late July 1957, for their first tour through the United States. Relative success based on a debut (in a relative sense) single reflected the power of records and recording in the consumer market, as a single could “elevate unknown musicians to instant stardom” and “fueled the success of both indie record companies and the musicians they put before the public, who went on to greater financial reward from their live appearances.” For the Crickets and Norman Petty on board as their business manager and producer, this led to national television appearances like *Ed Sullivan* and inclusion on an “eighty-day cross-country package tour billed as “The Biggest Show of Stars for ’57.”” Other acts in the package included “Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Drifters, the Everly Brothers, Paul Anka, La Vern Baker, Clyde McPhatter, Jimmy Bowen, [and] Eddie Cochran.” Weaving its way through the midwest, southern Canada, and into the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, the concert shows lasted for roughly two hours and every performer played three to four songs, giving audiences hits they recognized. The Crickets earned $1,000 a week between the four of them, but this discounts the money made by promoters and tour management, as well as the state of their “accommodations” which basically included a bus seat and a hotel room every morning for a few hours.\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{36}\) Zak, 141; Goldrosen and Beecher, 70-72: The biographers comments as well that such a tour was only possible because the numerous acts involved were paid far less than modern acts receive (for longer performances). Additionally, they note how promoters inadvertently marketed the group as an African American group, which led to an initially lukewarm reception when the foursome played the Apollo in New York.
This kind of tour, reminiscent in pace and scheduling as the western swing band’s in the 1930s and African American musicians on the Chitlin’ Circuit throughout the 1940s and 1950s, brought the Crickets directly into contact with listeners familiar with them only because of their records (in fact other musicians assumed the band were African Americans). For Holly, performing at this stage completed his aspirations of a career in music, and fellow Crickets and other musicians reflected how natural and “real” he seemed on stage. Given the appeal of rock ‘n’ roll, exposure by touring and the success of singles meant the record labels clamored for more materials to compile long playing albums. Accordingly, in late September and early October 1957, the Crickets and Norman Petty recorded more songs to round out the necessary tracks for an album for Brunswick. The “Chirping” Crickets was released in November and featured singles “That’ll Be the Day” and “Oh Boy!” (released in October) and B-sides “I’m Looking for Someone to Love” and “Not Fade Away,” respectively, in addition to new tracks.37

Although not the first artist or group to experience this demand by the recording industry, or the type of national touring schedule cited, Buddy Holly and the Crickets represented specifically working class roots within pop music of the postwar environment. In this case, the four young Texans grew up in an atmosphere as exposure to music and performers from different regions increased as well, paving the way for their entrance into the music business via models that were both unique and well-tested in the market. What rock ‘n’ rollers experienced, and Buddy Holly in particular, was the availability to record and the impact that facet of the music industry

37 Goldrosen and Beecher, 75-79 and 182.
held for musicians (or performers). Performing and distribution of recorded materials followed the trajectory of radio broadcasts and film appearances, but the postwar consumer market necessarily demanded increased access to performer’s recorded output. Recorded music gave consumers immediate and regular access to musicians, changing class divisions surrounding the processes of consumption and facilitating complex careers built from touring, performing, and recording (although musician economics were not equally split between those aspects). Musicians cultivated recording careers, as it increased visibility on a national scale and marked greater success than only touring in local, regional, or even in package tours, while also elevating economic and class status beyond “working” into the middle class through audience receptions. Recording articulated a different type of professionalism, and the consumption of recorded goods symbolized and represented middle class identities and options.

Holly’s career demonstrated the class divisions emerging in the music industry as a result of rock ‘n’ roll’s immense popularity. Where touring and performing tied a musicians to working rhythms and communities, recording took those connections and elevated a musicians into a middle class identity—framed by stricter time schedules and the studio as a clean, detached environment from workers and audiences. While the western swing and country musicians of preceding decades enjoyed access to recording opportunities, their careers were built solidly on performing and touring as economic livelihood and status. In fact, the examples in Chapter II indicated performing on the radio or in a touring circuit provided far better and more lucrative opportunities to make a living and cultivate a following. In the 1950s, increased
productively and new goods initiated these working changes and recording on a larger scale provided musicians with larger markets as part of an industry ready to capitalize. This suggests, as other historians and biographers of musicians have commented, that in recording and engaging the postwar consumer culture, musicians actively contributed to expansions in democracy through the market by emphasizing equality, racial interaction, and cultural diffusion. Rock ‘n’ roll concerts helped to break down racial barriers in the south, while popular music overall, including musicians like Buddy Holly, created a large community aware of class, race, and sexual divisions, that actively confronted older expectations of authenticity, taste, and social traditions. On one side was the visible confrontation in concert venues, on the other a consumable good for confrontation.38

Buddy Holly and the musicians of his era, including his closest friends and band members in the Crickets, aspired to make careers in music, and that meant recording to showcase their skills and performing those recordings to facilitate sales, success, and popularity. This appears from the earliest discussions of Holly’s ambitions using a tape recorder at home in 1949, to the longer career he enjoyed after his death due to un-mastered and unreleased recorded materials. Whether intentional or not, the Crickets’ international tours of Australia and England in February and March 1958 signaled an end to a phase in Holly’s career. By the summer of 1958, Holly was an “established artist—a star, and not just a one-record sensation,” and he and the band started taking steps to enjoy the lucrative financial benefits of that

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38 See Lizabeth Cohen’s discussion of the consumer culture and its political constructions in *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, specifically parts three and four.
success (even though a majority of the groups’ money remained under the direction of record companies, affiliated banks, and the eyes of their manager Norman Petty). Making it in the recording industry fulfilled certain aspects of the young musicians’ career aspirations, but staying in that place proved another matter, and Holly was determined to expand his skills and influence through recording from mid-1958 to his untimely death—which included the prospect of not performing regularly. In those changes, including the continued chart success by Buddy Holly and the Crickets in the spring and summer of 1958, was that Holly courted and married Maria Elena Santiago, a Puerto Rican-born receptionist with Holly’s record company in New York (married in Lubbock). 39

Buddy Holly’s career in 1958 reflected the impact of recording and performing as places of work and that year was a watershed in rock ‘n’ roll, as major stars started to fade from the music scene while the specific year gave birth to some of its lasting influence, namely inspiration among a specific group of young British aspiring musicians. In March 1958, Elvis Presley was inducted into the U.S. Army after being drafted, but would still record sporadically while RCA released albums compiling material from the previous two years. Symbolically, this “loss” to rock ‘n’ roll meant that Buddy Holly and the Crickets assumed the mantle of rock ‘n’ roll to listeners and admirers in the period. The Crickets’ continued release of recordings and touring confirmed the dual importance of these aspects of a music career. New songs like “Oh Boy!”, “Not Fade Away”, “Rave On,” and “Peggy Sue” interacted with further appearances on TV programs like The Ed Sullivan Show on January 26, 1958 (second

39 Goldrosen and Beecher, 102 and 105-107.
and final). Conversely, Sullivan actually objected to the band playing “Oh Boy!” during rehearsals, but Holly “insisted on performing the song,” or he would back out of the show. The band then toured Australia and England in February and March 1958 and found ready audiences in those nations, creating lasting legacies outside the United States following Holly’s death.⁴⁰

Where the United States recovered quickly from the industrial production and manpower needs of the Second World War, European nations did not recover as quickly, and needed American funds and goods to start renewal in the late 1940s. A decade later, American influence remained on both the continent and in the homes of the English, largely through American consumer goods, such as electrical devices and cultural items: movies, music, etc. For British youth, rock ‘n’ roll was as exciting as to Americans, and Buddy Holly, in particular, an attractive performer. In both Australia and England, shows by Holly and the Crickets attracted “hosts of new fans.” Audiences and critics found the excitement performed in concerts revolved around the closeness of the performance to recorded outputs, and the Cricket’s inclusion in package tours in England “raised rock ‘n’ roll to the same status level as more established forms of music and entertainment,” because the band had “professional showmanship” and successfully “[conveyed] the whole spirit of their music to an audience of mixed ages and interests.”⁴¹

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⁴¹ Goldrosen and Beecher, 90-91.
Furthermore, for a few of the new fans, Holly represented an alternative to the good-looking rockers that preceded him, namely Elvis. Aesthetically, he was “not pretty,” wore glasses, and his songs could easily be picked up by beginning guitarists (not to say Elvis’s material was demanding by any methods or skill level). While Buddy Holly inspired a generation of young Englishmen, his most fervent adherents were future Beatles John Lennon and Paul McCartney, as well as Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. In the mid-1970s, John Lennon recalled seeing Holly and the Crickets performance on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* on television during the 1958 tour, even though the group made a trip to Liverpool. McCartney’s production of *The Real Buddy Holly Story*, a 1985 documentary produced for Holly’s friends and family, illustrates the significance of the 1958 tour on British youth, the future of rock ‘n’ roll, and the music industry. The Crickets appearances inspired the performance techniques, confidence, and excitement that would invade the United States six years later when The Beatles first toured the United States. The Crickets journeyed to England in 1958 without fanfare, but six years later the group’s closest admirers made the return voyage with explosive grandeur and excitement, noticeable by even the harshest critics of pop music.  

Buddy Holly and the Crickets returned to the United States from their tours in Australia and England in April 1958, by that point barely a year into their recording

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42 See Goldrosen and Beecher, 86. Despite rock ‘n’ roll breeding challenges and confrontations to social and cultural settings in the 1950s, musicians were still expected to look like “gentleman” and according to these biographers, this was also meant to increase their popularity. “It was all right to look neat as long as you didn’t seem to be putting on an act about it.” Our historical hindsight delivers some irony that their appearance and “revolutionary” art forms did not necessarily match, but it also takes into account over fifty years of continued cultural challenges and development; Philip Norman, *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*, rev. ed. (New York: Fireside, 2003), 43; Paul McCartney and Keith Richards (interviews), *The Real Buddy Holly Story*.  

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The heavy pace of touring for promotion of their records and careers inspired extended time away from performing and recording and into the summer the band spent time at home visiting friends and family. For Buddy Holly, this included planning his future in the music industry, which included recording in New York and breaking the business relationship with Norman Petty by the end of 1958. Over the course of year there would follow other personal changes, notably Holly meeting and marrying María Elena and moving to live in New York’s Greenwich Village. The other major development was the amicable disbanding of the Crickets in October, due to the other two remaining members, J.I. Allison and Joe B. Mauldin, not wanting to move to New York (rhythm guitarist Niki Sullivan quit the band in December 1957, reportedly over his dislike of touring and diminished role as guitarist next to Holly).

After the group split up and Holly moved to New York, he focused on recording, both in professional studio atmospheres with new arrangement and styles accompanying his voice, and in his apartment with only a portable recorder and his guitar. Reportedly, Holly wanted to halt any plans to resume touring for some time and instead focus solely on recording, including contacting a contractor in Lubbock to build a home for his parents with an adjacent studio and apartments for musicians to record and live in while recording. Holly’s upbringing and roots in the working class created aspirations for a career in music and in turn the plans he initiated at this point in his career blatantly pointed at a revised identity as a member of the middle class, and intentions to incorporate improved economic stations in his and his family’s lives. To accomplish these plans, he needed cash and as many biographers have attempted to explain, available cash based on success to that point was tied up in his business
relationship with Norman Petty and music companies, so Holly had to go out on tour in order to fund his plans. The discrepancy surrounding Holly’s (and the Crickets) financial status at the end of 1958 revolved around their original agreements with Norman Petty and supposed fall-out resulting from the break with Petty that occurred before Holly moved to New York.43

Whatever the financial situation that existed for Holly at the end of 1958, and numerous biographers have pieced together the numerical and financial realities, he would have to go back on the road, which also meant he needed a backing group. Assembling a new group consisting of Waylon Jennings, Tommy Allsup, and Carl Bunch, Buddy Holly prepared to take part in the “Winter Dance Party,” a package tour that included other recording stars in 1958-1959, and ended tragically with the deaths of Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson. At the end of his life, Buddy Holly symbolized the division of pop music between working and middle class identifications. He aspired his entire life to record and capture perceived economic gains from that activity, but financial demands required he continue touring, an activity that contributed to his unintentional death in a plane crash on February 3, 1959. Touring and the activities required to sustain that practice remained a working class economic status in the music industry, but the aspirations to exceed that workspace by recording in a studio increasingly elevated musicians to middle class status, through alternate modes of professionalism and separated from “rough” elements inherent to venues and spaces for performing throughout the twentieth century and relevant to the postwar consumer market.

**Down the Line: Cultural Impact, Consumption, and Work in the Postwar Era**

Recording opportunities grew for musicians following World War II, so much that an aspiring musician’s ambitions changed dramatically with the idea of a career as a professional, “recording musician.” The performers in the Depression built careers as musicians through radio broadcasts and touring, and following World War II they played important roles inspiring another generation of musicians to find jobs in the music industry. The explosion of production, distribution, and consumption in the United States fostered a market where simply seeing or hearing the musician was not enough—purchasing recording materials for ownership changed the impact of music in individual lives. Consumption of music through those products also challenged and reflected economic possibilities after the war, as young Americans tethered to families that may have experienced family economics of the Depression yearned for symbols that expanded their influence and experiences. Recorded music offered that symbol, a 45 rpm single provided a prominent political role through the economics of the consumer market and demonstrated the relevance of youth in American society and culture, as well as changed the dynamics of working for the producers as performing remained relevant to musicians’ incomes, and to the selling of that product locally, regionally, and nationally. Accordingly, the music industry distributed recorded goods to radio stations and retail outlets that made up the new consumer marketplaces, sites where Americans took part and promoted broader goals as well, strategically linking consumption to economic success and political viability in the Cold War.

Technology and distribution of consumer goods created the environment for expanded interests in popular music among larger American audiences and society, at
least compared to local and regional bases that provided means for growth and success in the decades before the war. However, those interests challenged existing relationships and expectations for young Americans, particularly revolving around economic and cultural roles in the American political landscape. Rock ‘n’ roll, as the popular fad in the 1950s, historically engendered responses and discussions based on wild antics, out-of-control behavior, and interracial interactions, facets of its popularity and success explored by historians like Michael T. Bertrand and Brian Ward. Importantly, race was a socializing component of pop music culture after World War II, and played a monumental role in reshaping meanings around “notoriously dangerous” environments and music, including rock ‘n’ roll’s relationship to and ties to country and western swing venues. The music ironically flourished within a storied duality where teenagers adored it and respectable adults disliked it, including middle class representatives because it emerged from distinctly working class and rough environments. While reactions as described certainly occurred, rock ‘n’ roll and popular music played a prominent role making what was claimed a passing “fad” into a style that held merit and fostered economic growth for audiences that aspired for positions beyond notable experiences of parents and prior generations.44

The assumption that rock ‘n’ roll was yet another fad was rooted in the reactions and experiences of r&b performers. The historical discussion of this relationship largely deals with race relations and apparent divisions within the music market and buying audience. Historian Brian Ward comments in his book on r&b and race relations, Just My Soul Responding, that:

44 See Wald, 84-110. Wald explores technological changes in the 1920s that enabled musical recordings to emerge widespread as akin to other revolutionary cultural devices, like writing and literature.
“When r&b first began to infiltrate the white pop charts regularly in 1954, the entire industry believed that there was but a finite and transient white audience for this black music. Eighteen months and countless crossover hits later, it still struggled to accept the fact that rock and roll, as the new biracial style which emerged from r&b was dubbed, marked a major realignment of American popular music tastes and markets along new generational and racial lines. Among other things, that tardiness reflected the pervasiveness and tenacity of racism within the industry, as in the country at large.”

In rural markets, versions of songs by African American musicians, coupled with the growing popularity of r&b and rock ‘n’ roll, elicited fears among community leaders, as the music earned political status when it “forced” interactions between white and African American youths. These adults, leaders, members of the middle class, feared the impact this “fad” could have on America’s youth. The key, however, was the impact of those musicians and their products upon postwar economics and how the music industry treated those possibilities. Independent producers and labels made r&b and rock ‘n’ roll the successful popular music of the 1950s, a component duplicated by individual performers like Buddy Holly, too. The difficulties he faced recording to industrial expectations with Decca in Nashville spurred Holly to find an independent studio close to home and mirror the entrances of r&b musicians to local, regional, and national audiences and markets. Holly’s success through an independent-based studio illustrated interracial ties, especially when urban audiences assumed the “Crickets” were African Americans and came to witness a group of young white men.45

Historical studies have shown the impact of popular music in the 1950s upon consumer culture, youth culture, race relations, and the revenues of the music industry,

and Buddy Holly helps illustrate those ideas and how recording changed individual aspirations and economic statuses of performers. For musicians in the postwar period, recording came to embody a career in music despite performing providing greater control and prospects for economic income. According to musician Bob Montgomery, when he and Buddy Holly were kids in early 1950s Lubbock, they “worked [various jobs] mostly to get money together to record in studios.” Sonny Curtis added that after they graduated from Lubbock High School in 1955, they worked “playing in nightclubs, car lots, grocery store parking lots,” and played remote radio broadcasts just to bring in listeners. Recording and performing provided identical motivations, but the results diverged dramatically as the former increased potential audience sizes. Buddy Holly succeeded as a performer and as a recording artist in his brief career in the music business, but expectations for economic windfall upon the introduction of recording severely limits the broader implications of recording as a mode of work. Musicians still relied and earned substantial incomes from working as performers, but the consumer market provided new cultural impacts through mass consumption and recorded materials. Technological advances and recording created new opportunities and facilitated the expansion of the music industry in line with developments in the Depression and World War II, initiating greater opportunities and aspirations for mass consumption against older forms of class-based consumption practices.46

46 Ward, 34-39. Ward explores the economic motivations of whites and blacks in the radio and recording businesses in the late 1940s and 1950s as they sought to capture African American listening audiences—through the products created by technological change. The potential revenues made African American communities valuable to corporate interests. The market signaled value and opened doors for musicians to perform, record, and communicate with audiences on social matters. This historiography is useful because it demonstrates how technology and markets required musicians and listeners to access those products in new methods and with new meanings. In Ward’s study, those meanings included...
Mass consumption following World War II symbolized political strength in Cold War conflicts, while offering younger Americans’ opportunities to engage and challenge class and racial divisions in American society and culture. R&B, cover songs, and the popularity of musicians caused “authorities” to focus on the impact of pop music, as well as introduced recording and the studio as work and sites for production. For musicians after World War II, audiences continued to include those gained through radio broadcasts, as well as those who attended concerts and dances, viewed performances on television, and purchased records. Buddy Holly’s work as a musician enjoyed greater access to recording than regional and stylistic predecessors, fueled by influence across race and class divisions, and he captured a working identity as a “professional recording artist,” defined through middle class spaces like the studio. As a product of middle class possibilities, recording thus deconstructing the impulses of rock ‘n’ roll and popular music, even as musicians remained linked to venues and rough working class environments. Buddy Holly gained access to a career in music through aspirations and opportunities working (performing) in similar spaces as western swing and country predecessors, but in the wake of viewing and connecting with Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and other emerging 1950s musicians, his cultural status and impact expanded dramatically.47

By the end of the 1950s, popular music was a principal component of postwar economics in the United States, as well as a major contributor to societal and cultural

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47 Major labels searched for methods to capitalize on the interest in rock ‘n’ roll, creating different attempts to “defuse” the power of African Americans by producing “sterilized,” white cover versions (see Bill Haley and the Comets numerous covers) or creating new styles based around “cleaner” (or status quo friendly) white music.
developments and relations. Rock ‘n’ roll, in particular, illustrated confrontations over race, gender, and generational divides in American society, often imagined as parents rejecting the music of their children or racial interactions proliferating moral decadence and cultural decay. However, despite specific incidents and examples where confrontations played out over reception and audience behaviors, notably following movie screenings that featured rock ‘n’ roll performers, or at concerts and dances where young American broke across rudimentary dividers to enjoy the music as a single group, rock ‘n’ roll and pop music played a more sizable role in shaping economic opportunities and cultural influences. Recording and products manufactured from that activity only hinted at the larger relevance of musicians to mass consumption in the postwar, and the expansion of music as a tool for Americans across the twentieth century. Buddy Holly and West Texas musicians explored in this discussion illustrated the continuance and expansion of trends from western swing and country musicians from the Depression and World War II. Equally important was the impact Holly and contemporary performers made for themselves in the postwar environment, utilizing skills and training to institute their own influence and status in the minds of audiences, listeners, and nascent musicians in those groups. Technology provided those openings unlike prior generations, as recording provided permanence in popular music and pop culture for far more musicians than ever enjoyed or documented before World War II.48

Buddy Holly experimented with production methods and recording techniques in the studio by late 1958, and he became an innovator as much as a performer or recording artist in the short time before his death in February 1959. Rock ‘n’ roll exploded because it attracted Americans’ interests across race and generational lines, but its success in multiple regions and across the globe came as a result of technological developments and the production of recordings as a method of distribution and consumption. But those developments conflated the class status of musicians, before recording often did not meet the needs to sustain family or career needs. Holly demonstrates those ideas succinctly, as described in this chapter, his participation in the “Winter Dance Party” was out of economic necessity, and he hoped to bring money in that would allow him to fulfill family needs and career aspirations. Of course, his death prevented his goals from occurring, but his influence past that point continued beyond what he may have imagined or been possible prior to the expansion of recording and distribution technologies.49

Nevertheless, Buddy Holly serves as a useful example in the discussion of music as work in American culture, and his brief career offers tools for examining how music is work and carries problems and dangers often overlooked in line with cultural relevance and influence. Of course, the easiest arena to view the importance of performing after World War II emerged with the package tours, television broadcasts, and countless venues where musicians played two to three hits audiences were

49 See Bertrand 87. Bertrand comments how rock ‘n’ roll became accepted within the music industry because it generated immense revenues, despite “musical (and racial) inferiority.” Rock ‘n’ roll remained popular because it created excitement (popularity) that would “burn with vehement continuity,” according to one source. Recording is an important and fundamental tool in Bertrand’s study, for it shepherded the explosion of rock ‘n’ roll and operated as a gauge for when the listening and consuming public sought out racially diverse products.
familiar with or were new for consumption. Those activities also fueled the expanded interest in musicians shared by audiences across the United States and by the end of the 1950s increasingly with audiences in other markets, such as Australia and the United Kingdom where Buddy Holly and the Crickets toured in early 1958. In the UK, the Crickets performances on British television and across the country in cities like Liverpool directly impacted young aspiring musicians like John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Six years later, the Beatles led a charge across the Atlantic Ocean and rock ‘n’ roll invaded America from Britain.

The Beatles were not the only British group inspired by Buddy Holly and the Crickets; the Rolling Stones followed suit in the British Invasion, and paid homage to Holly’s influence. The Stones’ first American single was a cover of Holly’s “Not Fade Away” and Keith Richards admitted his debt to Holly in McCartney’s documentary The Real Buddy Holly Story: “Maybe doing Buddy’s song gave provocation to write our own songs.” When first introduced to Mick Jagger, Richards was attracted in part because the latter had seen Buddy Holly perform during the 1958 tour. The group aesthetic of the Crickets created a unique trend following Holly’s death, but the seeds for the “tradition” of a small, self-contained trio or quartet were planted well before that tragedy, during the tour of England. The line-ups of The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and many other groups demonstrated the “echo” the Crickets left as effects of their international tours, as well as fueled the popular success of the British groups in the mid-1960s.50

One of many musicians that came to prominence from 1950s and 1960s West Texas, Buddy Holly demonstrates how recording as a profession changed the impact of music as a consumer good throughout the United States. Holly’s recording career between 1956 and 1959 demonstrated the unique relationship of regional interests in the national culture of the postwar era, and the role technology (radio, records, television) played in increasing the interactions of Americans. As a cultural influence, Holly’s career explicitly indicates how the growth of recording as the major source of revenue for the music industry during such a short time forced musicians to maintain high levels of creativity and output. Consumer demands caused industry executives (those with the capital) to demand more and more product, at times detrimental to creativity and desires musicians held for experimentation, whether by gaining new skills or performance styles. In the wake of these developments, music took on greater influence than ever achieved as a form of leisure or entertainment, and by the 1960s elements of work and cultural impact caused conflicts and concerns about the safety and messages of musicians. The rock ‘n’ rollers exhibited music as work, finding promising and long-lasting careers from interests in consumer goods, recorded outputs, and pop music that transcended class and race. For those musicians that followed them, similar aspirations held, but cultural influence and identities far removed from the work of a musician complicated identities and careers. The political and economic British Invasion was not simply relegated to these groups initial success in the United States. Holly and the Crickets inspired an entire generation of British youth and Lubbock’s status as their hometown fueled interest in the city from this British generation well into the 1980s. Lubbock musician Joe Ely recorded with punk band The Clash on their hit song “Should I Stay or Should I Go” in 1982, and later brought the group to Lubbock “because they wanted to see where Buddy Holly went to school” (Joe Ely (interview), Fire in the Water, Earth in the Air: Legends of West Texas Music).
roles of the 1950s gave way to revolutions in cultural power and societal relations as young Americans continued to challenge expectations and realities in the 1960s.\(^{51}\)

In the postwar era, the consumer culture fostered opportunities to create goods for everyday use in the home, and the music industry responded, developing technology to increase recording capabilities and produce commodity items that provided access to music for consumers at any time. The recorded components of the music industry expanded the consumption of music from radio broadcasts at specific times of the day and parties and dances on the weekends to user-defined spaces and unrestricted play. Musicians only contributed the work and skills that made consumer goods popular and profitable, but factored heavily in the cultural expansion of popular music as a reflection of American cultural, political, and economic growth in the postwar period. When musicians like Buddy Holly inspired and encountered these developments they moved between class identities, at once working class while also incorporated increasingly into the middle class definitions of mass consumption and popular culture.

\(^{51}\) George Lipsitz, \textit{Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 15-17. Lipsitz illuminates the changes inherent to culture in markets increasingly controlled and “homogenized” by corporate interests. This argument opens up the cultural dimensions inherent to the music industry and how musicians and audiences both negotiated the increased exposure to popular fads.
CHAPTER IV
“TURNING PASSIVE CONSUMPTION INTO AN ACTIVE CULTURE”: THE BEATLES AND RECASTING MUSICIANS’ WORK IN THE 1960s

On August 29, 1966, the Beatles played the final concert of their American tour that year at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. The 35 minute show became the last live concert performance given by the Beatles in their career, aside from the impromptu rooftop performance atop their Apple building on January 30, 1969. Tours in 1964 and 1965 started and ended in San Francisco, respectively, too, but at the much smaller Cow Palace indoor arena in Daly City. Like Shea Stadium, where the Beatles played their largest concert in 1965 (and played again roughly a week earlier in 1966 to a smaller audience), Candlestick was principally a baseball venue. Situated on the western shore of San Francisco Bay, the stadium opened in 1960 as the home of the San Francisco Giants baseball team, and became the longtime home of the San Francisco 49ers football team from 1971 to 2013. Sports venues like Candlestick Park and Shea Stadium offered spaces to attract larger audiences and increased economic incomes from ticket sales, and for the August 29th show there were 25,000 tickets sold, a number well below the venue’s capacity. Following a routine set list stretched to 35 minutes, the Beatles departed Candlestick Park, flew south to Los Angeles, and ended a six-year work history of performing that made up the band’s primary income: the
Shea Stadium concert in August 1965 netted $160,000 (unadjusted) for 30 minutes, and typical bookings by 1966 ranged $80,000-90,000.¹

In the wake of Candlestick, the Beatles shifted fully into a studio-based recording unit, and this proved a radical development in their career, as live performances and appearances sustained popularity and the reactions of fans and consumers as part of Beatlemania. The following chapter argues that the Beatles stage performances, studio recordings, and immense popularity fostered a change in audience and listener perceptions’ of musicians as workers to culturally significant and valued figures and leaders based on popular success and market dominance, despite ties the members of the band held to working and middle class backgrounds as children and young performers. Essentially, over the course of their career in the 1960s and legacy since that decade, the Beatles turned the idea of popular music as a “passively consumed” product into an “active cultural” artifact, where maintenance of popular music as a good continues to determine industrial and worker productivity.

The Beatles played important roles and participated in cultural, social, and political ideologies linked to politics of consumption and affluence in the 1950s and 1960s, and this chapter argues they accomplished those roles by working intensely as both performing and recording musicians. From the explosion of audience interests in the

¹ The concert at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles on August 28, 1966, had an audience of roughly 45,000, while the second Shea concert on August 23 had roughly 44,000, down from 55,600 in 1965. At Cow Palace on August 19, 1964, 17,130 were in attendance, and on August 31, 1965, roughly 18,000. The first concert at Cow Palace lasted 38 minutes, too. Larry Kane, *Ticket to Ride: Inside the Beatles’ 1964 & 1965 Tours That Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 241-242; see “The Beatles - Tour Dates,” accessed March 3, 2014, [http://thebeatles.bizhat.com/tour_dates.htm](http://thebeatles.bizhat.com/tour_dates.htm). Paul McCartney announced plans in April 2014 to play the final concert at Candlestick Park on August 14, 2014, before the stadium is demolished, and the concert will be preceded on August 10 by his first concert at Dodger Stadium since the Beatles concert in 1966. Now it’s impossible to imagine sports venues not doubling as profitable concert spaces; see any Super Bowl.
United Kingdom throughout 1963 to the invasion of America and the world in 1964, the Beatles’ popularity only grew, represented by Beatlemania and the legacy of the group fifty years later, but concerts held at venues like Candlestick Park or Shea Stadium increasingly masked the Beatles skills, training, and work. Before the Beatles, no music acts played sports venues, and Candlestick earned an important milestone as the site of the band’s final concert.²

Along with other prominent culturally popular musicians and stars in the 1960s, the Beatles helped reshape receptions and reactions to music, making it a revolutionary force that inspired others to push for changes in their lives and environments, noteworthy as well due to their statuses as white, male musicians. Prolific recording musicians between 1962 and 1966, the Beatles adapted their skills within the studio to expand their influence and career options beyond live performances and touring. However, the demands of their record label (both in the UK and the United States), their fans and audiences, and even their management required near constant and regularly scheduled live performances and tours. Ultimately, by 1966 the Beatles had worked within these demands for six years, and the effects were visible upon their success, productivity, and job satisfaction. Individually and within their closest circles and friends, including competing musicians, the effects became more and more apparent as they progressed musically beyond the rock ‘n’ roll influences they adapted from their earliest founding through “apprenticing” in Hamburg and their first recordings and albums released in 1963 and throughout 1964.

Satisfaction based on aspirations of success through performing diminished and their work quality suffered as fans screamed nonstop at their concerts and drowned out their performances and music. As a tightly knit group, the Beatles were connected, reliant, and competitive with one another, largely self-trained and masters of their trade, but the inability to move beyond Beatlemania forced a drastic change in career trajectory and output, perhaps leading to their ultimate dissolution by 1970.

The re-definition of popular music, and rock ‘n’ roll in particular, as art in the 1960s occurred based on influence and political voices attributed to performers like the Beatles and audiences that clamored for leadership and interactions in the counterculture. When massively culturally influential musicians and performers abandoned live interactions with audiences, such as the Beatles final concert at Candlestick Park, or Bob Dylan’s motorcycle crash only a month earlier (see Chapter Five), they facilitated greater scrutiny of recorded output as directions and artistic sentiments. Popular music through the mid-1960s was long designed for audience and performer interactions, seen through physical activities like dancing and calmer receptions in theaters, and intended for consumption as a commodity in those sites. The Beatles set out to become successful performers, and from 1960-1962 they had achieved and surpassed those goals, morphing from an untrained and unfocused group into a club band, and then a massive cultural and economic entity in popular music. However, the band’s intense popularity, measured by audience reactions and record sales, forced managers and concert organizers to plan and book shows in venues that accommodated larger audiences, and more economic income from performances and tours. As they toured, so did the Beatles record, and their development as musicians
shifted designs for popular music from physical activities like dancing to appreciation by listening and interpretation, and the Beatles understood Beatlemania prohibited any practical receptions of their music: screams overpowered technology and amplification in most venues—“passive consumption” negated “active culture.”

When the Beatles toured the U.S. in August 1966, they inhabited roles occupied since they debuted to American audiences on The Ed Sullivan Show in February 1964. Of course, two years later, the band’s arrival was dampened by reactions to Lennon’s comment that the band was “more popular than Jesus” featured in the debut issue of Datebook, and developments in their schedule, the recording of Revolver in April, May, and June, and the band’s world tour in June and July 1966, disrupted interests in maintaining the recognizable and popular elements of 1964 and 1965 tours. The set lists remained virtually identical, often starting with songs “old” in comparison to the band’s newest LP or single (the Beatles released at least two new albums and four singles per year); in 1966, they introduced only one new song, “Paperback Writer,” and closed by covering Little Richard’s “Long Tall Sally,” part of their repertoire since 1961. Meanwhile, fellow musician Bob Dylan challenged and confronted audience expectations by “going electric” and moving away from acoustic and poetic folk music in 1965. Though many fans similarly followed and screamed at the Beatles in concert, as the band progressed musically, and engaged more political and social positions, some fans rejected changes and challenges to personal and individual expectations about the Beatles. For John Lennon, equally as outspoken and

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3 Devin McKinney, Magic Circles: The Beatles in Dream and History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 118: “Beatle shows as they came to be in 1964 and 1965 were not settings for the honing of musical craft…”
individualistic as Dylan, the confining attributes of Beatlemania affected his personality and tolerance of remaining tied to those perceptions. No longer aspiring musicians willing to do what was necessary to achieve success, the Beatles were skilled musicians motivated to progress and capture new sounds as artists at the emergence of rock music appreciated as art.

As performers were increasingly distanced from audiences by popularity and success, represented by stadium venues like Candlestick and audience sizes of 25,000, the music evolved into an art form functioning within the emerging counterculture. After 1966, touring and performing still factored as major sources of income for musicians, but recording took on greater significance in relating ideas of artistic expression. When the Beatles abandoned touring, they also abandoned connections to class and economic issues and engaged definitions of cultural relevance solely through recording. The Beatles appeared as clean-cut white and middle class male entertainers in their contributions to cultural shifts in the 1960s and helped shape the counterculture as a middle class reaction, alternative to working class concerns in the time period and attractions based on ideas of postwar affluence. Live performances linked musicians to working and a community with shared cultural interests, but abandoning that activity complicated relationships with some audiences because musicians challenged economic and political issues from points quite disconnected from the realities of worker’s lives. The Beatles took on greater cultural presence by
stopping touring, but the confrontations of 1966 and subsequent career based solely in the studio detached their history and backgrounds tied to work and class.\textsuperscript{4}

**The Beatles’ Work: Environment, Ambitions, and Beatlemania**

\textit{“Playboy: What kind of families do you come from?}

George: Well, you know, not rich. Just workin’ class. They’ve got jobs. Just work. …

Ringo: Just workin’ class. …”\textsuperscript{5}

The four individual Beatles grew up in Liverpool, England, during and after World War II, a port city their families had migrated to from Ireland in the 19th century. Much has been written regarding their youth and backgrounds, in particular the influence upon the band’s emergence in Liverpool, apprenticeships in Hamburg, and popular success in Britain and the United States. Without revisiting the individual and collective biographies of the Beatles (and avoiding presenting a paled composition of their biography), it is important to recognize that family backgrounds and work opportunities factored heavily in their attitudes and approaches to performing and musicianship. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr (Richard Starkey), grew up within divergent working and middle class families in Liverpool, and they related to American rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll performers due to the presence of American ships and merchants in Liverpool. Though linked to historical developments and movements, their backgrounds also represented the isolation prevalent in working class culture, identified by anonymity in available work and rationing from World War II kept in place by the British government into the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4} A note on geographical references: to avoid confusion among readers, the terms “Britain,” “the UK,” and “British” are used instead of “England” or “English” except where relevant to the location of Liverpool, and in direct quotes. The author acknowledges the diversity of nationality within the United Kingdom not observed due to this decision.  
\textsuperscript{5} Jean Shepherd, “Playboy Interview: The Beatles,” \textit{Playboy}, February 1965, 51-60.}
1950s, as well as limited reconstruction in Liverpool. All four crafted strong personal qualities tied to individual experiences, creating ambitions to escape problems of economic inequality and invisibility within a largely working class community.

Biographer explorations of the Beatles’ experiences illuminate many societal and cultural attributes within British youth, often pointing out Liverpool’s port status as privileging the city’s residents with a unique American influence other British cities lacked in the 1950s. A major difference noted between British youth and American youth in the period was the advent of “art colleges” in Britain that sought to create and mold potentially gifted young artists with talents unrelated to labor and industrial settings. In particular, the number of British rock musicians that emerged in the 1960s with backgrounds attending art colleges influenced discussions about the importance of those institutions. Media writer Steven Stark called the number of British rock stars emerging from art colleges a “major unintended impact,” but one that facilitated those “students who tended to think of themselves as artists.” Art colleges operated as an alternative secondary education, but did not substitute for British college experiences. In fact, for British youth like the Beatles and John Lennon in particular, the opportunities to attend art colleges merely acted as delaying momentum otherwise directing them into industrial work.6

Art colleges proved monumental to the emergence of British bands in the 1960s that took part in the invasion led by the Beatles, favoring untapped artistic ambitions and granting voices and opportunities akin to the baby boom and trends in affluence and consumer spending in the United States. These opportunities shaped

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British youth identities, even those not accepted into institutions, because these ambitious artists rejected identities rooted to working and class issues in favor of identities rooted in the hopes of escaping those statuses by performing music. It was the arrival of American rock ‘n’ roll music in the mid-1950s that spurred those ambitions, as it carried the excitement engendered in the United States across the Atlantic. The Beatles likewise shared societal and cultural backgrounds with American musicians that found audiences in the UK, particularly Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly who emerged from similar, if not more downtrodden situations. These performers, as well as the influx of new American music they produced, influenced listeners and fans that performing was not outside anyone’s grasp or ambitions—least of all because you wore glasses—in America and the UK.

Furthermore, emphasis on the individual Beatles’ experiences working in industrial settings reinforces notions that aspirations to play music while escaping working class jobs offered a quiet critique of the class system within the UK. The image of the Beatles’ later success playing music occurred because they dressed and represented respectable youth outside rough identities embodied by the rebellious “teddy boy” in urban communities. Young men in their positions were expected to find labor-based work to support family and personal economic needs, especially when educational opportunities dried up and degrees were unfulfilled and unfinished. Starr and McCartney, in particular, as late as 1960 and 1961 worked in industrial facilities, attempting to complete five-year apprenticeships required for trade certificates and guaranteed employments. Both eventually departed to play music, and Starr left with roughly half the time required for a completed certificate. McCartney’s
attempts to work in coil manufacturing proved problematic as he was not adept producing requisite numbers of products for manufacturing requirements according to biographer Mark Lewisohn. Lennon, alternatively, worked briefly in food service at the Liverpool airport after his mother Julia Stanley was killed, but his efforts demonstrated reluctance for service (or labor intensive) work when he failed to respect customer orders or preparation cleanliness. Of the four, Harrison refused attempts to find wage work following the end of his education in 1959-1960. Predictably, these rejections and failed attempts revolved around music and how performing granted personal satisfaction. It would be easy to link psychological rejections to these efforts, but that implies the Beatles were unwilling to work toward any goal or task, and popular music was still emerging as a respectable outlet available to a much larger population, not solely those who resided in central urban areas.\textsuperscript{7}

Cultural historian and biographer Devin McKinney emphasized how the Beatles unfocused and unrefined founding and early years set the momentum for their career overall: “Men underground, grinding for their pay, waiting to emerge.” This description also undermines their white, male statuses, in favor of a class-based determination to succeed. Opportunities performing created links to the definitions they attached to themselves, primarily through music and self-enterprise. In their individual resistance to industrial and wage openings, the Beatles committed vast time and efforts to honing their skills and craft as preceding influential musicians had for years and decades before the postwar era. McKinney further characterized their beginnings as rooted in the grime and filth of the working class, both in Liverpool and

\textsuperscript{7} Mark Lewisohn, \textit{The Beatles: All These Years}, Vol. 1, \textit{Tune In} (New York: Crown Archetype, 2013), 397-416.
in Hamburg, constantly pointing out the sensual realities of where they played and how it informed their performances, while expanding notions of what it took for the Beatles to find success and progress with their skills. Describing the decisions they made to work as musicians, and the legend they built out of Liverpool and Hamburg, McKinney complemented the “funk and sweat” underneath the band’s giant leaps into an unknown marketplace and work mastering instruments and craft.\(^8\)

In the late 1950s, the Beatles took any bookings available, often in dirty, working class environments that indicated struggle and dedication as the band searched for positive receptions that asked for subsequent bookings. McKinney and others have discussed issues of degradation and disrespect leveled at the young men, elaborating upon conscious decisions they made to tackle problems either unforeseen or predicted, and lower their status in order to present hard-nosed and rougher elements when they confronted resistance and rejection. The Beatles apprenticeship in Hamburg was literally dirty, full of gambling, prostitution, and violence, and the particular antics and events of their tenures in the German port only emerged slowly over time. As McKinney reconstructs, the Beatles engaged the working class they were portrayed as rejecting, catapulting themselves forward because they were willing to work hard, suffer setbacks, and buck resistance when met. Everything about their founding and development matched successful musicians in the 20th century and postwar environment, but these four men represented and wanted more from music. Hard work and dedication manufactured success with popularity translating to wealth

\(^8\) McKinney, 16-19.
outside local markets, but ultimately the music was produced for consumer and
listener appetites and discarded as regularly and frequently.\(^9\)

Performing intense environments in Hamburg and Liverpool created a solid
fan base, sometimes shared with other bands undergoing similar opportunities. By
early 1961, the rigors of playing in Hamburg molded them into a unit capable of
finding “regular” work as they crafted a work ethic, stage presence, and extensive
repertoire. Although stage antics were later fine-tuned and purged of rougher elements
by manager Brian Epstein (swearing, talking, and eating on stage, for examples), the
Beatles success was due to the intense pace and schedules they worked in Hamburg.
On successive trips, they played on average eight hours a night and six or seven nights
a week over a set period of months (generally six to eight weeks). Beyond language
barriers and historical prejudices, the Beatles picked up tools for entertaining diverse
crowds, in Hamburg, primarily drunk and violent Germans looking to spend freely and
carouse recklessly in Reeperbahn district bars and strip clubs. Following their first trip,
the Beatles returned to Liverpool a completely different performing unit, and
encountered old audiences intrigued by the developed sound, styles, and repertoire.
Importantly, this interest initiated the reality that they could earn prominent incomes
outside industrial work and disproved claims that music would only provide infrequent
incomes. The Beatles’ rejection of industrial work created a radical modification to

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\(^9\) McKinney, 19-44: “If they became the greatest thing in rock and roll it was because they chose to live
in filth and perform in fear, and then make music that was undeniable because it had been put daily to
that test. They were, after all, scions of the middle classes, with homes to return to and honorable trades
to enter. But as a function of their desire and the work ethic it demanded, the Beatles elected to switch
strata and became working-class …”; see also Stark, 20-80 for discussions of the Beatles’ Liverpool
backgrounds in the working class.
music as viable work within and representative of class structures, beyond popularity and success already captured by rock ‘n’ rollers as commodities in the 1950s.

Once Brian Epstein entered the Beatles environment in early 1961, he started effectively formalizing many aspects of the band better recognized to their popularity, success, and legacy. After the first trip to Hamburg in 1960, the band started gaining increased bookings in Liverpool, typically organized and maintained by the drummer they picked to go to Hamburg, Pete Best, or by his mother Mona, who owned a coffee bar in her basement that served as equipment storage and a semi-residency. Epstein’s interest was created by requests in his Nems department store for a single the band made in Germany with Tony Sheridan, “My Bonnie,” and developed fully after he saw a lunchtime session they played at the Cavern Club only a few blocks walk from his store. Of course, as biographers have regularly cited, the Beatles were regular patrons of Nems and fit images of young men that Epstein and his staff recognized from perusing shelves and listening booths. Mark Lewisohn emphasized in his biography that Epstein’s interests in the Beatles stemmed from his varied background in theatre and other endeavors outside his families’ stores in Liverpool, including the Nems (North End Music Store) department store specifically opened for him. His interest led to dedication and commitment at facilitating opportunities like recording through industrial contacts he had as the manager of the largest music retail store in Liverpool.10

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10 Mark Lewisohn, *The Beatles: All These Years*, Vol. 1, *Tune In* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2013), 560. Mona Best’s role as a facilitator and organizer of bookings later proved difficult when Pete Best was fired from the Beatles (as a band unit and business organization).
Epstein’s management did more than introduce another fan and committed patron of the Beatles, his role formalized opportunities performing throughout Liverpool and regular income on increased booking fees, as well as incorporating the band legally and providing representation for the band and individual Beatles. Previously, the band managed affairs related to labor, immigration, and financial matters, in “make it or break it” fashion, i.e. any incident or indelicacy could theoretically have wrecked their efforts and opportunities. This approach was problematic in a few situations in Hamburg, with others previously tasked with management duties, and later with sex and relationship concerns. Paul McCartney and Pete Best were nearly prevented from future VISAs to Hamburg after a prank involving a condom almost resulted in the burning down of a cinema. Accordingly, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison, found Epstein’s management useful and protective for them and as they continued improving and perfecting their craft. In late 1961, they had traveled to Hamburg again, but their success and evolution in Liverpool and northern England was expanding due to Epstein’s role.

The management provided by Epstein also opened doors for industrial interest in the Beatles, principally as this would provide more income and sustainability for the Beatles as performers who also recorded. For Epstein, managing a recording group would also stock shelves in his Nems store with the band he believed in completely as fan and manager. Achieving that goal meant cleaning up the Beatles performance and appearance in order to better represent their potential and respectability, matching Epstein’s own middle class experiences and aspirations. Epstein approached his management of the Beatles from a business perspective, helping them construct an
identity around what and how they performed, but also introducing important legal parameters to their existence, which formalized the Beatles as a company, in addition to friends and a band. New directives created a definitive Beatles image, molding a sense of uniformity and professionalism, even if later rejected as “selling out” in order to gain more opportunities and cultural respectability. Historically, these strengthened foundations provided long-term relevance and sustenance in the markets and culture of the 1960s, as well as creating a framework for identity and marketability beyond the band’s dissolution in 1970.\footnote{The Epstein family was a prominent, middle class family in Liverpool, and Brian’s father and grandfather were respected retail business owners. See John McMillian, \textit{Beatles vs. Stones} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 29: “… Epstein had his secretary type up memos spelling out exactly what the Beatles must not do: They must “stop swearing on stage, they must stop joking with the girls, they must stop smoking or carrying cans of Coke on stage” and so forth. Even some of their off stage behavior was regulated. For instance it was fine if they smokes, but only filtered cigarettes. Harsh unfiltered Woodbines, or rollies were considered \textit{déclassé} and strictly prohibited. The Beatles were instructed to trim their guitar strings and to bow deeply from the waist after each number.”}

One of Epstein’s earliest promises was to gain a recording contract for the Beatles, as this prospect allowed the band more prominence in the Liverpool market, as well as the British market, and his store shelves. A year after first introductions, Epstein succeeded in attracting a Decca a&r representative (artists and repertoire) down from London to check out a Beatles performance in December 1961, hopefully resulting in a studio demo or even contract to record. Decca was one of the two large recording companies in the United Kingdom at the time; along with EMI, accounting for nearly 80\% of the market in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Both companies held subsidiary labels and afforded budgets and promotions based on market success. Unlike the experiences and growth of the Beatles throughout 1960 and 1961, the recording industry in the UK had long operated with ubiquitous white-collar precision
and definite lines drawn between industrial goals and performers hired to record and release products by its labels.

In order to access much larger audiences than in Liverpool or through regional circuits, the Beatles needed (and wanted) to record with one of the major UK record labels. Securing recording opportunities, as the Beatles did with EMI in June 1962, meant bands had to adhere to the stipulations of the companies, and as descriptions provided by Mark Lewisohn demonstrate, the studio was primarily a site for work. At EMI (where the Beatles signed and recorded),

“… it was always suit-and-tie, except for the occasional Sunday session where sports’ jacket and slacks were permitted. The times of recording sessions (three a day, 10AM-1PM, 2-5, 7-10) and their output (maximum twenty minutes of completed recordings per session) were regulated by the mighty Musicians’ Union, a “closed-shop” organization, membership compulsory if you were a jobbing player.”

Overdubs and overly numerous takes of songs and materials were minimal according to industrial expectations, as studio time was paid by the company, even though EMI owned the facilities at Abbey Road, where the Beatles recorded the bulk of their output through 1970. The studio was an environment where middle class management and industrial leadership expected cheap production and returns from investments in musicians and the recorded products manufactured by factories for distribution, in this case across the United Kingdom.\footnote{Lewisohn, 253.}

The Beatles faced resistance from Decca, and later EMI, primarily due to their location in Liverpool, and partly due to industrial organization, where performers were marginalized and expected to operate within strict work schedules, environments, and direction, inside the studio. Live performances fueled and informed the Beatles style,
and without requisite elements they were accustomed to working within, the studio existed as a truly foreign and difficult environment to suddenly expect mastery. Decca arranged for a studio “test” to take place on January 1, 1962, after the a&r representative saw the Beatles play live in December 1961. That session, often cited more for Decca’s ultimately rejecting the Beatles, demonstrated the differences between the stage and the studio, as well as industrial expectations for sound and arrangements. For a band responsible for their own playing, arranging, and amplification, those expectations proved hard to fulfill and even more bewildering when the set-ups they had mastered were changed, in this case the Beatles’ amplifiers were deemed unsuitable.13

Decca head Dick Rowe reportedly informed Epstein that “guitar groups were on the way out” when Decca finally rejected the Beatles in February 1962, summing up a nicely foolish and ill-timed response by a powerful (and knowledgeable) executive regarding the Beatles and pop music. However, it likely did not occur as off-hand as that remark seems, dealing more with the Beatles location in Liverpool over London, and focusing on an aesthetically based decision further rejects the bottom-up construction of the Beatles career, while masking the band’s unfamiliarity with the studio environment and industrial operations. For the “test” at Decca, as the audition was referred to, the Beatles and possibly Epstein had selected fifteen songs, mostly covers that demonstrated they were a band unit and not a singer and backing group. Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison, all took lead vocals in the “test” and Mark Lewisohn indicates there was some idea of promoting the Lennon-McCartney self-

13 Lewisohn, 589.
written songs by Epstein in the audition, as this would markedly differentiate the Beatles from competitors—despite Lennon and McCartney’s apparent “hesitance about playing them.” Additionally, the songs selected were intended to showcase the band’s musicianship, even though drummer Pete Best was a very poor drummer and ideas about replacements were not far behind these events. The “test” at Decca, according to Lewisohn and other biographers, represented the best material of their live performances, and occurred as they played a full schedule of bookings and shows.\(^\text{14}\)

The studio environment the Beatles and other musicians of the mid-1960s added to their live performances and concert tours was essentially the opposite of those spaces. The contract the Beatles eventually secured with EMI in June 1962 required the band to record at Abbey Road, a space hardly open for artistic expression or experimentation. Any ambitions for expanding their repertoire took place in homes or on the road, in spare moments and hours when they were not on stage, although the band’s first number one single in the UK, “Please Please Me,” was written for the studio and recorded before played live. Additionally, the Beatles first album, \textit{Please Please Me}, essentially captured their live shows, and while recorded in one 11 hour session at Abbey Road, producer George Martin toyed with an idea of recording a performance of the band at the Cavern Club, but logistics of that space proved too difficult to overcome. If this had been accomplished, it would have changed the economic costs required for both parties, as the Beatles would not have had to travel to

\(^{14}\) McMillian, 12; Lewisohn, 537-542 and 557-563; Charles Gower Price, 216-217.
London and Abbey Road with their equipment and George Martin would have had to travel and carry recording equipment and personnel to Liverpool.

George Martin entered the Beatles environment as a result of Brian Epstein working through distribution contacts at EMI. That company’s publishing arm saw potential in the demo he carried from the Decca session and requested that Parlophone, which George Martin headed, record and release an original Lennon-McCartney song so the company would own the publishing copyright. At the time, Martin was one of the youngest label heads in London, and despite his position within industrial management, took part in numerous aspects of industrial production, including overseeing technological changes like the introduction of tapes, 7-inch extended play records (played at 33 1/3 speed), and “stereosonic” production in the mid-1950s.

EMI’s management offices operated out of the top floor of a building in central London, “8-11 Great Castle Street, just behind Oxford Circus,” while the studio at Abbey Road functioned for the recording purposes of EMI’s labels, including Parlophone, Columbia, and HMV (His Master’s Voice). Record managers like Martin were “shuttled” between the EMI offices and the studio, where technicians in “white lab coats” and administrators oversaw daily business.15

The cultural impact of music relied on studio production, and while manufacturing issues remained relevant, until the 1970s, did not specifically challenge or confront consumption issues or the markets for music. Nevertheless, Decca’s rejection instilled more intensity to “make it” and ultimately led Epstein to EMI, opening doors for recording and industrial based incomes for the band—specifically

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15 Lewisohn, 257.
recording-based royalties and publishing. The Beatles’ introductions to recording industry operations (primarily major label trends) emphasized links and backgrounds with the working class, though in the studio workspace where musicians’ inputs were minimized. Aspects of the entertainment industry, seen here via the Beatles’ gaining access to opportunities for recording in major label studio setups, complicate discussions about class divisions represented by performers and musicians. In particular, differentiating the elements of the working class presented through performing to audiences and roles employed within the studio environment, illustrates the latter does not provide as easy a descriptor of similar experiences to manufacturing and labor workers. Indeed, pointing to recording industry workers responsible for directly manufacturing the products of the studio may serve a better method of assessing class and income issues within the work conducted by musicians and performers.16

In January 1963, Parlophone released “Please Please Me,” and the single reached number one in the British charts. Subsequent singles that year, including “She Loves You” and “I Want to Hold Your Hand” equaled that success, leading to massive results in popularity and economic wealth after years of intense work and apprenticeship. By the recording sessions for “Please Please Me,” Ringo Starr had been added on drums, in part due to concerns about success in the recording studio, as George Martin informed Epstein he would supply a drummer in place of Pete Best,

16 Lewisohn points out that Decca later “realized with horror that not only had they missed out on the Beatles in Britain their US subsidiary London Records had lost the Beatles for America, Decca’s other companies had lost them around the world, and their in-house publishing company Burlington Music had probably missed out on Lennon-McCartney’s songs,” and the irony that “Decca spent more money treating Brian Epstein to lunch to tell him they weren’t signing the Beatles than it would have cost to sign them” (561); Charles Gower Price, 226.
determined to be too poor a player for recording. Like Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison, Ringo Starr had similar experiences to the Beatles with other bands in Hamburg and throughout Britain since 1960. Recording opened the doors to broader success across Britain and new regions in Europe, such as Sweden and later France (January 1964). The reception audiences and fans gave the Beatles, coined “Beatlemania” in October 1963 by the Daily Mail quickly represented a cultural and social phenomenon unlike any “fad” witnessed previously, despite comparisons made to rock ‘n’ rollers like Elvis in the 1950s, and led to worried questions about its meaning and implications for audiences of what was perceived as distracting “noise.”\(^17\)

Musicians maintained working class identities principally through the struggles to earn wealth and gain success, an economic and a cultural reality made possible by the growth of the pop music industry after World War II. However, despite ties to the working class and dedication to their craft, musicians increasingly lost those connections based on income and economic value granted through popular success. Time and again, new styles and fads emerged primarily through independent producers and record labels outside and away from the major centers of production and populations: Sam Philips recording Elvis Presley for his Sun Records in Memphis before selling his contract to RCA, Buddy Holly’s rejection by Nashville and Decca, only to find an outlet through independent producer Norman Petty and the Coral label (owned by Decca nonetheless), and Chuck Berry working clubs in St. Louis before

meeting Leonard Chess in Chicago. These musicians proliferated r&b, rock ‘n’ roll, and genres at first ignored by the major labels because they were rooted in the working class, until promoted to success by the middle class. Even though the Beatles operated in a different market, new American records found their way to Liverpool through merchants or similar independent labels.18

Popular music was culturally linked to the middle class and ideas of commodity production and consumption in the 1950s and 1960s. Rock ‘n’ roll developed within working class communities and transcended class and racial divisions, often promoted through the radio. The Beatles and their British contemporaries that came with them during the invasion fit these models, although evidence and discussions about the consumer and cultural market in Britain that found traction in the United States have repeatedly pointed out the uniqueness of the Beatles background and experiences. That these young men rejected industrial opportunities in favor of hard times working at the literal bottom of any music market illustrated their connections and influences derived from common threads within American working class musicians’ experiences. Industrial work was perceived as lacking cleanliness, either through menial or labor intensive positions, and so to were the environments the Beatles encountered and likewise engaged that supported and promoted rock ‘n’ roll and the spirit of rebellion and rejection of conformity.

In a 2013 article about the popularity and success of musicians in the recording industry, Lee Marshall commented that after a half century of pop music stars, the

18 Charles Gower Price cites Mercury Records producing a cover of Buddy Holly’s “Words of Love” that charted higher and made more money than the Coral Records original by Holly, because it accessed a larger market (214).
“archetypal popular music star” was one that writes their own material “which is assumed to represent the star’s own thoughts, experiences, and emotions. This form of creativity is assumed to be individual, original, and independent of the processes involved in the commercial production of popular music.” Success, per Marshall and rock critic Simon Frith’s definitions about pop music and artistry within cultural commodities, has been determined through the listeners response to authorship and stardom—often measured through reception of performance and materials to the point where self-composed becomes irrelevant. Accordingly, “this ideology of creative independence is extremely significant for popular musicians who wish to achieve longevity; an act viewed as too much of a commercial puppet is unlikely to maintain a long-term following.” Musicians and performers formalized this process in the 1960s, even if they were not the first to write their own songs. Bands such as the Beatles transformed pop success into life-long careers when expectations limited success to smaller windows, and “[emphasized] the cultural aesthetic, human qualities of the music rather than the economic, rational, objectified elements.” Marshall’s definitions are built on the cultural elements of pop music, “submerging the process of commodification central to the recording industry,” contrary to Frith’s arguments that pop music was made through industrialization. The Beatles in 1963 stood between culture and work, navigating changes to the receptions of pop music and stars that intensified cultural authority.\textsuperscript{19}

The addition of the recording studio initiated extensive changes to the Beatles already busy performing schedule, leading Brian Epstein to significantly alter their availability in Liverpool after the start of 1963. Additionally, after another trip to Hamburg from December 18-31, 1962, the Beatles did not return to the city or Germany until 1966. The Beatles still played Liverpool and northern England on national tours throughout 1963-1965, but residencies and lunchtime sessions at the Cavern Club were left behind. That’s not to suggest there was any declined interest in the Beatles playing venues in Liverpool, but Epstein had eyes on larger sites and steadily increased the band’s booking fee over 1962 to emphasize interest in larger venues as well as the band taking part in national tours and playing to bigger audiences. The revised schedule also had to keep space free for the inclusion of recording sessions in London, as the band remained headquartered in Liverpool for the first few months of 1963.

New business ventures would emerge from London as the band spent more time recording in the capitol, principally the creation of a publishing company with Dick James for Lennon and McCartney’s original songs, called Northern Songs, Ltd. With a self-owned publishing venture, not connected to EMI as the company hoped, and the Beatles’ familiarity with pop music and arrangements, the band held pivotal control over the material they recorded. Opting not to record a live performance for the band’s first LP, Martin and EMI booked the Beatles at Abbey Road in February 1963 to essentially record a live performance in the studio. The album included eight Lennon-McCartney tracks and six covers, a remarkable feat for a performer working for the early 1960s British recording industry. Although reflecting the best of the
band’s live performances, this combination further signaled the strength of Lennon and McCartney’s writing, and demonstrated how they worked (increasingly) with Martin to devise output. Historian John McMillian qualified Martin’s role with the ever inquisitive and dedicated Beatles: he “did not attempt to make a big creative imprint upon their work” and “many other salaried producers probably could have gotten a comparable result,” especially through 1966.20

Writing their own songs allowed the Beatles greater flexibility and control in the studio, as performers were typically controlled by producers, the recording companies, and even professional songwriters in that space: songs and arrangements carefully selected and directed. By mastering a large repertoire of materials, including hit and obscure pop music and their own written songs, the Beatles determined their own output, even as Martin and the engineers at Abbey Road remained useful to recording and achieving sounds the band desired. The struggles finding an opportunity to record, reflected in the “test” and rejection by Decca, and the personnel changes in the wake of signing with EMI, demonstrated how performers were expected to work in the recording industry. The Beatles’ experiences challenged those notions and they rejected attempts for extensive industrial control, in turn inspiring other performers while industrial forces sought to retain control. This is especially evident with the Rolling Stones, as John McMillian pointed out in his comparative history of the two bands, the Beatles capabilities as successful songwriters inspired the Stones to add original songs to their repertoire (of blues covers). The Stones’ contract with Decca

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20 McMillian, 134. See McMillian’s discussion on pages 72-73 for description how the Rolling Stones’ manager Andrew Loog Oldham and Keith Richards understood the Beatles writing “[changed] the rules of the game”.
(reportedly at George Harrison’s advice to Dick Rowe) proved distinct because manager Andrew Loog Oldham paid for recording sessions and the band owned their own master tapes—leasing the materials to the company for higher royalty rates. In the wake of the Beatles signing with EMI, these dynamics significantly altered industrial relationships, reflected by the success these two examples enjoyed in the marketplace.21

The Rolling Stones were not the only band that witnessed increased control in the industry, and certainly not one that achieved more control as a result of the Beatles, but overall the Beatles did help expand opportunities to record in their wake and expanded what was deemed suitable or potentially popular and profitable. Eventually, the recording industry introduced new methods to match the Beatles success while maintaining greater control over musicians. Even the Beatles faced continued controls by the industry, both in the UK and later the United States, as they were signed through 1966 with specific expectations for output levels. Crucially, the Beatles and Epstein’s management controlled their performing schedules and profits gained through that work, and thus the industry pressed for regularly released singles and albums yearly: typically four new singles and two new albums in the UK, and a much different output once the Beatles found success in America. Coupled with the band’s performing schedule and bookings to appear regularly on BBC radio and through television programs, “Beatlemania” grew exponentially in 1963, and the band’s pace only intensified as they prepared to invade the United States in early 1964. In their wake, the music industry scrambled to find other bands representative of the Beatles’

21 Ibid.
style for the market, while Capitol Records (EMI’s American subsidiary) cut up the
Beatles UK albums and singles to manufacture five “new” albums in 1964, in addition
to film company United Artists releasing the A Hard Day’s Night soundtrack.

Recording expectations and touring schedules increased heavily through 1963
and 1964, which included arrangements for filming A Hard Day’s Night after their
first trip to the U.S. in February 1964. The effects of extensive presence in the pop
music market, first in the UK and then critically in the U.S. in 1964, achieving six
songs in the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart in April, eventually took a toll on the
band’s songwriting and studio work. Their fourth album for EMI (Parlophone),
Beatles for Sale, reverted to a collection of eight originals and six covers after the A
Hard Day’s Night album included only original Lennon-McCartney songs. In terms of
Beatlemania and the Beatles history of working, 1964 served as the peak, and the
intense fame directed at them fundamentally changed the dynamics of pop music and
the role of musicians in society and culture. The Beatles seemed to adapt and confront
increased roles in the marketplace and cultural affairs, but as more listeners, particular
in America, searched for leadership from cultural figures, the Beatles encountered
resistance from sources previously connected to pop music’s postwar expansions. The
Beatles and Beatlemania challenged societal expectations related to affluence, sexual
relations, and political movements, and influenced many to confront the environments
around them, while other groups disparaged pop music as culturally destructive.
Within an emergent counterculture in the 1960s, the Beatles gained wealth and success
through intense levels of popularity and a work ethic built out of years performing and
mastering skills.
The Impact of *Ed Sullivan* and American Success upon the Beatles
“Work” Identities

The Beatles departed London’s Heathrow Airport on February 7, 1964, for their first tour of the United States, slated to last just over two weeks and centered around two live and one taped appearance over three Sundays on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. When the band landed at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City, thousands of screaming American teenagers welcomed them to the United States in an event that has been described over and over again, with emphasis often residing in the reception of the band and the excitement generated for their arrival. Indeed, this moment, like the remainder of the Beatles first two-week trip to the United States has been mythologized in the history of the 1960s, pop music, and the counterculture. This was Beatlemania manifested in the United States, the band’s cultural force Ed Sullivan witnessed firsthand from an airplane waiting to take off as the Beatles arrived in London on October 31, 1963. For Sullivan, a veteran TV personality and host of his own variety show on CBS, the level of attention and praise first led him to believe a member of the royal family had arrived, and his attention led to him booking the Beatles. At the time, the Beatles had enjoyed no success from limited independently released singles in the United States. Sullivan had a keen eye for acts with large potential, and he later reported the British youth convinced him: “I made up my mind that that was the sort of hysteria that had characterized the Elvis Presley days.” Writer Steven D. Stark added, however, that at the time Sullivan agreed to feature the Beatles, he still knew nothing about their music and Epstein was unaware of Sullivan’s interest when he traveled to New York with a demo recording of “I Want to Hold Your Hand” in mid-November. Sullivan’s opened an important door for the band and helped
Epstein press EMI’s American subsidiary Capitol Records to release and promote their latest single (Capitol refused the band’s first four hugely successful singles.) A *New York Times Magazine* article about Beatlemania convinced Capitol president Alan J. Livingston to tell Epstein that Capitol’s a&r department had found something worthwhile in “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” and Epstein convinced Livingston to commit a promotional campaign of $40,000 for the release of the single and an album of twelve songs prior to the band’s debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in early February.22

Four previous attempts throughout 1963 by Epstein, EMI, and the band’s record producer George Martin resulted in rejection from Capitol, often based on the grounds that the American market would not accept the music performed by the Beatles. In response, both Martin and Epstein turned to smaller labels in the United States to issue hit UK singles like “She Loves You,” “From Me to You,” and “Please Please Me.” Unfortunately, when first issued, none of the U.S. versions of those singles made any impact in the American charts. But Sullivan’s interest, highlighting an influential trendsetter in American popular culture, and the arrangements to feature the group on his show helped convince Capitol to take on “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” a song long cited as written and recorded with the American market in mind. Capitol initially set the single for release on January 13, 1964, but intense pressure from radio stations and listeners prompted the label to rush release on December 26, 1963. In

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22 Greil Marcus, “Another Version of the Chair,” from *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*, reprinted in *Read the Beatles*, 79-80; Stark, 22-23 and 32-33: “There was no better way to sell a record than through television, and there was no better show to appear on that *The Ed Sullivan Show*. … every Sunday night at eight o’clock, Sullivan put his version of the *Good Housekeeping* seal on everyone from Elvis and Bob Hope …”; Jonathan Gould, *Can’t Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain and America* (London: Portrait, 2007), 211-212; see also Stark, 36; and Peter Brown, “At the Height of Insanity,” *Newsweek*, Spring 2012, 49: “Despite the best efforts of countless biographers, it’s hard to pinpoint the blast. That’s because the Beatles as we know them were years in the making, an almost miraculous compound of genius, luck, and pluck.”
addition to “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” Capitol prepped an album, with tracks pulled from *With the Beatles*, for release two weeks before *Ed Sullivan* and cleverly titled *Meet the Beatles* to coincide with Capitol’s “The Beatles Are Coming” promotional campaign.

By the time the Beatles debuted on *Ed Sullivan*, the United States had suffered the tragedy of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination (coincidentally the same day *With the Beatles* was released in the UK: November 22, 1963). As numerous biographers and cultural historians have pointed out, an intense mood shift took place in the wake of the tragedy, and the possibilities presented and achieved in the American market reflect emotional trauma in late 1963, and the excitement the Beatles initiated has been and should continue to be connected to perceptions about the world in that period. Less than a month after Kennedy’s assassination the Beatles’ American success commenced when a young listener in Washington, D.C. persuaded a disk jockey to find “I Want to Hold Your Hand” before Capitol officially released the track. Shortly afterward, the song had traveled as far west to St. Louis as other DJs picked it up and introduced the song to listeners. The Beatles quick success in the U.S. overshadowed the band’s yearlong trajectory conquering the UK as Beatlemania swept through the U.S. before the band even departed for the trip. Walter Cronkite, presenter and managing editor of *CBS Evening News* later reported “It was not a musical phenomenon to me … The phenomenon was a social one.” In only two months the Beatles conquered the American market, bolstered by TV reports, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” the album *Meet the Beatles!*, and Capitol’s promotional campaign that featured wigs, posters, signs, buttons, t-shirts, etc. Reviewing the scale
of this trip, *Rolling Stone* contributor Mikal Gilmore cited “their impact was about something more than fad or celebrity; it was about laying claim to a brand new kind of youth mandate.”

In his cultural history of the Beatles, Steven D. Stark argued that, “if nothing else, the Beatles offered a temporary respite from all the tension” related to Kennedy’s assassination:

“It’s hard to overstate—and sometimes to understand—how much the youth of the day identified with the first family’s idealism and vigor. It was a bond the president often emphasized himself, whether stressing physical fitness in the nation’s schools or by creating the Peace Corps. … Kennedy also created a cultural appetite for excitement, movement, and newness that both the press and the public seemingly could not get enough of. … When Kennedy was assassinated the nation took it hard, but surveys showed the young took it the hardest.”

Equally a period of emotional distress and dismay, 1963-1964 witnessed important developments in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. Only three months after the March on Washington, Beatlemania was compared to “race rioting” by a *Variety* article, according to Stark, pointing out alternatively that because Beatlemania was predominantly white, it was “more acceptable.” Even with this assessment, it remains important to note Stark’s follow-up, as white listeners encountered a

23 Stark, 33 and 35: the market in late 1963 was “a usually slow time of year” but DJs enjoyed an influence over teenagers rooted in the 1950s, and that TV (soon to be more valuable) “constituted only about 10 percent of the viewing audience. Teens also tended to form an insular audience, preferring TV shows that no one else liked such as American Bandstand. Thus, television pitched them few offerings, and even when it did, teens often had to watch with their parents because many households still had only that one television set; Elijah Wald considered American market “primed” for the Beatles based on TV reports about Beatlemania in the UK and Capitol’s promotional campaign. “Say You Want a Revolution…” in *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231; Mikal Gilmore, “How the Beatles Took America,” *Rolling Stone*, January 16, 2014, 42; Philip Norman’s description of *With the Beatles* indicated pop music moved to the middle class: “Never again would pop music be considered the prerogative only of working-class boys and girls,” from *Shout! The Beatles in the Generation*, rev. ed. (New York: Fireside, 2003), 224, and quoted by Charles Gower Price, “Sources of American Styles in the Music of the Beatles”, *American Music* 15, no. 2 (Summer, 1997): 208-32, accessed October 23, 2009, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052732](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052732).
“heterogeneous” mix of genres broadcast on American Top 40 radio stations, introducing the Beatles to larger audiences via playlists that included “Patsy Cline, Frank Sinatra, and James Brown in the same half hour.”

The release of “I Want to Hold Your Hand” in the United States elevated the Beatles to legendary and mythical attributes, ushered in the British Invasion, and “[blew] wide open the doors of the 1960s.” An intense period of success and influence, the Beatles’ conquering of America initiated the shift of musicians to cultural significance and value seemingly ignorant of work and class divisions. Supposedly the Beatles were unwilling to go to the United States without a number one record because so many other British acts had flopped when they tried to go to America. For the majority of Americans, even those in New York, the first real encounter with the Beatles came through this single. A growing media presence through pictures and television news reports about the band’s success served as a pale introduction to the hysteria that engulfed the Beatles when they landed in New York. It is fair to say that most Americans initial contact with the Beatles in person came from their February 9, 1964, performance on Ed Sullivan. The broadcast factored heavily in the postwar history of popular music and television, as 73 million viewers tuned in across the United States. The first Sullivan performance introduced the Beatles immediately to a wide American community, ushering in a cultural phenomenon that helped shape forces redefining American culture, society, and history in the period.

British acts prior to the Beatles often fared poorly in the United States, and the largest British rocker prior to the Beatles was Cliff Richard, though he never “made it”

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in the United States, and the Beatles individually expressed fears that his fate would befall them. Paul McCartney quipped on board the flight from London that “[Americans] got their own groups … What are we going to give them that they don’t already have?” The easy answer was Beatlemania as an idea and phenomenon, backed by 1963-64 media criticism, historical film footage of American youth responses, and the magnitude of the *Ed Sullivan* debut. Prior to New York, the Beatles played eighteen shows at the Olympia Theatre in Paris as part of their French debut in January 1964. From this setting, Epstein and the band learned that “I Want to Hold Your Hand” topped the *Cash Box* music charters with sales of over one million between December 26, 1963 and January 10, 1964. The sales figures matched the band’s single sales previously achieved for four releases in the UK, and demonstrated the marketing frenzy caused by Capitol’s promotional campaign alongside the mood and political climate in the United States.²⁵

The Beatles debuted on *The Ed Sullivan Show* during the evening of Sunday, February 9, 1964, and played for roughly fifteen minutes. The band next played American TV a week later on a special Miami broadcast episode of *Ed Sullivan*, and these two broadcasts each carried Nielsen ratings of over 70 million viewers. In 1964, the 73 million viewers from the first show, on February 9, broke the “world record for

²⁵ Stark, 11-16; Jonathan Gould, 221; biographer Mark Lewisohn cites sales of 250,000 copies in the first two days of release, and sales of over 1,000,000 by January 10 (two weeks after December 26, 1963). Lewisohn further comments that by January 13 (the original date of release), the single was selling 10,000 copies an hour in New York City alone. *The Complete Beatles Chronicle* (London: Hamlyn, 2003), 136; Reproductions of the original telegram and *Cash Box* charts can be found in Bruce Spizer’s chronicle of the Beatles’ first trip to the United States: *The Beatles Are Coming!: The Birth of Beatlemania in America* (New Orleans, LA: 498 Productions, L.L.C., 2003), 112-114; Also cited by Chris Ingham in *The Rough Guide to the Beatles* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 26; 73 million viewers was roughly “60 percent of the American viewing public that evening” (Charles Gower Price, 210). The fall 1964 American tour would be seen as very unmanageable due to the similar pace and schedule of a British tour (length of time, number of dates, venues), but across a much larger geographical setting.
the largest-ever TV audience.” Between the Beatles Ed Sullivan appearances, they then played a concert in Washington D.C. on February 11, and two at Carnegie Hall on the 12th, so the majority of Americans following the excitement of Beatlemania did so through their TV sets. Although popular music and television cooperated for success prior to the Beatles, this moment seemed to solidify the power of TV in broadcasting American culture and expanding access to new changes and developments. Television emerged as the preeminent form of leisure and entertainment a decade earlier, but as a cultural medium and cultural force in the 1960s, TV can be linked between the ferocity of the Beatles success and its presence within American homes. The events of the 1960s found constant audiences through television, making the technology important to the dissemination of ideas and phenomena like Beatlemania, particularly related to societal and cultural challenges presented by youth movements, the civil rights movement, expanding political ideologies, and the counterculture.

Long before the Beatles debut on American television, music acts and artists were considered ample material to fill segments on American television variety and talk shows. Despite its position as a questionable aspect of American culture in the 1950s, part of rock ‘n’ roll’s success lay with how television producers and programmers incorporated musicians into broadcasts. For instance, The Ed Sullivan Show previously featured Elvis Presley for three appearances in 1956-1957, and Buddy Holly and the Crickets appeared in 1958, before traveling to Australia and the UK for the Crickets only international tours. The constant presence of musicians on television also provides some of the key moments of success for musicians in the
memory of historical popularity in the United States. After all, Elvis Presley’s third appearance on *Ed Sullivan* featured the mythologized and overhyped waist-up appearance because producers feared the sexuality present within rock ‘n’ roll (Elvis, in fact, performed gospel that episode). Similar attributes were leveled at Holly’s appearance, since the Beatles linked *Ed Sullivan* with Holly, and Lennon asked a production assistant during rehearsals if the spot where they practiced was the same spot that Holly stood six years earlier. Writing about *The Ed Sullivan Show*, television critic Gerald Nachman cited the Beatles appearance as the broadcast most people remember about the long-running program, including “eyewitnesses” not alive at the time. Nachman calls the “Beatle-casts” “deeply entrenched landmark moments in the nation’s psyche,” linked to the events of the 1960s and factored intrinsically in various histories and experiences.26

Music in the mid-1960s was constantly visible on television, as it was audible on the radio, through routine live performances and appearances by stars and performers. In reviewing the impact made by the Beatles in 1964, *Rolling Stone* contributor David Fricke commented that “rock & roll was, by 1964, an established, sanitized presence on national television: on Dick Clark’s’ afternoon dance party *American Bandstand*; in Ricky Nelson’s singing cameos on the sitcom *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet.*” Fricke’s phrase “established, sanitized presence” illustrated Americans’ exposure to music on television alongside radio in introducing listeners to new genres, new bands, and new songs. Historians have commented on the relevance of television to American society and the history of popular music during the 1950s

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and 1960s, as well as the trajectory and impact made when the Beatles debuted on
February 9, 1964. Even with music’s presence and exposure on television during the
first two decades of consumer demand for televised material, the notion that its
presence was “established” and “sanitized” gives clues as to the historical impact
made by the Beatles and reactions to the band in the period and in relation to their
contemporaries, like the Rolling Stones (not middle class or “clean” by comparison).
Fricke also offered this assessment for the power of TV and the Beatles appearance:
“In one hour and five songs, the hottest rock act in Britain became the biggest pop
group in America, immediately transforming the character and future of a
generation.”

The Ed Sullivan debut, however, was not the Beatles first exposure through
television, coming nearly fifteen months after the band first appeared on TV in the
United Kingdom. According to Beatles scholar Ian Inglis, between October 1962 and
December 1963, the band appeared forty times in first-run performances on British
television. The appearances on Sunday Night at the London Palladium in October
1963 and the Royal Variety Performance in November 1963 earned the Beatles an
“enhanced status” among viewers and British audiences. With the Royal Variety
Performance, the Beatles played a bill that included “familiar domestic and foreign
stars,” a situation that “confirmed their dual role of rock ‘n’ roll performers and family
entertainers.” Furthermore, because the Beatles talked with members of the royal
family (the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret), that “gave them a royal seal of

27 David Fricke, “Beatlemania!: February 9th, 1964—the Day of the Beatles’ First Ed Sullivan
appearance—changed America Forever,” Rolling Stone (Feb. 19, 2004), 40: “… Sullivan delivered the
nation’s first blast of Beatlemania in extreme close-up, and unprecedented display of the liberating,
openly sexual ferocity of live, loud rock & roll.”
approval” and “undermined” any negative press. This extensive television resume allowed the Beatles greater “exposure,” according to Inglis, and raised their profile with both “local and national audiences” on top of an extensive resume of residencies and national tours by this point. In line with these distinctions, when Ed Sullivan witnessed the group at Heathrow Airport in October 1963, they were returning from playing both live concerts and television performances in Sweden.28

Inglis also argued that the Beatles appearances on those prominent British TV programs “were not moments of transition, but moments of completion, in the story of the Beatles.” The national television exposure in 1963 capped by these high profile programs “confirmed” that the Beatles were accepted and highly prized among an audience not limited to age, gender or class restrictions. Finally, despite early negative press in late 1963 and early 1964 from American critics and reporters, particularly surrounding the band’s haircuts and music as “noise,” Inglis maintains that television formalized the band and removed hints that the Beatles were “potential rebels.” The Beatles were received as safe, family entertainment because TV exposure offered contact and appraisal of the Beatles and their music, and according to Inglis, “as their career progressed, the songs of the Beatles became markedly less important” based on TV appearances. In the United States, without Sullivan’s interest, the Beatles may

28 Inglis’ list does not include repeats or news coverage, or other visual media. “Here, There and Everywhere: Introducing the Beatles,” from Popular Music and Television in Britain, edited by Ian Inglis, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 181-188 (chart and commentary, 185-188).
have failed, and these assessments add an important dimension to the work required to maintain the band’s success.\footnote{Inglis, 189-195; the Beatles “were watched by two distinct sets of viewers: a general, passive audience for whom there were no alternatives, and a specific, active and highly motivated audience of younger pop music fans.” Inglis also mentions that “… despite their exhausting timetable, Paul McCartney’s comment in September [1963] that ‘happily, we’ve spent a lot of this year in front of television cameras’ suggests that not only Epstein, but the Beatles themselves, were well aware of the benefits to be gained from their persistent exposure.”}

When the Beatles played \textit{Ed Sullivan}, the intensity of Beatlemania in the UK and the band’s arrival at JFK was witnessed again. Additionally, reports indicated crowds camped outside the Plaza Hotel starting Friday night, and fans were stationed outside CBS Studio 50 (now the Ed Sullivan Theater) hoping for a chance glimpse or opening to see the show. The Beatles’ appearance on \textit{Ed Sullivan} operated only as work, they performed songs they had written and mastered, and were paid far less for this introduction than later live performances. Before the broadcast, the Beatles checked the vocal and instrument mix through the television microphones to approve a quality mix and producers strategically placed cameras to film the audience as the Beatles played. Media writer Steven D. Stark cited this preparation as “professional” behavior exhibited by the Beatles and appreciated by \textit{Ed Sullivan} technicians. During the broadcast, the studio audience was restrained in comparison to other groups imaged over the previous two days, while viewing audiences engaged all aspects of the Beatles and their product: the screams, the shrieks, and the music coming out of three guitars, one drum set, and four young men. Viewing \textit{The Ed Sullivan Show}, the American audience digested the Beatles in an easy setting—without positive or
negative commentary directed at the phenomena, the band, the Beatles’ hair, or the style and sound of the music the band played.\(^{30}\)

The Beatles *Ed Sullivan* debut reached and affected a larger audience at once than any concert performance could in any size venue, yet their pay over three weeks ($10,000) was far less than typically earned. Critical reception from older middle class representatives also proved cool to the effects of the band and Beatlemania. In a *New York Times* television review, Jack Gould rejected the Beatles as another fad and dismissed the *Ed Sullivan* debut: “in their sophisticated understanding that the life of a fad depends on the performance of the audience and not on the stage, the Beatles were decidedly effective.” Gould’s comments also pointed out how responses from the TV studio audience replicated the screams and shrieks from crowds that gathered outside JFK Airport and the Plaza Hotel. Equally inflammatory was Gould’s comment that “in the quick intelligence beneath their bands, there appeared to be a bemused awareness that they might qualify as the world’s highest paid recreation directors,” which rejected any notion that their entertainment appeal emanated from work and output, and seemed to revel only in cultural impact as leisure rather and working class notions and sensibilities in its inspirations among middle class and young listeners. Taken as a component of Beatlemania, the *Ed Sullivan* debut offered a “fine mass placebo” and a “sedate anti-climax,” to Gould’s reception of footage aired on *The Jack Paar Show* a month earlier that revealed British responses to the band (identical to American responses: screams, shrieks, and howls): “dated,” and a phenomena that “went out” of

\(^{30}\) Stark, 37.
style in the wake of Elvis Presley’s drafting and the effects of the Payola scandal in the late 1950s—and one that would find no home in America.³¹

Adulation and mass hysteria in Britain and the United States found harsh criticism as an aged artifact of the 1950s rock ‘n’ roll era, as well as the notion that the real entertainment was not the Beatles, but rather the ways audiences received and responded to their appearance and their music. The _Ed Sullivan_ broadcast, likewise, toned down the overall excitement and enthusiasm. In his biography, Bob Spitz called the _Ed Sullivan_ appearance “a pretty tepid affair” when compared to British audiences: “Reports of “crazy girls, who were going bananas … screaming, tearing out their hair,” were grossly exaggerated. No one fainted or leaped toward the stage. For that matter, no one even left her seat. A kinescope of the event reveals a fairly well-disciplined group of kids—screaming, yet, at times bouncing up and down, but never on the verge of pandemonium.” The real pandemic took place in living rooms, according to Spitz, because 73 million far outpaced any comparable audience in concert or radio.³²

Following the debut, journalists attempted to account and discredit reactions to the Beatles as measured through Beatlemania. These critiques appraised the Beatles debut solely as a cultural event, outside notions of economics or class divisions, important distinctions in thinking about the changes taking place with _Ed Sullivan_ on February 9, 1964. The debut may have introduced Americans to the Beatles, but it was also an introduction to intense popularity and cultural significance of a scale not

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witnessed in the UK or Europe in 1963, and defined the band’s work for another two years. The musical review in the *New York Times* claimed

“Two theories were offered in at least one household to explain the Beatles popularity. The [15-year-old] specialist said: “We haven’t had an idol in a few years. The Beatles are different, and we have to get rid of our excess energy somehow.

The other theory is that the longer parents object with such high dudgeon, the longer children will squeal so hysterically.”

In this response, writer Theodore Strongin of the *New York Times* cited a lack of stars from the pop music industry, as well as rebellion among youth against parents outspoken or opposed to the Beatles or new fads. After the second *Ed Sullivan* appearance on February 16, fellow *Times* writer John A. Osmundsen interviewed analysts, psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists in a search for practical explanations. Those sources cited the Beatles “as symbols of”:

- “Adolescent revolt against parental authority.
- Status that comes from belonging to a group, in this case, of other Beatlemaniacs.
- Sex, both from the supposed erotic nature of the Beatles music and the way they perform it and from the appeal they seem to have to the “mother instinct.”
- Success by persons who are seen as fellow teenagers (although none of the Beatles are under 21) and as underdogs who come from the wrong side of the tracks and have made good.
- The frenetically felt urgency for having a good time and living life fast in an uncertain world plagued with mortal dangers.”

These explanations point to expected tropes dismissing the Beatles and Beatlemania, as well as link back to postwar cultural impact by rock ‘n’ roll, pop music, and the working class as signs regarding issues of consumer growth, affluence, and satisfaction in work and productivity. In America, the emotional tragedy of Kennedy’s assassination runs underneath these explanations, too, demonstrating how community
fostered safety and security, and success inspired and motivated the emulation of behaviors and aspiration for improved lives and opportunities.\textsuperscript{33}

Osmundsen’s article emphasized points made by sociologist Renee Claire Fox, in an exploration of deeper meanings for Beatlemania and appeal of the Beatles in youth groups. Fox believed “the Beatlemania question [ran] much deeper than sex or status” and “[stemmed] from the personification of many forms of duality that [existed] in … society,” including that “the four are both an audience for their own antics and for those of their cavorting, screaming audience, acting, as it were, a play within a play.” These sentiments are not new to the discussion of the Beatles appeal or the reactions within Beatlemania, especially Fox’s arguments that

“… they are male and yet have many feminine characteristics, especially floppy hairdos. They also play the dual roles of both adults and children. And they appear to be good boys who nevertheless dress and pose as bad ones—London Teddy-boys. Their fancy, Edwardian clothes suggest of a sort of sophistication that, Dr. Fox believes, contrasts with their “homespun” style of performance.”

Again we can see levels of dismissal and rejection, here from sources demonstrating professional appraisals of culture and society and not specifically taste. These appraisals shared opinions by British counterparts, such as Paul Johnson who considered the band’s music that “which not only cannot be heard but does not need to be heard” because “the teenager comes not to hear but to participate in a ritual, a collective groveling to gods who are themselves blind and empty.” Johnson, writing in

the wake of the band’s American trip, argued fervently that the effects of TV upon youth left them “enslaved by a commercial machine.”

Across the United States, the Beatles emerged even more popular than the crowds in New York, Washington, and Miami hinted at during the band’s two-week trip because of television. The medium offered glimpses of the world with greater focus, and the Beatles’ *Ed Sullivan* debut was no different, even as it changed that idea further by representing mass popularity in a new scope. Reviewing the impact of the band’s television debut, Laurel Sercombe remarked that “for millions of teenagers … life changed dramatically, permanently, as the Beatles became the central focus of existence, providing a source of joy and influencing not only musical taste but speech, fashion, romantic fantasies, friendships, books and magazines read, movies watched and overall world outlook.” The “sixties” commenced at this moment, even as larger, sweeping movements and events challenged the status quo in the United States and the world. Without this event, those movements would have remained just as pivotal, but here was the spark that ignited how music factored into the experience of the “sixties,” rooted in the experiences of the working class and broadcast through television to a larger group, ultimately represented more by middle class activities and cultural pursuits. American teenagers celebrated the Beatles’ arrival, incorporating music more

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34 Ibid; Paul Johnson, “The Menace of Beatlism,” *New Statesman*, February 28, 1964, in *Read the Beatles*, 53-54; Reverend Billy Graham called the Beatles “a passing phase … symptoms of the uncertainty of the time and the confusion about us” in response to *Ed Sullivan* and Beatlemania (Stark, 39).
heavily into experiences and responses to the “sixties” and the direction of American society and future generations.35

The *Ed Sullivan* broadcast introduced Beatlemania to American audiences beyond crowds camped at JFK or outside the Plaza Hotel, and set the tone for the Beatles’ work over the next two and a half years. Looking at this moment and connecting it to the larger history of music and television, pop music remained a core consumer and cultural commodity among a generation of Americans’ shared experiences. Television distribution provided a faster pace of exposure of performers and musicians in ways not possible by either radio or even concert tours. In the Beatles case, the *Ed Sullivan* appearance compounded the group’s success in radio and physical sales—on April 6, 1964 they famously held the top five spots in *Billboard*’s Hot 100 chart, with another nine songs charting, too. That pace might hinge on different factors, but television broadcasts operated alongside the history of touring within radio territories, or musicians sending a transcribed broadcast outside their home radio network. Additionally, we know that television never replaced the popularity and uses for radio, but TV emerged as the primary tool to flirt with or capture success across national audiences, while radio and physical sales better reflected popularity and success across different regional markets. Ultimately, the “established, sanitized” exposure of rock ‘n’ roll on American television, and across

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35 Laurel Sercombe, “”Ladies and Gentleman...“. The Beatles: The Ed Sullivan Show, CBS TV, February 9, 1964,” in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, ed. Ian Inglis, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 2; One of the most striking indictments of young audiences relationship with the Beatles (in the UK at least) was written by Paul Johnson (*Read the Beatles*, 54-55): “Are teenagers different today? Of course not. Those who flock round The Beatles, who scream themselves into hysteria, whose vacant faces flicker over the TV screen, are the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures: their existence, in such large numbers, far from being a cause for ministerial congratulations, is a fearful indictment of our education system, which in 10 years of schooling can scarcely raise them to literacy.”
the world, grew beyond these types of appearances to alter the influence and intrusion of media into all components of modern, American life. Just like Inglis’s argument for the Beatles success and the overall phenomena of Beatlemania facilitated in the United Kingdom through extensive television appearances, the distinction proves accurate for descriptions of the excitement directed at the Beatles arrival when the band’s television debut was still two days away. Media outlets covered the emotional explosion and sociological envelopment of Beatlemania within the American audiences, fulfilling Inglis’s argument for “completion,” this time in America.

Many historians have pointed to *Ed Sullivan* as moment when the “sixties” arrived, a debut that ushered a new era of music history and fostered the growth of the recording industry much further than already achieved at that point in the postwar era. More than those revolutionary ideas connected to the Beatles and *Ed Sullivan*, the debut was a significant element in recasting the work of musicians’ from performance and reception to performance, adulation, and reflection, where intent and significance overshadowed struggles and dedication to make careers out of music in favor of evaluating further developments to retain cultural relevance. This development led countless commentators to theorize that the arrival was strategically timed for the tragedy of President Kennedy’s assassination and that the trauma involved opening the door for the hysteria, excitement, and joy associated with the Beatles when they arrived. Even discounting these theories, the arrival of the Beatles factored into the younger outlook of the United States, even if the president was gone. In the wake of this performance, despite the presence of popular music on television before 1964, it became a moment that signaled television was the best method of distribution and
reception for entertainment and information through the first decade of the twenty-first century, as well as that moment when the “sixties” arrived and cultural expectations outweighed work contributed to fulfill consumer demands.

Beatlemania swept over the United States first between December 1963 and February 1964, leading to the arrival of the Beatles for their American debut. Even with the immensity of this time period considered here, the Beatles initial trip was brief, and it would be another six months before they returned to besiege the sensibilities of American audiences. Reporters at the time wondered about the longer impact if the Beatles had not departed when they did. In the New York Times, McCandlish Phillips ruminated that The Beatles “could have barnstormed the nation, doing one-night stands at major sports arenas and concert halls in 20 or 30 cities. … They might have made several million dollars.” Six months later the Beatles returned to the United States, with their first film A Hard Day’s Night out as another form of promotion and consumption. In a delightful recreation of the events relevant to the period, the film followed a fictionalized version of the band as they prepared to film a television appearance. Where a TV appearance ushered their brief arrival earlier in 1964, in many ways the month-long concert tour between August 18 and September 20, commenced with the release of the film about a TV appearance, not that Beatlemania or demand had declined since February. Between the Ed Sullivan debut and A Hard Day’s Night, the Beatles’ musical output received the catalyst for lasting exposure and legacy of cultural impact and historical presence in the United States.36

36 McCandlish Phillips, “4 Beatles and How They Grew: Publicitywise,” New York Times, February 17, 1964. Nearly fifty years later, Paul McCartney implied the Beatles needed Ed Sullivan to break into the American market, and so did groups like the Rolling Stones, the Animals, and the Doors, but a
The British Invasion started on February 7, 1964, when the Beatles touched down at the newly renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. Only two weeks earlier, the band’s first number one was achieved in the United States as “I Want to Hold Your Hand” sat atop Cashbox, and the band’s first album released by Capitol Records, Meet the Beatles!, was out and additionally racing up the American record charts. Within two and a half years, Beatlemania and the British Invasion swept through American, and other groups such as the Rolling Stones, the Hollies, Dave Clark Five, and countless more followed in the Beatles’ wake. In the first years of the Beatles American popularity, the band released six unique albums and in April 1964, six tracks placed in Billboard’s Hot 100 singles chart, an unprecedented output for any musician or artist. By August 1964, the Beatles starred in a major motion picture, A Hard Day’s Night, and returned to launch a full-scale tour of the United States.

Beatlemania was a measure for popular success and cultural influence never witnessed before, but it carried confinement in the methods it was measured. In 1965, the Beatles largely replicated their schedule and levels of activity by touring, appearing on TV, filming another movie, and recording new songs for single and album releases. The explosion of the British Invasion in the United States paired with cultural impact and value by the Beatles and pop music throughout the world, but by mid-1966 the pace

performer like Jimi Hendrix, denied a booking on Sullivan for performance style and content, could make it without a TV performance, interview for American Masters: Jimi Hendrix – Hear My Train A Comin’; see also Wald and his discussion about the “craziness” in the American market before the Beatles arrived (231-232); David Fricke’s description of the Ed Sullivan debut: “The Beatles were on the air that night for about thirteen minutes. But the visual impressions they left behind are now pivotal rock & roll iconography: the tight, sharp cut of their black, Victorian-mod suits; the flying, pudding-bowl hair as the four shook their heads in unison during “She Loves You”; the individual shots of each Beatle with his first name super-imposed on the screen and, under John’s, the famous line SORRY GIRLS, HE’S MARRIED” in “Beatlemania!: February 9th, 1964—the Day of the Beatles’ First Ed Sullivan appearance—changed America Forever,” Rolling Stone, February 19, 2004, 44.
slowed and the band faced harsher critics and growing backlash, ultimately deciding to halt touring and live performances following the conclusion of the concert at Candlestick Park.37

A year after the Beatles debuted on *Ed Sullivan*, the band collectively gave a “candid” interview to writer Jean Shepherd for *Playboy* magazine. Though not as reactionary as Lennon’s “more popular than Jesus” comment proved to be, the interview from February 1965 hints at awareness that the Beatles’ heavily impacted ideas of work and success in the music industry.

“Paul: … They say, ‘How come you’ve suddenly been able to adjust to fame, you know, to nationwide fame and things?’ It all started quite nicely with us, you see, in our own sphere, where we used to play—in Liverpool. We never used to play outside it, except when we went to Hamburg. Just those two circles. And in each of them, I think we were round the highest paid, and probably at the time the most popular. So in actual face we had the same feeling of being famous then as we do now. … But it just grew. The quantity grew, not the quality of the feeling.”

McCartney also expressed an awareness of how influential the Beatles were to opening doors for many more musicians, even if those performers and groups lacked the time learning and playing skills as the Beatles did in Hamburg and Liverpool before signing with EMI in mid-1962.

“It’s become so easy to form a group nowadays, and to make a record, that hundreds are doing it—and making a good living at it. Whereas when we started, it took us a couple of years before the record companies would even listen to us, never mind give us a contract. But now, you just walk in and if they think you’re OK, you’re on.”

37 Gilmore, “How the Beatles Took America,” 69. In 1964, the Beatles “weren’t ready to let go. Perhaps the one question they were most commonly asked in interviews during that year was: How long could it last? Reporters were generally implying that the Beatles’ fame was a fool’s paradise that would vanish almost any day.”
The Beatles’ cultural impact was immense by 1964-1965 when interviewed by 

*Playboy*, and the massive shift in what constituted work and working in music was equally evident. These comments simplify changes that came with the Beatles’ massive popularity and how that success translated to economic gains for the music industry, but underscore a sense that the Beatles knew they could sustain their popularity because of their work history and training.\(^3^8\)

**Revolver and the 1966 Tour: Cultural and Economic Success in Opposition**

“No one had ever been as famous as the Beatles. There was Frank Sinatra and Elvis, of course, but the Beatles achieved popularity that not only represented perhaps the last consensus in pop music, but also brought a level of attention that was so ferocious and enveloping that it almost swallowed them up. In 1964, there was no “fame industry” of agents, handlers, bodyguards, and entourages. It was just the Beatles and a handful of us from Liverpool against the deluge.”\(^3^9\)

Two years after *A Hard Day’s Night* was released and the Beatles embarked on their first full tour of the United States, the band as a performing unit came to a close on August 29, 1966. The tour started in June 1966, after the Beatles enjoyed an unexpected hiatus when they did not film a third film and then recorded the album *Revolver* in April and May. Between June and August, Epstein booked the Beatles to tour Germany, Japan, the Philippines, and finally the United States (for their third full tour). The band never toured the UK again after a short tour in December 1965 promoting the album *Rubber Soul*. By the summer of 1966, the Beatles had worked, toured, and recorded professionally and intensely for six full years, with sparse holidays and vacations taken throughout that time, and the two years after the *Ed *

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\(^3^8\) Jean Shepherd, “Playboy Interview: The Beatles,” *Playboy*, February 1965, 51-60.

\(^3^9\) Peter Brown, “At the Height of Insanity,” *Newsweek*, Spring 2012, 52-53.
Sullivan debut followed a pattern of “a film, a soundtrack album, tour dates, another album.” When the Beatles could not agree on a script for a third film, the time allotted was not filled by any new commitments and the Beatles enjoyed a nearly three month hiatus. The unexpected hiatus provided an occasion for the band to slow down and enjoy years of economic and cultural wealth, and the subsequent recording of Revolver illustrated progression as musicians and artists, expanding stylistic shifts first expressed on Rubber Soul, an album that incorporated new sounds on top of the band’s rock ‘n’ roll roots, notably the sitar and folk rock. Revolver followed its predecessor, but pushed beyond the contents of Rubber Soul as the Beatles discarded concerns about recording “only what stood a decent chance of being reproduced on stage.” Ultimately, Revolver required studio technology to complete and its arrangements prevented any practical live performances.40

The studio environment proved a pivotal arena for musical and artistic development by the Beatles and served to deconstruct qualities of their working class seemingly preserved by the band’s intense and routine touring schedules and concert set lists. As music emerged as a cultural expression throughout the 20th century, recording documented performers and musicians and facilitated artistic development with greater technological introductions and recording opportunities. The postwar period, in particular, as discussed in previous chapters, witnessed and facilitated those opportunities and the economic potential of recording as a career choice and commodity for production and consumption. When the Beatles entered Abbey Road

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40 Rodriguez, 7 and 112; the Beatles played Wembley Stadium on May 1, 1966, as part of a showcase; George Harrison referred to Rubber Soul and Revolver as “volumes one and two” in the Anthology documentary (1995) due to the albums’ similarities (and possibly due to Revolver being overlooked between Rubber Soul and Sgt. Pepper).
for the first time in mid-1962, they encountered expectations and requirements that mirrored industrial ideas outside the music business, such as strictly regulated periods for recording (time clocks), managers and other leadership representatives directing musician development and output, and performers relegated to positions of labor with limited opportunities for input in the recording process. While many of those attributes remained intact by early 1966, the Beatles popularity and the economic impact of their output meant the record label eased those restrictions and the band increased the time spent crafting successive singles and albums at Abbey Road.

Touring and recording accumulated alternative sources of income and revenue for the Beatles collectively over the previous four years, and John Lennon and Paul McCartney earned more income through their writing partnership. The March 1966 interview with Maureen Cleave that later provided the quotes misinterpreted by American readers in early August 1966 regarding Lennon’s religious stance, was more appropriately part of a four-part series on all four Beatles about their personal lives in the downtime available in the hiatus. Cleave revealed Lennon not quite at home with his newfound wealth and status, particularly in his Kenwood that was part of a wealthy, confining, and secluded gated community. Compared to McCartney, who lived in London and enjoyed an active social life, Lennon was uncomfortable in Kenwood playing husband and father. The profiles of all four Beatles further illuminated important insights into the different expectations that existed as a result of the Beatles’ fame and successes, between fans and performers and with other performers and
entertainers that enjoyed similar careers with success and popularity (though not on scale with what Beatlemania represented).  

The Beatles enjoyed market presence unequaled by contemporaries in the 1960s, but this success did not set them apart musically from interests they shared with other artists and groups. In particular, the Beatles followed traditions of American performers closely, not only covering African American r&amp;b and rock ‘n’ roll songs by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and others, but also those recorded by girl groups like the Shirelles and the Ronettes (who flew with the Beatles on the flight to JFK in February 1964 and later supported the Beatles on the 1966 American tour). These influences remained pertinent to the Beatles career over the duration of the band’s existence, but cultural attention typically drifted toward the impact and seeming competition with other 1960s musicians like the Rolling Stones, the Beach Boys, and Bob Dylan. The back sleeve of Revolver included a picture of the Beatles inspecting the Rolling Stones’ earlier 1966 album Aftermath, and biographers have long noted the band toyed with naming the album “After Geography” in response. Furthermore, Rubber Soul famously persuaded Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys to record Pet Sounds, a momentous move forward in production techniques and studio capabilities that Wilson then attempted to top on his own with SMiLE, an album Wilson finally abandoned over budget and behind schedule in the wake of Sgt. Pepper’s 1967 debut. The American market may have adopted the Beatles and British acts quickly into its

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41 Maureen Cleave, “How Does A Beatle Live? John Lennon Lives Like This, London Evening Standard, March 4, 1966,” in Read the Beatles, 87-90; see also George Harrison, Ringo Starr, John Lennon, The Beatles Anthology (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 227-229; see also Charles Gower Price, 209: “The rapid maturation of their music, from simple adolescent anthems to carefully crafted studio creations with lyrics of substance, parallels the successful cultivation of their initial popular image as clean-cut, uniformed boys to the eventual public emergence of their true individual personalities, which ultimately led to the demise of the group.”
hits charts, but bands and artists already enjoying success in the United States remained to influence and challenge the otherwise improbable success the Beatles enjoyed through 1966.

Bob Dylan’s influence factors more heavily as he seems to historically hold an equal share with the Beatles cultural impact: Dylan symbolized and signified the social and political roles ascribed by audiences and listeners. Together, Dylan and the Beatles (in addition to other sources worthy of consideration) faced attention as “voices of a generation” with their popularities, and through work that incorporated political and societal developments into pop music and its meanings. Like Dylan, who disappeared from public view following a motorcycle accident in July 1966 (see Chapter 5), the Beatles post-Revolver success (released only two weeks later) was compiled through studio work and output that seemed to easily reflect the period. In committing themselves to the studio for this work, these musicians dominated the counterculture even if output did not immediately address social or political roles, but rather incorporated broader issues into longer statements. The Beatles’ Ed Sullivan debut sparked challenges to American culture and society, but with Rubber Soul, Revolver, and later albums, the Beatles adopted work that otherwise formed a rejection of how the counterculture perceived their influence—principally through Beatlemania, hit singles, and touring.42

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42 In How the Beatles Destroyed Rock ‘n’ Roll, musician Elijah Wald comments that at these moments rock musicians like the Beatles took part in a further racial divergence within pop music, as African American artists continued cultivating chart successes through single releases, while white musicians explored sonic possibilities achieved by expansive and expressive albums, 238-243. Of course, Jimi Hendrix’s work and interests, as well as his popularity provide a superb counterpoint that rock music hardly diverged completely from racial trends.
Commenting upon the fiftieth anniversary of their first released recording in 2012, Brian Epstein’s former personal assistant Peter Brown, summed up the Beatles popularity:

“By the mid-‘60s, their unprecedented fame made the Beatles into political, religious, social, and cultural lighting rods. … Occasionally, Beatles would wander back into the world to have a look. But when George went to San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury during 1967’s “Summer of Love,” he encountered thousands of hippies who followed him, waiting for him to say something, sing something, to give them meaning. He later remarked, disillusioned that they looked up to him as if he were a messiah. If Beatlemania had the power to inspire hope and joy, here was its downside.”

Although looking ahead to 1967, Brown summation engages expectations that the Beatles operated beyond their work as musicians, more poignant because the time period he points to occurred without a recognizable Beatlemania as that phenomenon existed a year earlier. The realities of Beatlemania, both as an economic indicator of pop music’s power, and a cultural signifier of musicians expanded influence, held heavy consequences and decisions for those determined to hold such power over hordes of consumers looking for messages in their lives. Rock critic Simon Frith argued that, “by 1967 pop had become rock—no longer working class teenage music, but a form of expression for youth in general, for a generation.” Brown’s summary reflects the Summer of Love and cultural concerns, including where the Beatles factored in those developments, but illustrates developments in the relationships and community fostered by pop music’s status as a cultural artifact and commodity in the counterculture.43

43 Peter Brown, “At the Height of Insanity,” Newsweek, Spring 2012, 52-53; Frith, Sound Effects, 213.
In 1966, the Beatles career choices and directions hinted at the conflicts emerging around the counterculture and its influence within American society. The hiatus and recording of Revolver in the first half of 1966 changed the pace of work for the Beatles, and influenced their reception of their own career, but this period held important significance for the Beatles on tour that year and the role of pop music throughout the 1960s, the counterculture, and beyond. The changes to the Beatles’ work schedule factored heavily in demonstrating how relevant the studio was (or had been) to their work overall. Epstein’s booking a tour and concerts meant the Beatles confronted audiences expecting performances linked to past successes and images perceived as part of Beatlemania. Audiences wanted the Beatles and music that reflected ideals more akin to the middle class: cleaned-up and representative of unchallenging political and cultural values; even as the Beatles took part in and influenced the counterculture. As Simon Frith wrote in the early 1980s, “for years rock musicians were presented as the boys-next-door, street kids or rural hicks, making music for a working-class audience that identified with them” while “rock ‘n’ roll fit into the long show-biz tradition of middle-class producers *fronted* by working-class performers.” As a significant cultural phenomenon, the Beatles faced the brunt of positive adulation and negative rejections, ultimately turning away from those realities and the safety net of their friendships and sustained image. In addition to the effects of the band’s 1966 tour causing the Beatles to reevaluate that aspect of their career, the earlier hiatus and recording *Revolver* factored in the decision and hinted where their individual interests were directed.\footnote{Frith, *Sound Effects*, 64. For his memoir about the Beatles’ 1964 and 1965 tours, reporter Larry Kane}
On the road, the band returned to Germany for the first time since 1962, where concerts in Hamburg were intended to mark a kind of homecoming for the Beatles, since the city was where the band earned their first real breaks six years earlier. Going back to Hamburg allowed the Beatles to review past experiences and old relationships. The dynamics of Beatlemania, never constructed in Germany, appeared when they returned in June 1966, and attempts to revel in past relationships and routines, were impossible. Intended as an inauspicious start with a unique rekindling of their work, touring Germany in 1966 instead saw Beatlemania manifested fully in an environment expected to be more like a home and where individual Beatles identified the band’s real talents and skills. George Harrison, in particular, singled out Hamburg as the band’s “peak for playing live … because at that time we weren’t famous and so the people who came to see us were drawn in by the music or whatever atmosphere we created …” Along with John Lennon, Harrison had long been quite vocal in criticism of Beatlemania and the effects of touring on their performances. The band’s apprenticeship in Hamburg created their drives and relentless efforts for output that guided their performing and recording career, and returning “home” lacked the environments where work and professionalism flourished five years earlier.\footnote{Jim Nettleton and Long John Wade, “Echoes and the Dream” from the \textit{Wolfman Jack Beatles Radio Show} (1976); Paul McCartney, \textit{The Beatles Anthology}, 227.}

Since ending their career as a club band, both in Hamburg for extended residencies and in Liverpool at selected coffee houses and clubs like the Cavern Club,
the Beatles had morphed into a massive national (British), worldwide, and American cultural sensation. By 1964 and 1965, the band’s experiences in the scope of these regions and popularity provided their company, represented by the band and managed by Brian Epstein and Nems, with massive income and economic gains, and John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, carried their mastered crafts to audiences in theaters, stadiums, and on TV. For all intents, the Beatles labored as musicians well beyond any realistic expectations or hopes of previously popular acts and artists, including the rock ‘n’ rollers of a decade earlier. The effects of their work inspired mass adulation and eventually hysteria among audiences that reacted to new cultural possibilities, primarily sexual and gender expressions, as well as social and political challenges connected to the 1950s. In the United States, the Beatles arrival in 1964 and popularity throughout the 1960s weighed heavily in youth, anti-war, and the counterculture movements, challenging ideas of conformity identified with immediate postwar experiences and 1950s consumer politics.

The band’s experiences in 1964 and 1965 articulated their commercial success and the demands of sustaining pop success, notably routine appearances on stage, TV, the radio, and in magazine articles. As touring provided the bulk of their income, it also introduced the band to the problems of fan responses within Beatlemania: concert venues grew, but fluctuated in attendance, and continued shrieks and screams overshadowed the Beatles mastered skill sets playing instruments and performing on stage. When the Beatles encountered Beatlemania in Germany for the first time, it indicated the distance between band and audiences. Playing the Reeperbahn in 1961 included direct interactions with patrons, not always positive, but not defined by
intense reactions based only on their appearance and proximity—especially when the Beatles were on a field and audiences occupied stadium seats far away. The fact that the Beatles still relied on 25-35 minute set lists filled with materials played countless times over five years demonstrated the diminished professional value of performing and touring to their overall success. In a period where rock music was taking on the qualities of an art form, rather than remaining tied solely to commercial success and hit success, the Beatles had let their craft decay on stage until unified motivation to confront and challenge the status of their popularity or the definitions of their career success emerged on the road in 1966. Recording *Revolver* illustrated engagements with other artists and musical progression attained by the technological capabilities of the studio, but by not transferring those growths to their concert stages, the Beatles limited their own productivity and the satisfaction they enjoyed and shared with audiences as working musicians.

Music remained an important source of work for numerous Americans and performers in the world, especially those still engaging audiences with live performances in regional and local circuits. In the 1960s, these individual performers were easily visible as folk and art festivals showcased untapped performers outside the pop music environment. The impact made by the British invasion in the mid-1960s essentially fostered a wider unequal distribution of cultural prosperity and economic success in the context of music and the recording industry. Rock ‘n’ roll performers were identified with working class identities, but also disconnected from the day-to-day realities associated with industrial work, as detailed previously regarding the Beatles rejecting industrial work for opportunities to perform on stage. Simon Frith
argued this disconnection was required to find success; coupled with ambition, rock musicians had to be “detached from a class background—if rock is a way out of the working class, a path to riches, it is also a way out of the middle class, a path to bohemian freedoms” and this lifestyle was marked by unknowns connected to a “musical living” through recording and touring. Wealth and success unhinged working class identities from musicians, and the counterculture counteracted representations of work previously depicted by musicians in favor of perceived leisure and entertainment qualities—despite political and social messages complementary to wider issues.46

The flip side to the Beatles popularity was the attributes it earned the band as a source of inspiration on top of celebrity, particularly inspiring the counterculture of the 1960s. These were the occasions when the Beatles encountered reactions opposed to the status they held at the center of Beatlemania, when the bounds of propriety and celebrity crashed around the group, the individual members of the group, and the fans who championed the band relentlessly. Following Germany, the Beatles challenged cultural traditions and political exploitation when they stopped in Japan and the Philippines. In Japan, the band broke a cultural taboo by playing the Budokan, a traditionally sumo only arena in Japan, requiring constant security and absolutely no sight seeing. The band later snubbed the Imelda Marcos, the first lady of the Philippines, because the band did not take part in official state organized functions in their “honor” (after an incident at the British embassy in Washington during the band’s first U.S. visit). The Beatles later reflected that the latter incident served an unintended, but important rebuke to the Marcos regime provided support to

46 Frith, Sound Effects, 75.
downtrodden Filipinos, but in 1966, the snub resulted in mob anger and fears the Beatles and their entourage would not leave the Philippines unscathed. And then, the band came to the United States in early August 1966 and confronted controversy surrounding the publication of Maureen Cleave’s interview with John Lennon in the teen magazine *Datebook*. Comparing the band’s ultimate U.S. visit with the first, cultural biographer Devin McKinney summed it up as: “the Beatles were returning to reap the bad harvest of everything they had sown in the American mind two years before, at the very moment the nation was making its last tortured break from the flimsy social constructs of the ‘50s to the chaos that would soon define its daily life.”

Reviewing the 1966 tour illustrates the stark differences between the Beatles cultural presence and their work output, particularly the duality of August 1966 as *Revolver* was released and the band faced scrutiny unrelated to either than album or their upcoming tour. The planned concert dates served to only supply the band with economic income, and did not further their presence any more than tours and output over the previous two and a half years in America. That the Beatles never toured the UK after promoting *Rubber Soul* in late 1965 reveals specifically how the 1966 tour operated only as an exercise in work. In London, as in parts of the U.S. like San Francisco during 1966, countercultural aspects were emerging before they captured wider attention as part of the “summer of love” a year later. The Beatles, defined through middle class values, took part in those developments, but by retreating into Beatlemania again distanced themselves from increasingly wide divergences erupting in pop music. The “more popular than Jesus” controversy illustrated awareness of

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47 McKinney, 152.
social and political developments in the world, and how the Beatles took part and informed themselves and those issues. Pop music in preceding years elevated musicians and performers to relevant positions of commentary and political power, and in August 1966, John Lennon was asked time and again by reporters about his comments and essentially forced to apologize for his cultural commentary because it did not fit expectations of proper behavior by a Beatle. Pop stars were sources for receptions and reflections of new and radical ideas, and the “more popular than Jesus” incident illuminated cultural influence and artistic sentiment, but overshadowed and misrepresented why they were even in the United States, specifically what became their final (American) tour and promotion of *Revolver*.

Negative and tumultuous encounters notwithstanding, the decision to stop touring was not arrived at quickly, nor did the Beatles fully realize it would not occur again after they departed Candlestick Park on August 29, 1966. But they took time to document the concert personally, taking snapshots onstage and reportedly playing a slightly longer set list with more energy than in the nights and weeks before. The Beatles did not need to tour, as this discussion has illuminated and explored, they were well positioned economically and culturally and this jaunt from Germany to Japan to the Philippines and on to the United States only gained the band more economic wealth and detracted from their musical progress. One aspect of the 1966 tour, apparent in the wake of the counterculture and another half-century of pop music history and cultural relevance, is how it marked a sharp distinction in the presence of live performances and what those provided for musicians, performers, and the industry overall. With the summer of love and the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, music and
arts festivals across the United States and the world took off—expanding what
meetings like the Newport Folk Festival provided for musicians, artists, and activists.
As historian George Lipsitz argued regarding political activity by 1960s middle class
American youth, “the music festival and large concert hall emerged as privileged sites
for the making of music, and the ability of musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin,
and Otis Redding to transform audiences through live performances provided an
important basis for their prestige.” The Beatles’ American tours featured large
audiences, and while cultural challenges occurred, these sites were not conducive to
political movements, given how chaperoned they were and the limited shows
generated by the Beatles short set lists.48

Upon concluding the well-played and finely tuned set list, the Beatles left the
stage and walked across the field of Candlestick Park in San Francisco on August 29,
1966. Although unannounced at the time, but apparent in the months and years
following, this concert performance represented the end of the Beatles as a live touring
act, and effectively concluded the period known as Beatlemania. Years of performing
and intensity on stage and in the studio, started by traveling to Hamburg, Germany in
1960, called for time away from the stage and public scrutiny for a longer period than
any previous hiatus provided. Until November 1966, there was quite literally no
operational “Beatles,” and when four young but aged men convened again in the
studio that month, uncertainty existed whether there would be, or if it was possible
again for the Beatles to carry on—especially given ample opportunities to explore

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48 George Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and Social Crises,” in The
Sixties: From Memory to History, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina
interests, completely devoid of the live performance schedules so crucial to the Beatles’ activities.

Following Candlestick Park and returning to the United Kingdom, the Beatles took holidays as individual men—away from the group and identities defined by their roles within the Beatles and popular culture. They grew mustaches, dabbled in solo projects, and were unconnected for almost three months. The band’s record company and management expected the new sessions started in November 1966 to result in new output, and in February 1967 the Beatles released the double A-side single “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane” as a kind of prelude to their new work. After a total 700 hours of studio time, unprecedented in the history of pop music and the recording industry at that time, an album was released. Alongside the single, both were completely unlike anything the “Beatles” previously released. The album, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, was devised by Paul McCartney and intended to “go out on tour” in place of the Beatles. Though Epstein still hoped to promote future touring, the Beatles were happy and ready to create something as “artists.” They had the free time to hang out and the “freedom to come in with crazy ideas.” The Beatles started to “appeal to a more turned-on audience, because they themselves were more turned on” and Epstein retreated in his role because the Beatles did not need extensive tours and appearances organized. In an interview promoting Sgt. Pepper, John Lennon stated “for those who want moptops, the Monkees are right up there, man.”

49 Mark Hertsgaard, A Day In the Life: The Music and Artistry of the Beatles, (New York: Delta, 1995), 203; see also Neil Aspinall, and George Martin, The Beatles Anthology, 236-237: “They were generally fed up with their lives. … [Brian Epstein] thought that it was the end of The Beatles, and there were all sorts of signs of that in 1966. There was the Philippines disaster, and the falling attendance in some of their shows, and they were fed up with being prisoners of their fame”; Paul McCartney, The Beatles
Pop music and culture were many things to the generation of the 1960s and musicians like the Beatles became synonymous with progress through that influence and explosions of popularity like Beatlemania. The Beatles’ career “from homespun rock ‘n’ rollers and hit ditty makers to subtle melodists, acute lyricists … was the model of that progress.” Simon Frith wrote that the *Sgt. Pepper* album “[addressed] issues other than teenage fun” at the same time marking a “move from pop to rock … describing a more ambitious music than pop” that helped to “realize complex private dreams and feelings.” The album represented an “event” in sixties culture, marketing pop to the masses and “[representing] a new movement of youth—classless and ageless.” To those interested and active within the counterculture, *Sgt. Pepper* offered “a new purpose: to make out of pleasure a politics of optimism, to turn passive consumption into an active culture.” For the Beatles, it confirmed a career started by playing to drunken Germans, fulfilled by the economic wealth generated through years of touring and live performances, and finally leaving behind the reactions they encountered while performing in concerts to embrace recording as their only tool in connection to affluence, commodities, and cultural resonance.50

The expanded cultural presence the Beatles occupied throughout the remainder of the 1960s, one not reliant nor resembling their roles in Beatlemania, revealed important developments in the places of pop music and pop stars to issues of work and

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cultural identities. The album *Revolver* indicated musical interests and experimentations progressed beyond rock ‘n’ roll and pop styles the Beatles first released only three years earlier. In their own manner, the Beatles rejected the counterculture by leaving Beatlemania and live performances behind, specifically expectations about what they were meant to signify and leadership they seemed to provide, even under the hysteria. Unlike Bob Dylan, who similarly retreated from his popularity and cultural presence (see Chapter 5), the Beatles did not disappear completely as they left touring behind and recorded an album not released under the “Beatles” moniker (they were “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band”). In fact, the release of *Sgt. Pepper* came to represent the period, even if it masked personal and work problems that emerged within the Beatles as a recording unit. The Beatles never wholeheartedly took part or defined the counterculture, but in rejecting ideas of “the Beatles” throughout the last months of 1966 and during the recording of *Sgt. Pepper* in early 1967, the band rejected ideas of working long core to the success they had achieved and the social and cultural impacts of their work in the music industry.

**“Start with This One”: The Beatles in the Memory of the Sixties**

*Playboy*: There’s been some dispute, among your fans and critics, about whether you’re primarily entertainers or musicians … What’s your own opinion?

John: “We’re money-makers first; then we’re entertainers. …

Paul: Still, we’d be idiots to say that it isn’t a constant inspiration to be making a lot of money. It always is, to anyone. I mean, why do big business tycoons *stay* big business tycoons? It’s not because they’re inspired at the greatness of big business; they’re in it because they making *money* at it. We’d be idiots if we pretended we were in it solely for kicks. In the beginning we were, but at the same time, we were hoping to make a bit of cash. It’s a switch around now, though, from what it used to be. We used to be doing it mainly for kicks and not making a lot of money, and now we’re making money without too many kicks—except that we happen to like the money we’re making.
But we still enjoy making records, going onstage, making films, and all that business.”

In early 2012, a half-century following the Beatles debuted on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the band, their music, and the popularity they witnessed as part of Beatlemania and the 1960s counterculture remained an integral component of American culture and society. They arrived in the midst of Beatlemania sweeping the nation via radio and consumer goods, but made a larger mark through *Ed Sullivan*. With television, the Beatles debuted to a national audience in a single broadcast, capturing attention and impacting societal functions in a manner never before achieved by pop music or the music industry. Historian George Lipsitz commented in an essay on the 1960s that, “the music industry expanded its reach and scope through the cultivation of an entire generation of avid consumers, yet music also emerged as an important site for cultural conflict and dialogue about prevailing values.” The Beatles worked at the forefront of those changes, and their success and achievements witnessed through *Ed Sullivan* and Beatlemania demonstrated how they ingratiated consumer goods and cultural impact within young Americans and an atmosphere undergoing political and social upheaval. A British band finding immense popularity in the United States did not accomplish such large feats on its own, but as this discussion has argued, the Beatles symbolized and represented the counterculture, more so as Americans and scholars look back and review the images of the 1960s.

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Within pop culture, the Beatles remain a source for cultural influence in the 1960s, often acting as a tool to demonstrate significant shifts that occurred. Specifically to this point, in May 2012, an episode of the period drama TV series *Mad Men* incorporated a Beatles song in order to dramatize generational and cultural changes taking off, as well as recreate the bewilderment of Americans unprepared for those changes felt. At the conclusion of the episode “Lady Lazarus,” set in the fall of 1966, series protagonist Don Draper’s young (and relatively new) wife Megan bought the fictional advertising executive a copy of the “latest” Beatles record, *Revolver*. Her goal was to introduce Draper to the band and illustrate they were more than a teenybopper fad. Megan pointed him to a song listed on the album’s rear cover, instructing him to “start with this one.” The following scene cuts to Draper setting the needle on the LP, and the audience hears the album’s closing track, “Tomorrow Never Knows,” start playing as his introduction to the Beatles. An experimental track immediately recognizable to Beatles’ fans, the song incorporated non-traditional sounds, tape loops, and was influenced by its writer John Lennon’s reading of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In terms of Draper’s expectations about the Beatles and the band’s first debut on American TV, the song was worlds away from “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and young girls screaming at four men disembarking from an airplane.\(^\text{53}\)

Much of “Lady Lazarus” revolved around storylines dealing with issues of sex and gender, aging, and fears of death or absolutism. Don Draper, played by Jon Hamm,

\(^{53}\) From *Mad Men*, “Lady Lazarus”: “Don’t worry, there’s a million band that sound like that. … All we want is the chaos and the fun. That sort of adolescent joy.” Don: “We know what the Beatles sound like. … When did music become so important?” Megan: “It’s always been important.” Don: “I mean, jingles yeah. But now, everybody keeps coming and looking for some song and they’re so specific. … I have no idea what’s going on out there.” Megan: “Well, no one can keep up, it’s always changing. … Oh, you said you didn’t know what was going on. I bought you the latest Beatles album. Start with this one.”
to this point in the series a polished and fashionable creative executive, understood the Beatles and the impact of music as an advertising mechanism. As he listens to “Tomorrow Never Knows,” the viewer gets a prolonged look at Draper’s reception of the song and scenes edited into the sequence depicting his fellow characters grappling with changes confronting their safe and seemingly secure lifestyles in the 1960s. Fittingly, the montage of these conclusions is abruptly halted as Draper removes the needle, cutting off the song, and walks away from the turntable and out of the scene, what was previously “passive consumption” becoming “active culture” for viewers. The abrupt and jarring stop to the music presents Draper as seemingly unable to absorb the song and the Beatles, but more importantly the intersecting cultural, historical, and emotional impact of cultural shifts and confrontations occurring around him in American society that are represented by the song “Tomorrow Never Knows” and his awareness of the Beatles.

*Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner told the *Wall Street Journal* his purpose in using “Tomorrow Never Knows” was that “he wanted viewers to experience the song as his characters would have, from a point of first discovery.” Despite previous mentions and encounters with pop music, Weiner successfully recreated that experience, and Draper’s sudden rejection runs counter to the placement of the Beatles in the history of the 1960s and the counterculture, while also complicating the character as a white, male authority. Weiner’s character dismisses the music, but as an audience we were primed long ago to understand and engage the Beatles and the band’s music as part of the cultural landscape of the 1960s and the present.
“Tomorrow Never Knows” was also a very poignant and predictable selection for *Mad Men* and those intentions of “first discovery.” Historian George Lipsitz has argued that,

> “Many of the song lyrics and the countercultural practice of the sixties were created to arbitrate these historically specific crises of the moment. They expressed the rage, frustration, and despair of people who felt they had no future while at the same time projecting utopian fantasies about community, cooperation, and pleasure within a deeply divided society that routinely resorted to violence to advance its objectives.”

In our memory of the 1960s, TV first introduced Americans to the Beatles two and a half years before Draper rejects the Beatles, and that role cannot be overstated. The debut on February 9, 1964, included less than fifteen minutes of performance, but offers important evidence to the role TV played as a disseminator of information and cultural values, even if reviewing *Ed Sullivan* that evening blocks out confrontations over song content, other cultural influences and drugs, and comments made about religious life in the time period following that debut.⁵⁴

The end of “Lady Lazarus” illustrates questions surrounding the status quo in the United States and the world. Despite prior popular music references in *Mad Men*, this episode confronted Draper’s sense of style and authority in marketing consumer

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⁵⁴ Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and Social Crises,” 221; John Jurgensen, “How Much *Mad Men* Paid for the Beatles,” *Speakeasy* (blog), *The Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2012, accessed May 9, 2012, [http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/05/07/how-much-mad-men-paid-for-the-beatles](http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/05/07/how-much-mad-men-paid-for-the-beatles). In his alternative history of popular music, Elijah Wald comments that the Beatles appearance fundamentally changed the course of American music, and the course of the Beatles career altered how audiences approached music: “there need be no unifying-styles, as bands can play what they like in the privacy of the studio, and we can choose which to listen to in the privacy of our clubs, our homes, or, finally, our heads. Whether that was liberating or limiting is a matter of opinion and perception, but the whole idea of popular music had changed,” 247. The rumored cost it took Weiner to license “Tomorrow Never Knows” for *Mad Men*, $250,000, indicates how culturally valuable the Beatles remained nearly a half-century beyond the 1960s. The modern viewer, even disinterested in the Beatles, recognizes the song and Draper’s reaction conflicts with expectations that the song should be accepted and immediately factored into the culture swirling around the character. Weiner’s endeavor to “lead the audience almost kicking and screaming into something new,” gives the audience an introduction to the Beatles that can only be replicated, as it is in the episode, because the *Mad Men* viewer may already be familiar with the Beatles or ideas about the 1960s.
goods and culture, depicting him here with little real knowledge about a seminal pop music entity or the Beatles cultural impact beyond market success and teenage dreams. The viewer sees Draper ridiculously miss the mark about the Beatles, at one pointing adding that he and his ad agency “know what the Beatles sound like” when a colleague reassures a worried client, “there’s a million bands that sound like that” when rights to a Beatles song in 1966 are unavailable. The ending leaves it unclear whether Draper will revisit the band, but makes it clear his preconceived notions about the Beatles are changed—his “disinterest” in finishing the song reveals how wrong he was about finding an alternative for his client, who was interested in the Beatles based on consumer, presumably female, interest. His reaction mirrors a November 1963 *Time* magazine review of British TV footage: “though Americans might find the Beatles achingly familiar … they are apparently irresistible to the English” and “their records have sold 2,500,000 copies, and crowds stampede for a chance to touch the hem of the collarless coats sported onstage by all four of them.” In the postwar era, youth movements and their cultural influences, according to historian George Lipsitz, “emerged in part as a reaction against the corporate culture of conformity that had shaped much of suburban life since World War II, but it also responded to the ways in which political struggle transformed the nature of urban space.”55

Some critics of *Mad Men* expressed confusion over the use of “Tomorrow Never Knows” in the episode because Draper was in advertising and would see the potential offered by the Beatles as soon as they appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In her review, NPR music critic Ann Powers commented that the song “was part of a

paradigm shift that confused and alienated many a pre-rock daddy figure, but it wasn’t the start of anything, nor would its experimental yet very shiny sound have likely alienated a quasi-hip city dweller like Don.” Furthermore, Powers argued that the Beatles “transformed pop marketing as much as music” and “as an inventive, highly competitive trend-chaser, Don Draper would have loved the Beatles from the minute they hit Ed Sullivan.” Expecting Draper to adore the Beatles as much as his wife or daughter neglects the character as a placeholder for the audience. We expect Draper to know the changing culture around him because of his career, and when he does not, it represents our historical expectations that the counterculture was a youth movement and contradicted middle class values. In reality, the “sixties counterculture … closely mirrored the system it claimed to be overturning” and “at key moments, alternative sixties cultural institutions … replicated rather than resisted the ruling cultural and ideological norms of American society.” The 1960s encompassed developments outside popular music contributions, but the Beatles symbolized challenges and confrontations central to the histories of social, political, and countercultural upheavals in American society.56

The Ed Sullivan debut introduced the Beatles to the American market, and generated more success than previously available only in Britain or Europe. The TV broadcast also showcased talents they had mastered through years of dedicated work in sites completely different from the sheen provided by TV. The Beatles not only mastered their instruments and a repertoire attractive to a diverse group of listeners,

but created goods equally prized and valued within the consumer culture of the postwar environment. The two components fueled a career hinged on precise skills and negotiations of varied workplaces on stage and in the studio. The Beatles did not simply walk out on *Ed Sullivan* as finished musical artists, but rather worked diligently to enter the music industry and radically expand the opportunities for musicians and performers in the production of careers and goods for audiences in society. Television operated as a unique marketing tool for selling the Beatles product and the individual members as skilled workers. The environment occupied, however, looked upon the four Beatles as more than those roles, and distributed meanings and affections only hinted by popular music before these points.

When the Beatles toured the world in the summer of 1966, they did so under the aura of Beatlemania for roughly the fourth year in a row, but after the first significant break in that time. Staunchly committed to their work, their visibility within the cultural market afforded them a presence unmatched and shared by only a few others in their time and by fewer still since then. But, that compulsion to work and reliance upon manager Brian Epstein to direct their schedule and pace left the Beatles exhausted and unwilling to cooperate with the expectations that they continue occupying the same roles they did when they first debuted on *Ed Sullivan*. To the Beatles, contact with other performers and musicians enhanced their output and added to musical experimentation and progress as recording musicians and artists. In those contacts, readily visible through their music and products, the Beatles aspired to engage cultural and societal developments, marked in *Mad Men* by the significance of the song “Tomorrow Never Knows,” and its relevance to changes afoot in the 1960s.
Akin to Don Draper’s response, rejection, the Beatles likewise encountered audiences unwilling to accept new cultural affectations and paradigms the Beatles presented, commented upon, or represented.

The album *Revolver*, including “Tomorrow Never Knows,” never featured in a Beatles live performances, due to its complicated technological components and proximity to the band’s ultimate tour. Furthermore, with the events of the summer of 1966, and especially the “more popular than Jesus” controversy, the Beatles never enjoyed cultural responses to the album. The studio work *Revolver* represented was overshadowed by the work conducted by the Beatles on stage and reactions surrounding their appearances and concerts. Rejecting touring in favor of the studio following these moments, definitions of the Beatles found new meanings available only through their recordings. In their place, new musicians and performers engaged audiences as part of the counterculture, uniquely visibly when Jimi Hendrix was paired with the Monkees for a national tour following the Monterey Pop Festival in the summer of 1967. The Monkees were meant to recreate aspects of Beatlemania, appealing to teenyboppers infatuated with them and their TV show, while Hendrix symbolized the social and cultural challenges music represented for youth and political movements—even though he hardly sought any leadership role either. Hendrix’s entrance into the American market was fast paced and reminiscent of the Beatles (though American, Hendrix found audiences in the UK, and the album *Are You Experienced* was released shortly after Monterey Pop), but his performances were so
unlike the Monkees on tour that the Jimi Hendrix Experience was pulled from the bill after only a few concert stops.\textsuperscript{57}

The shift to solely recording acted against trends in the late 1960s (careers remained built by recording and live performances) and was not unprecedented among other performers throughout the 20th century, but the Beatles musical growth in the studio between 1962 and 1966 moved the band away from demands of touring and other publicity activities related to their overall success. However, the Beatles’ cultural influence in the 1960s rested on different connections drawn by fans, listeners, and critical commenters between the effects of the band’s live performances and the growing artistry of their recordings. As one of the prominent and most profitable acts in the 1960s and history of the music industry, the Beatles interacted with complex political, economic, and social developments through their output and cultural position, influencing listeners across the globe and particularly in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States. Illustrating their influence, the hysteria of Beatlemania initiated with the Invasion in February 1964 demonstrated the band’s influence in and problems associated with the counterculture and consumer market as the band’s recordings and concerts diverged and cultural impact complicated consumer trends and receptions.

When the Beatles stopped touring it was due to fears about their safety and concerns over their musicianship and how little they felt their careers progressed in the midst and the fervor of Beatlemania. While similarities existed with Bob Dylan’s retreat at virtually the same time (see Chapter 5), it was not that the Beatles rejected or sought to distance themselves from the cultural roles they inhabited and were

\textsuperscript{57} See \textit{American Masters: Jimi Hendrix – Hear My Train A Comin’}.
perceived as holding. The participants and proponents of the 1960s counterculture viewed cultural contributors like the Beatles, and Bob Dylan, in particular, as leaders in politics, economics, and social issues. As the Beatles career and public images progressed in the midst of Beatlemania, this influence resulted in greater and greater attention paid to what they did, where they went, and actions taken individually and by the group. Whether audiences, listeners, or young activists took notice of the Beatles and popular musicians about a variety of issues, these pop stars emerged as critical components of lifestyles and society. After retreating to the studio, the Beatles embraced aspects of the counterculture fully—whereas touring and media appearances throughout 1962-1966 brought problematic confrontations over their positions (particularly obvious by Lennon’s “more popular than Jesus” commentary), and in the years following their performance at Candlestick Park, the Beatles countercultural presence progressed through personal conflicts that eventually challenged the band.

The Beatles have been viewed as forces for change regarding sexuality, gender issues, race relations, political activity, and recreational drug usage. Behind all of these influences were demands upon the work required of the Beatles as entertainers, performers, and musicians on stage, in the studio, and laborers in the recording industry. The Beatles’ work influenced the development of music, and rock ‘n’ roll, as an art form while it maintained status as a commodity within an industry tied into the post-World War II politics of affluence, especially in the United States. Entwined within this time period and these developments, the Beatles’ personal and individual histories growing up within working class and middle class households during the 1950s factored into their appeal and those contributions. As rock ‘n’ roll was regarded
as lowbrow and a working class component of popular culture, those musicians that preceded the Beatles largely encompassed situations close to that economic position, for instance Elvis Presley as a truck driver, Chuck Berry as a factory worker, or Buddy Holly working in his family’s tiling business. But, the Beatles were presented as white, male middle class musicians that wore matching suits, bowed after performances, and played respectable to audiences that included young fans and the royal family. The cultural and social impacts of the Beatles with 1960s audiences shifted the identification of rock music from working class to the middle class, and from a racially integrated music to one largely identified as white, because the “industry had to learn about [working class teenagers in the 1950s and middle class youth in the 1960s] and their demands, the musical results followed rather than led youthful tastes and choices.” That shift corresponded to the economics of musicians working in the postwar recording industry, seen through the effects of popularity, stardom, and affluence related to output, and how those attributes compensated artistic endeavors.58

When Megan Draper instructed her husband to “start with this one,” she was introducing him to the Beatles, and the revolutions of the 1960s unfolding as a prominent counterculture. Behind the depiction in Mad Men were extensive changes taking place with musicians and pop music, as groups like the Beatles interacted with larger and larger audiences while transitioning their work as musicians into styles and

58 Frith, Sound Effects, 62 and 263: “Rock ‘n’ roll made cultural sense not as an experience in itself, but in the context of specific relations of work and power. When rock ‘n’ roll became rock in the 1960s it was removed from these contexts and its original significance was changed. Consciousness of class became the myth of “rock brotherhood”; the rock ‘n’ roll experience became something that could be consumed by middle-class youth, by students; culture became commodity.”
output regarded in closer proximity to art forms. Writing about rock music emerging as an art form in the 1960s, critic Simon Frith argued that,

“rock musicians drew on artistic ideology to legitimize and make sense of their movement (following the Beatles) from live performance to the recording studio, from collective celebration to the individual lyric, from dancing teenage crowds to appreciative listening audiences. They moved, commercially, practically, and creatively, away from those places and activities from which rock ‘n’ roll and R&B had drawn their meanings.”

In making these moves, rock musicians altered the reception of pop music and the spaces previously provided for social interactions based around music consumption, seen prominently through generational, racial, sexual, and gender dynamics on the dance floor. The Beatles’ career from a loud and raunchy rock ‘n’ roll band in Hamburg to a studio-based recording unit that produced *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* enacted specific attributes of this shift. As prominent historical figures charged with influencing the counterculture, the Beatles signified musicians as workers reviewed into perceptions as cultural entities contingent on a leisure and entertainment industry outside the needs or concerns of other industrial-based workers. In the battles of the late 1960s, the challenges faced in Beatlemania paled in comparison to the confrontations musicians’ faced with opponents of countercultural movements and events.59

59 Frith, *Sound Effects*, 21; see also Lipsitz, “Who’ll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and Social Crises,” 230: “In part, 1970s music emerged as a critique of what had been let out of the sixties (working-class anger, desires for androgyny), and new musical forms reflecting new social realities emerged.”
CHAPTER V


On the eve of his “Rolling Thunder Revue” tour in November 1975, Bob Dylan visited the Mayflower replica moored in the harbor of Plymouth, Massachusetts, alongside fellow musician Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, poet Allen Ginsberg, and Rolling Stone contributor Nat Hentoff. After watching Elliott climb to the top of the mizzenmast and call “Ahoy!” down to Dylan, Ginsberg proclaimed: “We have, once again, embarked on a voyage to reclaim America!” Ginsberg’s comment revealed plans for the Rolling Thunder Revue tour experience, and hinted (retrospectively in publication) at renewed efforts by the musicians to create a community of support and “collective work” with fans and artists. The call to reclaiming America recalled the Beat and folk movements all three emerged from in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the inspired message acted in opposition to the realities of the performers’ careers in the music industry and 1970s American culture and society. Behind calls for community and connections to America, the musicians all held contracts for agreed pay and participation, including Dylan, who released new single “Hurricane” as the tour started, and the album Desire in early 1976 following the end of what became the first leg of the tour. The Rolling Thunder Revue achieved a nearly decade-long shift in career by Dylan, where he distanced himself from expectations tied to his supposedly being a “Voice of a Generation” and worked toward ambitions complimentary to the hopes, productivity, and output of working Americans. In his shift from folk hero and
revolutionary icon, Dylan reinforced the prominence of white, male musicians articulating meanings and definitions of “authenticity” and links to the political divisions apparent between race, class, and gender in the 1960s and 1970s.¹

Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue tour was his second major tour of the 1970s, following a grand return in 1974 following nearly eight years in hiatus from live concert performances. The America he left behind in 1966 and found again in 1974 were completely different environments, and the intervening years saw the postwar economic prosperity tied to the end of World War II peak and fall, while a counterculture inspired by Dylan flared and faded without his playing any real role. Coming out of the folk scene in 1961-1963, Bob Dylan quickly gained a following by singing of working Americans, civil rights, and social concerns, and was labeled the “Voice of a Generation,” a moniker ideally suited for the period but rejected by those his music seemed to champion. The discussions of the following chapter explore Dylan’s retreat from touring between 1966 and 1974 and argue that the performing hiatus in those years saw Dylan form a lifestyle built around a family that symbolized and shared concerns and fears among working Americans. The chapter further argues that this period allowed him to reinvigorate his artistry and musicianship in order to support a prolonged and effective working career within the music industry. As a popular musician, Dylan enjoyed economic opportunities outside working class concerns, but the music he produced disconnected from the popular music and cultural impact he enjoyed as a folk and rock musician and personal emphases on safety and

security for his family illustrated interests in productivity and output as a member of the “consumer commodity society” of the postwar environment.

After 1974, Dylan’s career focused on personal interests without concern for cultural expectations, and increasingly shared social and societal problems that many Americans confronted and reflected aspects of working class productivity and output. Folk music and musicians like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger sang of working Americans, and Dylan’s connections through these musicians hinted he shared political messages of the Popular Front of the late 1930s or the Beats of the 1950s and rejections of the consumer society. Dylan’s music shared political and socially conscious messages, but increasingly, emphasis on working Americans seemed less direct after the British invasion. After famously “going electric” and switching to rock ‘n’ roll in 1965, Dylan experienced intense fan reactions related to perceptions of authenticity within both folk and rock music. Tense encounters engulfed subsequent concerts and interviews and culminated at a May 1966 show in England where a fan yelled “Judas” before Dylan played the period-defining “Like a Rolling Stone.”

Despite the intensity of this period, Dylan married Sara Lownds in November 1965 and purchased a new home in Woodstock, New York. In June 1966, he returned to Woodstock, but suffered a mysterious motorcycle accident in July that resulted in a cancelled tour and hiatus. Following his crash, Dylan explored interests in various forms of American music while the counterculture flourished, and his career continued primarily through recordings until 1974, with only a handful of performances.²

While Bob Dylan did not specifically target working Americans with his music as much as reflect and reinvigorate his own musical tastes and interests in the late 1960s, it still worked to disrupt expectations that tied him to the counterculture and social movements that seemed antithetical to working Americans. Dylan’s touring hiatus coincided with economic prosperity peaking in the late 1960s and workers and labor unions struggling to maintain jobs and the production output achieved in the previous two decades. The American worker, long idealized politically and culturally as white and male, suddenly found himself under attack from various sectors, including civil rights and counterculture sources that longed for equal representation and access to the attributes of American life and society. But a long tradition of the working American as a subject for music and audience meant the working class was a contested aspect of popular culture. By the early 1970s, historian Jefferson Cowie has noted, “there was less a popular front than a cultural war as to what ‘the worker’ might be, as artists did battle of his (mostly, his) allegiance and representation.” In particular, *John Wesley Harding*, released in late December 1967, sounded like a radical challenge to the psychedelia of the Summer of Love and the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Beatles scholar Devin McKinney heard this album as an escape, a compromise, and a “regression” to ideas of the early postwar and Hank Williams, pointing to links between Dylan’s late 1960s and 1970 recordings as closer to fears of the chaos in the counterculture among many Americans, particular the working class. The final break in Dylan’s rejections of his supposed reflections and contribution to the counterculture was *Self Portrait* (1970). Alternatively cited as a complex concept gone awry or an attempt to detach himself from the “Voice of a
Generation” tag, *Self Portrait* seemed the end of Dylan, but he quickly released *New Morning* four months later to renewed praise.³

The period between 1966 and 1974 allowed Dylan to work without expectations as the “Voice of a Generation” and illustrated the craftsmanship long central to his music and output. His return established a musician and a worker that operated within American culture, not an inspiration directing labels and movements outside his control. Coupled with the decline of economic prosperity for the United States and workers struggling to maintain levels of productivity and output in the 1970s, Dylan’s turn in the late 1960s provided cues to how popular music and prominent musicians continued to play relevant roles in American society and culturally revere the working class. Disrupting Bob Dylan as the “Voice of a Generation” between 1966 and 1974, the musician that worked throughout that period replicated the hopes and aspirations of American society and the working class with his music and lifestyle, and his shift away from that label captured a “loneliness” historian George Lipsitz attributed to the careers of Hank Williams, Marilyn Monroe, and Chester Himes in the late 1940s and 1950s. Dylan’s retreat from the expectations of postwar life, while adhering to ideals of work and output in the “consumer commodity society” of the 1950s and 1960s allowed him to conduct a representative

American career tied to productivity, output, and individuality, even if Dylan remained linked with audiences to the counterculture.⁴

In January 1974, Bob Dylan returned to concert touring, and his writing, recording, and performing output established a productive trade that carried into the twenty-first century. From the replica Mayflower to performing for President Barack Obama at the White House, Dylan charted a dominant and successful career in American music. Critics continued to praise and confront, fans emerged and faded, but Dylan crafted a unique repertoire, and his career overall seems to fit historian Alice Echols’ description for disco in the 1970s because he looked to the past, at the present, and pressed his output forward: “promiscuous and omnivorous, [disco] absorbed sounds and styles from all over, and in the process accelerated the transnational flow of musical ideas and idioms.” Dylan’s voracious appetite for various styles of American music meant he was tied to the folk movement and the counterculture in the 1960s despite moves away from overt social and political messages. In disrupting the “Voice of a Generation,” Dylan connected with the American worker, and created a complex career tied to multiple forms of work, industrial output, and productivity and output in the “consumer commodity society.” Interviewed by historian Douglas Brinkley for Rolling Stone in April 2009, Dylan commented that, “every man should

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learn a trade. It’s different than a job. My music wasn’t made to take me from one place to another so I can retire early.”

**Being True to Yourself: Crash, Family, and Work in the Late 1960s**

The postwar work culture signaled heightened productivity and satisfaction as sustained economic growth demonstrated the value of American workers within culture and society. Historian George Lipsitz linked rock ‘n’ roll’s emergence with these developments and argued that its popularity was rooted in its connections between different regional interests carried by workers to new positions. Two decades before the Rolling Thunder Revue, American workers found new opportunities and made sacrifices in support of wartime demands. When World War II ended, the broad groups of American workers sought greater control over economic prosperity, and “devised plans and methods to help them wage real and symbolic struggles for power” in order to “[demonstrate] a collective understanding … that the war emergency and its aftermath offered an opportunity to fulfill some very old hopes.” To achieve previously unavailable hopes and aspirations in the war and earlier depression, workers turned to increased union activity and created a work culture rooted in “opposition to exploitation and hierarchy.”

In the 1950s, rock ‘n’ roll fostered desegregation and helped install the working class within postwar economic and cultural expressions. Importantly, rock ‘n’ roll factored heavily in the growth of the music industry as part of the “consumer commodity society” taking shape. Rock ‘n’ roll contributed to opportunities for

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greater popular awareness of various forms of American music, and in the early 1960s folk music gained more prominence within American culture and expanded its influence and presence in social and political movements. Folk music enjoyed extensive interest throughout the twentieth century thanks to the works of musicians like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, and in the late 1950s new performers emerged to promote the style and its messages. Groups like the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary, and performers like Ramblin’ Jack Elliott and Joan Baez increased interest in folk before Dylan found his way to Greenwich Village and signed a contract with Columbia Records.

Bob Dylan’s music and performances polarized audiences in the United States and Europe, at first endearing listeners to the raw power of his output as a folk musician, and later challenging others because he “went electric” and played rock music with a blues-based band. Equally frustrating and inspiring were his methods of writing and parrying responses to interviews as his career exploded in the first-half of the 1960s. Dylan’s music spoke to downtrodden characters in the American landscape and carried folk movement explorations of working class experience from the Depression to postwar America. And as his career pushed ahead, breaking down authenticity barriers of folk and rock, he was assigned the label “Voice of a Generation,” supposedly for connecting with young Americans rebelling for change. At times, Dylan’s appearances and performances maintained those links, even promoting the idea that he could speak beyond his music. Singing “When the Ship Comes In” and “Only A Pawn In Their Game” at the March on Washington in August 1963 furthered notions that his music connected him beyond his output to the
movements of the 1960s as the “Voice of a Generation,” tying him to that ideal even as it was the last major appearance he made at a specifically political event.

The links held to politicized events and movements pushed Dylan into a broader rebellious position, even as his music moved away and his performances unshackled those ties. Jefferson Cowie hints at the lasting image of Dylan playing at the March on Washington, because that was how tied the musician was for many Americans looking at the impact of youth and civil rights movements. Expounding a history of “culturally conservative” American miners upset by losses faced in the workplace, Cowie recounts a labor attorney commenting how “the most tsarist, autocratic and backward union in America” renewed union activity without hearing “a Bob Dylan song in their lives.” Working class Americans that operated with similar goals as the economy declined in the late 1960s might previously dismissed Dylan and popular culture output that spoke to racial and class equality and ideals of work productivity. The dismissal remains important in shaping Dylan’s career in different phases, from folk musician, then rock star, and following his marriage in late 1965 and motorcycle crash in July 1966 turns that ultimately revealed his importance in music history of formalizing the “singer-songwriter.”

After his crash in 1966, Bob Dylan shed the “Voice of a Generation” by doing exactly the things that generation protested against: getting married, making a home, starting a family, and working. Commenting on the young Americans in the 1960s and counterculture, historian George Lipsitz argued that those groups “had values remarkably consonant with those of their parents in most important matters.” For these

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7 Cowie, 37-38; the crash took place in the early morning of July 29, 1966: Mikal Gilmore, “Dylan’s Lost Years,” Rolling Stone (September 12, 2013), 46.
Americans, popular music and musicians, provided tools to “shape and reflect” massive changes taking place culturally and socially. Popular musicians like Bob Dylan succeeded as a result of postwar economic expansion, witnessed by the purchasing power of young Americans, and the sharing of music socially and politically by large groups. Lipsitz argues “political movements established the legitimacy of singing in public” and “brought diverse groups together in a way that set the stage for the subsequent appreciation of difference and diversity within public music performances and audiences.” However, it is important to recall that the music industry after World War II still operated as “an Industry organized to sell commercial leisure, a functioning part of life in a capitalist country, and a reflection of all the ideological contradictions of the world surrounding it.” Therefore, no matter the assigned political role Dylan came to represent, it is important to keep focus on his status as a worker within the music industry, and not an individual separated outside it.  

When his tumultuous tour of England ended in May 1966, and *Blonde on Blonde* was released, Dylan retreated to Woodstock, New York, with wife Sara Lownds, where he crashed that summer. In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan remarks that while he was injured, he did recover, but the incident offered a chance to get out of the “rat race.” Starting a family re-oriented his outlook toward providing and protecting others beyond himself, and though it carries a great deal of anger for those who labeled and cornered Dylan into the “Voice of a Generation” without his consent,

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the memoir demonstrates Dylan’s familiarity with his position as a breadwinner and that role’s working class meaning despite the 1960s counterculture.

“As far as I knew, I didn’t belong to anybody then or now. I had a wife and children whom I loved more than anything else in the world. I was trying to provide for them, keep out of trouble, but the big bugs in the press kept promoting me as the mouthpiece, spokesman, or even conscience of a generation. That was funny. All I’d ever done was sing songs that were dead straight and expressed powerful new realities. I had very little in common with and knew even less about a generation that I was supposed to be the voice of. I’d left my hometown only ten years earlier, wasn’t vociferating the opinions of anybody. My destiny lay down the road with whatever life invited, and nothing to do with representing any kind of civilization. Being true to yourself, that was the thing…”

Looking at Dylan’s remarks, he made it clear the work required to be a “Voice” was not to his liking, and when pressed by Rolling Stone founder and editor Jann Wenner about why he had not “worked in so long,” Dylan replied that “uh…I do work.” Rather than work within those expectations, Dylan controlled his own work, directed his new music to his interests, took care of his family and protected those aspects of his life. Although not explicitly in line with economic options available to a majority of working Americans, Dylan’s priorities seemed to match ideals associated with working American in the late 1960s and not the counterculture.⁹

Fans and audiences waited until early 1974 for Bob Dylan to return to the stage full-time. For eight years, Dylan appeared infrequently and principally at festivals, notably Isle of Wight in late August 1969—and not the similarly timed Woodstock near his home. In the same time period, the United States changed dramatically, and as

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Americans confronted the effects and loss of the Vietnam War, vast economic fluctuations, and shifts in sexual and gender dynamics, the counterculture imploded and conservative politics erupted from the working class. Within these changes was the American family, undermined as new societal rifts and cultural forces instituted new norms that challenged expected family dynamics. In her history of the American family in the 1970s, Natasha Zaretsky explores how “many observers interpreted the rising numbers of working mothers and single-parent households and father absence as a cultural, social, and moral critics emanating from the institution of the family itself.”

As new cultural forces emerged in the postwar environment, they challenged traditional family roles specific individuals were supposed to represent within the institution. Zaretsky articulates how historical events and developments in the 1960s, including the war, economic decline, and counterculture, acted to detach those notions and created a fractured family image under stress and attack by cultural forces.10

Seeing Bob Dylan retreat to build and protect his own family fits the confrontations of the period while also conflating the realities most Americans experienced. However, in an environment where the family was undermined by cultural forces and dismantled by societal and economic changes, Dylan’s focus proves highly complimentary to workers promoting and struggling to maintain American strength through the family. Zaretsky highlights how “productivity experts” “traced” problems of 1970s workers to their fathers’ experiences, as work ethics were not successfully transferred due to “[insulations] … from the deprivations that had

10 Mikal Gilmore notes that Dylan “proved, not surprisingly, something of a reluctant star. He disapproved of any publicity that trumpeted him as a storied legend, and he was seen by some to be nervous and ragged onstage” at the Isle of Wight concert in late August 1969, “Dylan’s Lost Years,” 49; Zaretsky, 12.
framed his own Depression-era experiences” and “the father had done his son a
disservice by failing to ready him for the discipline and rigor of work.” Dylan
alternatively, and again complimentary, remembered “being born and raised in
America, the country of freedom and independence. … I was determined to raise my
children with these ideals.” In Chronicles, Dylan further remembered that he became a
father within the same period that his father died and was unable to share experiences
of parenting. Dylan imparts that focus on the strength of the family to American
ideals, both in his efforts to protect against forces intruding upon their lives, and as a
child born of Depression-era parents later imbued with a commitment to work and
family.11

As a prominent and popular entertainer in American popular culture, Dylan’s
career was examined less connected to these ideas, to most critics and fans he had
disappeared and they waited anxiously for any sign of his return. Over time this led to
questions and criticisms of his output, applied to stylistic shifts on new records, a
vocal adjustment on a country album, or eventually sheer disgust directed at an album
that ultimately revealed Dylan’s deep ties to American history and the working class
in the postwar era. Dylan may not have shared the experiences of traditional working
Americans in the wake of the counterculture, but he created images and a lifestyle
designed to emulate the idea of an independent American—by then centuries old and
fought over routinely—at work and homeward bound. The “Voice of a Generation”
committed his final exit from the ties to the 1960s and overt support and prominence

11 Zaretsky, 113; Dylan, 107-114; In an Uncut magazine article on Another Self Portrait, writer Allan
Jones implores new listeners to consider the state of Dylan’s life in 1970: “bringing up a young family,
deeply shocked by the recent early death of his father at only 56 and under siege, no other word for it,
by his fans, desperate for his word on the matters of the day,” (September 2013), 37.
in the folk movement, civil rights, and ideas of class equality, not by going electric, but by retreating to a private life and home to live quietly with his wife and family. Even from a physical distance, he found the ties impossible to avoid or disentangle, and fans and cultural forces still found him and complicated the existence he carved for himself. Eventually, Woodstock could not provide independence from expectations about his status, productivity, and output, the counterculture swarmed in by the hundreds of thousands, local residents regarded him as an “outlaw” and he was forced to flee again by 1969-1970.12

Dylan’s exposition on his life in Chronicles, paired with the changes observed in his momentum and output illustrate that the political and cultural importance attributed to his career did not reflect the work he desired. Dylan’s retreat ultimately stripped the politics from his music, however prominent his voice was for the counterculture, working Americans, or the downtrodden. From the first moments in 1965-1966 forward, Dylan started tapping into American music forms, driven by personal tastes, artistic interests, and his home, family, and community. Those albums that garnered celebration for new output, and later criticism that he was done, reflected Dylan’s efforts to distance himself from assigned political roles and a fan base that denied him access to the fantasies and impulses he held about the ideal American experience. Before the tumultuous events in England in May 1966 and his motorcycle crash in July 1966, Dylan told Playboy he did not feel that he owed listeners or fans that viewed him as a “folk hero” any “responsibility” because he did not ask them to listen to his record, they “just [happened] to be there.” Dylan’s success was rooted in

12 Dylan, 120.
postwar prosperity and consumer interest and his attempts to experience the American
toncepts of home, work, family, and community occurred at the moments when those
notions were being stressed over and challenged in the 1960s and 1970s. What
propelled Dylan forward was work and family: a work many fans in the United States
and across the world found attractive and popular, accessed back to the folk and rock
and forward through new phases, tours, personal problems, and even religious
impulses.13

Eighteen months away from the public, Dylan released the album *John Wesley
Harding* quietly after the Christmas holiday in late 1967: its folk and biblical allusions
disconnected from the counterculture; its title song taken from an American west
outlaw. The album “was a finely set parable of fated and deceitful people, some
looking for escape from those fates,” and greatly affected rock music after its release,
“stopping the psychedelic movement cold.” The album also reflected none of the
informal and impromptu performing and recording Dylan conducted with the Band
throughout much of 1967 in the fabled “basement tapes.” Uniquely rooted in the
American environment and character, those recordings were made in a house called
“Big Pink” in Woodstock, and found legendary status from bootleg releases in the late
1960s and early 1970s (an official Columbia compilation came out in 1975). But
fifteen months after *John Wesley Harding* hit #2 in *Billboard*, Dylan released a
country album called *Nashville Skyline* (#3), baffling critics, and constituting an
“awkward” grounding in working class traditions according to historian Jefferson
Cowie. Though it furthered “the type of cross-class alliance on which working class

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success had always depended,” Cowie regards attempts by musicians like Dylan to renew their popularity with working class definitions as “the advance party of a generation’s voyage that had given up on people’s politics.” Dylan, in particular, “[retreated] from what he saw as stale and deadening political realities, and toward the pursuit of the ‘politics’ of innocence, spontaneity, and personal authenticity.”

However, reviewing Dylan’s career, Rolling Stone contributor Mikal Gilmore noted Nashville Skyline “seemed to undermine any remaining claims that the radical element of the counterculture might have on him.”

The problem of viewing Dylan’s, and other rock musicians that renewed their output with working class traditions, like country music, as outside the “people’s politics” is that it denies their takes on country music an authenticity because it seemed to lack any politicization. Dylan, or the Band, or the Byrds, remained linked to the counterculture, and thus outside the working class because of inspiring or taking part in rebellion, even when they walked away or changed tunes and created new lifestyles that reflected working Americans. This dynamic remains highly visible in the contentious and celebrated history associated with Dylan’s two albums released in 1970: Self Portrait and New Morning. After his “ragged” appearance at the Isle of Wight festival in late August 1969, Dylan and family moved back to New York and Greenwich Village. During the days (“nine-to-five” existence), Dylan started recorded predominantly older songs and covers with producer Bob Johnston, emerging songwriter David Bromberg, and Blonde on Blonde collaborator Al Kooper, among others. Although Kooper later revealed that he was unsure what to make of Dylan’s

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approach: playing other musicians’ songs and old folk songs cited in Sing Out! magazine issues and songbooks; Bromberg told Rolling Stone the process illustrated Dylan was “more than a songwriter. He’s also a brilliant interpreter.” After overdubs, the inclusion of four songs recorded at Isle of Wight, a double album titled Self Portrait was released in the summer of 1970. Even before Self Portrait was out, Dylan and Kooper started working on more songs—this time Dylan originals—and Kooper took a prominent role in arrangement and sequencing, though he grew frustrated by Dylan’s constant changes to the recordings for New Morning after Self Portrait was released and departed before New Morning came out.\textsuperscript{15}

Moving stylistically from John Wesley Harding through Nashville Skyline to Self Portrait and New Morning, Dylan’s recorded output during his hiatus illustrated dramatic changes in his career, moving completely away from the popularity generated by his folk and rock output. The new albums enjoyed continued success, but as noted for the first two this reflected lengthy delays between releases alongside the interpretations and impact of the albums in the marketplace. The latter two, released barely four months apart in 1970, generated separate and alternate responses from music critics, prominent Dylan writers, and the purchasing audience. Self Portrait conveyed deep connections and roots to American music history, and Dylan recorded songs dating back into the nineteenth century, including Civil War hymns, immigrant

\textsuperscript{15} Gilmore, “Dylan’s Lost Years,” 49; Dylan has (or had) repeatedly distanced himself from Self Portrait and its reception in countless interviews since it came out, most often claiming it was designed to shake off fans that plagued him for direction and leadership. Many reviewers of the Another Self Portrait “bootleg” set reconsidered the album and that position, with Allan Jones of Uncut offering a valuable historical interpretation of the impulses and influences Dylan employed: “Such perversity hardly seems credible, however, when you look at some of the songs rescued from the archives that feature on Another Self Portrait, examples of vintage Americana and the US folk tradition that Dylan holds so dear and continued to inform much of what he does. They are surely not the kind of songs he would want to demean through parody or reduce to pastiche” (September 2013), 40.
tales, murder ballads, and working songs. When *New Morning* followed it kept a similar trajectory, but was prominently new Dylan songs, including reflections of his career, family life, and expectations. Together, these albums demonstrated Dylan addressing and rejecting expectations of his cultural status, even though he gave multiple explanations for the approach of recording and then releasing *Self Portrait*. In the notorious review of *Self Portrait* compiled for *Rolling Stone* by Greil Marcus, the writer opened with “What is this shit?” and launched into numerous brief responses to the album’s tracks, Dylan’s previous output, musings on musicianship and career, as well as literary and historical mirrors that Dylan entertained within his multi-faceted career.

The sheer notoriety of Marcus’s review conveys a denial of authenticity to *Self Portrait*. Obverse to the arguments made in this chapter, Marcus’s review goes so far to ponder if the album veered too close to “self effacement” in Dylan’s “removing himself from a position from which he is asked to exercise power” (the “Voice of a Generation”). If the album achieved such humility then it fulfilled the crashing hiatus following Dylan’s intense popularity in the 1960s. While Marcus and his commenters claimed the album lacked “ambition” and might “keep you away” from Dylan, the musician maintained a career built earlier in the 1960s but renewed its power and idealism by output that led to confusion, dismay, and insecurity about the power of a supposed leader. It was ambitious because it distanced Dylan further from the counterculture, and made links to the working class by pointing to folklore and traditions in American society. Until the early 1970s, American workers largely succeeded in reflection of the consumer-commodity culture that exploded in
productivity, output, and popular culture, but held onto economic concerns and realities from before World War II, and *Self Portrait* was built off folk music and older songs that predated the entire postwar environment. But Marcus made no links to those historical and cultural realities, iterating instead that “I once said I would buy an album of Dylan breathing heavily. I still would. But not an album of Dylan breathing softly.”\textsuperscript{16}

The critical affect of the review gives *Self Portrait* little to aspire or achieve to the novice listener, whether they encountered the album in 1970 or through the 2013 reissue that offered an expanded glimpse into the 1969-1971 period of Dylan’s recording and performing career. Nevertheless, *Self Portrait* reached #4 in the *Billboard* Top 200 Albums chart during the summer of 1970, presumably around the same period that Marcus wrote his infamous review. The *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* albums demonstrated Dylan’s awareness of a history of working in America, prominently in the output both albums offered at that moment. *Self Portrait*—Dylan later said he was throwing “everything [he] could think of at the wall and whatever stuck, released it”—presented variety and difference from its predecessors in order to distance Dylan from fans constantly expecting direction. The commercial reaction hardly reflected those desires, but the doors were open for a final retreat from the 1960s and complete break from cultural demands. When *New Morning* came out, hitting #7 in *Billboard*, the album received a warmer reception as it attacked similar expectations of what Dylan was supposed to mean. Revising his critical assessment from 1970, Greil Marcus commented in the essay for the reissue *Another Self Portrait*\textsuperscript{16}

in 2013 that “hiding in plain sight was clearly not going to work.” Paired together, as appropriate given the next hiatus Dylan commenced reveals the musician at work in 1970, the 2013 reissue highlights the styles and drive both albums shared by the artist behind them while indicating a broader construction of career direction and productivity from Dylan.17

Historically, Dylan’s retreat and hiatus between 1966-1974 seems to otherwise excise the “Voice of a Generation” from the landscape of the counterculture and economic decline, but Dylan’s lifestyle and work reflected cultural ideals rooted in the working class after World War II. Dylan’s overall career also instigates the formalization of the “singer-songwriter” within the music industry. Once he disrupted his counterculture leader label, his new output reflected Dylan’s status out from behind cultural and political expectations. From 1970, and starting fresh again in 1973, Dylan was a musician writing and performing materials that demonstrated personal interests, ideally unconstrained by cultural, political, and increasingly by industrial expectations. Debates over labor and family in the late 1960s and early 1970s questioned the preeminence of America and ideas of success generated by those specific attributes. Dylan, already a legendary American character, seemed to take on the developments in American society and culture even if he hardly intended to during 1966-1974 because he focused and secluded himself within his home, family, and work. Looking back though, Dylan’s insecurity during the hiatus is visible through the varied output he released, too. Mikal Gilmore noted an “unease eating at the edge of the song “Sign on the Window”,” from New Morning, as “Dylan’s assertion that love

and family “must be what it’s all about” came at the song’s end, as either consolation or pain to a man who understood that kinder dreams can be lost…” The strength found with his family proved short-lived as he and wife Sara divorced in the mid-1970s, but the skepticism pointed out in Gilmore’s exploration of the 1969-1971 period hints at the broader American experience Dylan encountered like fellow workers and families in the time.\(^{18}\)

Following the releases of *Self Portrait* and *New Morning,* Dylan retreated again and pursued personal interests, notably painting and filmmaking, before confronting Columbia Records on a new recording contract. After another three years out of the spotlight, new opportunities inspired Dylan to renew his recording career, but as his career shifted back to touring, it included those changes he struggled to achieve in the hiatus. As much as Jefferson Cowie or Natasha Zaretsky commented on the working class and labor in disarray as a result of political maneuvering and economic changes, Dylan’s multidirectional career through the 1966-1974 period shares similarities and commonalities with working Americans. Even if Dylan did not produce materials about the plight of labor or face hardships any way related to workers in America, Dylan inhabited a role similar to the loneliness and personal conflicts so many American workers and celebrities faced. As he prepared to return in 1973, Dylan also took up a “new” role tied to the histories of numerous musicians before him, that of an “itinerant worker.” His return to touring in 1974 and the gradual permanence of touring as a component of his trade by the late 1980s connects Dylan directly into the histories of musicians moving for work, dating back to Western

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\(^{18}\) Gilmore, “Dylan’s Lost Years,” 50.
Swing groups, the “Chitlin’ circuit,” rock ‘n’ roll pioneers, and his own career to 1966. Dylan’s long career built on the road, whether by design or necessity, demonstrates a worker committed to working and controlling his output, ultimately one that also eschews retirement or inability to work. The hiatus following his 1966 motorcycle crash allowed Dylan to achieve American ideals within the family structure, while his career generated tools necessary to protect that institution and take control of his work despite outside demands.19

**Myth Into Man, and Man Into Myth Again: Touring America in 1974**

The oft-referenced and hyped review of *Self Portrait* compiled for *Rolling Stone* by reviewer and frequent Dylan-writer Greil Marcus hypothesized that “Dylan is, if he wants to be, an American with a vocation.” In the midst of his eight-year hiatus from touring and performing to audiences, Dylan had revealed the music that personally motivated his work and formed the core of his training and musicianship. Marcus’s review, despite many references citing its opening “What is this shit?” otherwise illuminated the importance of Dylan and musicians throughout the 1960s—not as “prophets” but as workers in the music industry. Nevertheless, the harsh criticism reportedly negatively affected Dylan, and following the release of *New Morning* in October 1970, four months after *Self Portrait* he retreated again. Historian Jefferson Cowie argued that rock music overall “had lost much of what had given it authenticity by the early seventies” and Dylan’s recording retreat in the midst of his performing hiatus coincided with this assessment. Until January 3, 1974, he appeared only sporadically for live shows with close friends George Harrison and the Band.

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Although Dylan’s hiatus can be traced back to his motorcycle crash in July 1966, the renewed hiatus from recording after album *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* in 1970, respectively, highlighted his shift from the “Voice of a Generation” to a less politically and culturally-oriented musician, a man concerned with his family’s well-being, and an artist exploring interests outside music, like painting and filmmaking.\(^{20}\)

When approached to helm the soundtrack to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* in 1973, Dylan was also offered a minor role of the character “Alias” in the film and reportedly took great interest in the part. The soundtrack proved a fine point to restart a career, too, since Dylan was in the midst of negotiations with Columbia Records regarding his recording contract. According to a *Rolling Stone* article announcing Dylan’s new tour in early 1974, the musician acted as a “free agent” for the soundtrack, which was bought for release by Columbia Records. The sudden interest in music activities and a film role followed almost three years exploring other art forms, including painting and filmmaking, and demonstrated the beginning of Dylan’s shift completely away from the “Voice of a Generation.” By the end of 1973, rumors swirled and confirmed Dylan was prepping a return to touring and increased activities, indicating how Dylan planned to integrate developments within the 1966-1974 period into his career. The next phase of Dylan’s career looked very unlike past versions, yet harkened to components familiar and disdained, ultimately reflecting his “prophet”

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music, his rock music, and the work he maintained throughout 1966-1974, often built around personal interests struggling against cultural expectations.\textsuperscript{21}

Dylan held a series of recording sessions in November 1973 with previous performing partners the Band for a new joint album. Negotiations with Columbia Records had fallen through by this time and it was clear the label would not be releasing Dylan’s next project—which became the album \textit{Planet Waves}. In a sign of retaliation, Columbia released an album (of sorts) titled \textit{Dylan} and made up of outtakes and covers dating back to the 1969 and 1970 sessions for \textit{Self Portrait} and \textit{New Morning}. The album became the lowest rated in Dylan’s career, despite his dismissal of it and later prevention of any future reissues once he returned to Columbia in 1975. But, for critics and journalists, the sudden developments in Dylan’s recording contract and rumors about negotiations with several other recording companies fueled accurate speculations that he was prepping a new album and tour. In early December, promoter Bill Graham announced the details of a tour with the Band that took place from January 3 to February 14, 1974, and stopped in twenty-five cities. Dylan and the Band played thirty-nine shows on the tour, and released \textit{Planet Waves} two weeks after it started.\textsuperscript{22}

The tour was Dylan’s first since 1966, and at the time his largest and “most ambitious,” but aside from the initial announcement about the tour and how fans could purchase tickets, there was little other information or fanfare. Even the new album

\textsuperscript{21} Following his experiences with Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Dylan filmed his own project \textit{Renaldo and Clara} during the Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975, though the resulting film was a critical and commercial failure. Dylan’s film interests resurfaced with \textit{Masked and Anonymous}, another critical failure like \textit{Renaldo and Clara}, in 2003-2004.

\textsuperscript{22} Dylan’s preventing 1973’s \textit{Dylan} from future reissues in the United States after 1979 seemed to come to an end in 2013 when a “complete albums” box set was announced, and included a newly re-mastered version.
remained a rumor and David Geffen refused to reveal if his label Asylum Records was handling the release. The surprise and mystery surrounding the announcement escalated the tour’s reception and impact among fans and the performers. The tour ultimately enjoyed a resounding and intense level of interest from the public, earning Bob Dylan, the Band, and their representative’s hefty profits, and demonstrating Dylan’s continued popularity in American culture despite the eight-year hiatus. *Planet Waves* also sold well and seemed to confirm Dylan’s thoughts that Columbia Records simply went through motions when he put out new material. Geffen, however, celebrated his status and output, and Dylan gained more economic and legal control of his output from the deal made with Asylum Records. However, even with these renewed successes, Dylan “apparently tired quickly of the hoopla of big-city auditorium life” over the course of the tour and reports of his reflection about the first show in Chicago indicated a harsh personal assessment of the concert.23

The *Rolling Stone* article announcing Dylan’s tour with the Band followed a much different piece discussing problems within the music industry throughout 1973, and the magazine claimed the “rock boom” was over. Citing industrial executive concerns, increased choices in the marketplace and economic problems that caused more selective purchasing habits among young Americans tracked back into the mid-1960s. Additionally, the industry faced a shortage of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), the primary component of vinyl records, due to a shortage of petroleum oil and the

growing energy crisis across the globe. Costs to produce LPs increased and were transferred to American consumers, with prices rising from $5.98 to $6.98. Coincidentally, Columbia Records produced its own records as well as for numerous other labels (for a fee), but had been forced to reduce “new” albums and the weight of pressed LPs from 140 grams to 110, which indicated a product further diminished in quality. Furthermore, the article cites executive dismissals in 1973 as a cause for the decline of the music industry, including Clive Davis’s firing by Columbia Records for “alleged personal use of company funds.” Davis’s leadership of Columbia dated back five years and he was an executive supportive of Dylan and how Dylan worked as a writing, performing, and recording musician. Nevertheless, popular music remained a $2.1 billion/year industry and was larger in output and profits than the film industry, television, and professional sports. Despite Rolling Stone’s claiming an end to the “rock boom” and decline of the music industry, the realities were much more complex, as new developments and styles generated music that attracted different groups and exhibited alternative tastes challenging rock music and its “traditional” white audiences.24

Disco music, in particular, challenged the dominance of rock music and its audiences, and historian Alice Echols has argued that disco offered a unique identity to the 1970s against claims that the decade was both an extension of the 1960s and precursor to the 1980s. As a complex and diverse style, rooted in developments across the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, disco offered a complimentary voice to often downtrodden or overlooked groups as conservative backlash reacted against civil

24 “Goodbye to the Industry’s Golden Years?,” Rolling Stone (December 6, 1973), 16 and 20. In 2013, the standard new vinyl weighs between 180-200 grams.
rights movements, such as African American men and women, and gay men. Over the course of the 1970s, disco achieved mainstream success and eventually found an audience among the white male population undergoing struggles at work and home. Echols’ discussion of the 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever* demonstrates how the working class confronted social and cultural changes in the 1970s and the role of disco in the restructuring of gender and sex politics within the working class and heterosexual white male culture. If disco cultivated audiences outside the white working class, yet impacted that culture by its popularity and backlash, then musicians like Dylan shared in those developments by offering nonpolitical versions of previously socially critical songs, like “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” in the mid-1970s, without condemning or supporting the latest popular music in American culture. Dylan’s career provided few ties to cultural backlash, but the renewed productivity spurred by successes of *Planet Waves* and the 1974 tour played into political and cultural developments as he took up new causes and religious activity when he converted to born again Christianity five years later. The tour reinforced his status as a rock musician, tied to performing and masculinity, but his repertoire reflected larger and personal influences and his status as a singer-songwriter.²⁵

The coincidental pairing of Dylan’s tour announcement and the end of the “rock boom” in *Rolling Stone* also predicted questions about the economics and gross profits that factored in Dylan’s decision to tour in 1974. In a later article, Dylan responded that the tour “wasn’t planned to take advantage of a lull in the music business, or to make a statement in a time of national crisis. ‘I saw daylight,’ he said.

²⁵ Echols, xxiv-xxvi and 159-194.
'I just took off.'” However, ticket prices and predictions about the expected revenues caused a great deal of criticism for Dylan. Some concerts on the tour priced $9.50 per ticket, and no stop dropped below $6.50, even in “college towns” (presumably smaller venues with fewer ticket opportunities). Ultimately, contemporary reports about the tour profits and biographers have placed gross revenue for the tour over $5 million and net profits for the performers at least $2.5 million, indications of the tour’s success and Dylan’s continued popularity despite economic conditions in 1973-1974 and eight years in hiatus. Coupled with a new record deal and the success of Planet Waves, the effects on Dylan’s personal wealth are hard to ignore, especially reviewing the album and tour as indicative of Dylan’s career in the trade and supporting notions about the working class. Moreover, Rolling Stone writer David Felton pointed out reactions based on the tour announcement that the tour was designed for revenue and nothing more than promotion for Planet Waves and Dylan.26

Questions regarding motivations on Dylan’s part and the decision to tour for a new album are not easily detached from the period, but those were also standard business practices in the music industry at the time and countless artists and performers worked accordingly. Dylan reportedly left Columbia after his contract expired in January 1973 over financial matters, and the deal with Geffen, initially only for one studio and one live album (planning for a successful return), included substantial recorded and publishing rights granted to Dylan and the Band. That Columbia released the cobbled Dylan album as an act of revenge and also as an effort to keep Dylan by not releasing it if he stayed. Nevertheless, these career developments

and cultural impact taking place in 1973-1974 demonstrated Dylan’s efforts to fully grasp control over his career, its output, and the directions he chose to take without industrial or audience pressures. The tour capitalized on Dylan, and fans recognized that “Dylan is trying to reestablish that there is a Dylan around” while Dylan told reporters his intent was “to play his music for the people;” but journalists noted the people wanted “The Word” and not only music. If only money drove these developments, it aligned Dylan closer to the struggles of industrial workers in the 1970s, while maintaining the folk traditions of working songs and attracting audiences because his cultural status was part of a rebellion in American culture.27

Fan hopes and expectations for what Bob Dylan represented and how a new tour by the fabled “Voice of a Generation” emphasized the prominent cultural position Dylan held, as well as the fame associated with his career and music. The announcement for the tour instructed fans, referred to as “applicants,” to send in ticket requests, called “applications,” with payments to specific post office boxes by a certain date and all requests were to be handled as applications on a first-arrived, first-served basis. The tour’s promoter Bill Graham estimated around 1.2 million requests

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27 Fong-Torres, “Knockin’ on Dylan’s Door,” 38; Considering the music produced for Planet Waves and reception of the album, certain songs conveyed elements of what Dylan strived to achieve away from touring in 1966-1974. Greil Marcus, commenting on “Wedding Song,” the final track on Planet Waves: “A man goes out into the world; he is bedeviled by its traps, seduced by its delights. If he a fool he is determined not to remain one; he tries to read the signs God and the devil have scattered in the world, and he builds slowly toward a moral stance. He makes choices and suffers by them, and grows both stronger and more wary. He tries to get across what he has learned to the crowd, but finds they don’t listen too well; whether they do or not, he feels he has at least told the truth. Finally he returns home and meets his wife, down there at the core, and the two of them take off to have a drink, to make love, to get some rest. He’s worked hard, and he’s earned his reward. … “Wedding Song” says that all the struggles of the world are present in the reward as well; the struggle only shifts to another plane. I think Dylan was trying to get across such a sense of struggle and reward on Planet Waves, and that he didn’t make it, because he has been out of the world too long, and the songs remain too personal.” Greil Marcus, “Heavy Breathing,” Creem (May 1974), in Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus: Writings, 1968-2010 (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), 51-52.
were made for the shows in New York alone, and Madison Square Garden had a capacity of 58,500 over the three shows held there. Applicants were further limited to four tickets at any of the prices and Graham later boasted that most fans “requested four tickets … at the top price.” Further estimates regarding ticket sales placed the total number of applications at five million, and it was known that $93 million was sent in with applications.\(^28\)

After the tour, Graham estimated 1.5 to 2 million envelopes with applications were received before the deadline, while those received afterward were returned to sender. Every concert sold out “immediately,” and tickets were awarded to the “lucky first 658,000 applicants,” an achievement Graham claimed was “rather monumental.” Graham also called the tour “the biggest financial response for any event in entertainment history” based on the application method. Interestingly, the method meant “applicants” lined up at post offices hoping to gain the necessary postmark to demonstrate mailed “applications” before the deadlines. Categorization of hopeful audiences through applications and applicants hinted at promotion and industry attempts to capitalize on Dylan and the Band. While Dylan and the Band played no role in ticket sales, the method seemed designed to present the concerts as unique access to music and output by the performers. The massive response demonstrated the value of the musicians and their product existed even after Dylan’s long hiatus, as well that the “Voice of a Generation” was expected.\(^29\)

As the tour started, *Time* magazine reported on its impact, citing calculations “that 7.5% of the population of the U.S. had requested tickets to see Dylan and his

\(^28\) Fong-Torres, “Knockin’ on Dylan’s Door,” 41; Watts, “Chimes of Freedom.”

bluesy bayou back-up group, the Band.” Numerous reports also noted how little
attention was paid to audiences, the performers focusing on the performance without
the reactions changing the mood of their work. For a musician, working to perform
and entertain for wages, the distance from the audience relies on forms of management
promoting and selling the product. The worker lacks direct contact with consumer,
while the product speaks for work and quality. In entertainment, the expectations may
be different and with Dylan, in particular, hopes for a message persisted even when he
disrupted cultural expectations and demands. Music affords dynamic change and
opportunities for revision, as well, while attracting audiences to the familiar, Dylan
increasingly changed arrangements and altered songs to match his own interests—over
his career some songs became nearly unrecognizable from popular versions. So, while
the music related to a time period of rebellion without worker’s facing economic
problems, the tour presented “two and a half hours of music that was often
professional and entertaining.” For Melody Maker reporter Michael Watts, the tour
presented no change in Dylan or the Band: “Eight years, and it’s just like yesterday.
Myth into man, and man into myth again, right there before our eyes.” Despite
attempts to disrupt the “Voice of a Generation,” the 1974 tour ultimately resulted in
myth continuing to overshadow Dylan’s trade and output.30

The dynamic must be attributed to the early responses and overall success of
the 1974 tour, as he received a “hero’s reception” from 20,000 audience members
shouting “Welcome back” the first night in Chicago on January 3. Michael Watts
conversely described “a lack of emotion” in his response attributed to “a psychological

30 David DeVoss, “Dylan: Once Again, It’s Alright Ma,” Time (January 21, 1974), 32; Watts, “Chimes
of Freedom.”
reaction, mentally screening off the soon-to-be-faced fact that Dylan, who embodied
his generation, was an extinguished flame, valiantly trying to fan the park after the
match had gone out.” Watts also expressed concerns that the tour was really about
money, but ultimately his reception changed once Dylan and the Band took the stage
thirty minutes late. Here was a musician “as right as all great truths, putting the
musical achievement of the past decade into some perspective as well as defining his
own relevance,” and the audience “wasn’t a typical rock concert crowd by any means
… the mood was subdued and respectful, a little ruminative one might say.”

Two weeks into the tour, Asylum Records released the delayed *Planet Waves*
album, with initial orders of around 500,000. Another 100,000 copies sold the end of
1974, but Dylan was not impressed by the distribution mechanisms of Geffen’s
operations or the ultimate sales. After supplying Geffen with the live album *Before the
Flood*, pulled from recordings made on the tour, Dylan negotiated with Columbia
Records again and returned to his old label, albeit with greater control and rights over
his output and materials—there would not be any threats about another *Dylan*-type
album in the future, and ultimately that release went out of print by request of the
artist. The monumental success of the 1974 tour compares heartily to the
representative set list compiled for *Before the Flood*. No track from *Planet Waves* was
included, even though the hit single “Forever Young” remained on concert set lists
throughout the tour even as other tracks from *Planet Waves* disappeared. The live

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Thomson and Patrick Humphries (Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat Books, 2011), 196; Watts, “Chimes of
Freedom.”

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album thus provided another opportunity for Dylan (and the Band) fans to relive the 1974 tour, and the “Voice of a Generation” in their youths.

Reports of the 1974 tour concerts published by writers like Watts provide fitting glimpses into audience receptions, as well as hopes for what the tour might have meant for a renewed Dylan career: “it was justly fitting for Dylan that the concert should be a celebration of his past while hinting at his future.” The complexity of expectations surrounding the tour, from the hype and nostalgia among audiences to the intents presumed and proposed for Dylan and the Band, illustrate the value of touring and impact the work provided for musicians, audiences, and American society. After two decades of rock ‘n’ roll and the expansion of popular music into a major American industry, the components of writing, recording, and performing combined to make every aspect “big business” in the historical and critical definitions. Touring, in particular, provided vast revenue for artists, management, and to some extents the record labels, though Dylan and the Band exerted a control over their touring outside industry forces.

Writing in *Hit Parader*, Lisa Robinson complained about the general intent of touring, referring to it as “big business … only the big groups with powerful booking and powerful management … are able to get any kind of exposure these days.” Robinson suggested Dylan’s tour offered a kind of “relief” to audiences, accustomed to “a few years of loud, freak rock”:

“Glitter and makeup (although Dylan did wear face makeup on this tour!) turned a lot of people off, audiences who wanted to hear something they could relate to were repulsed by theatrics such as those employed by Alice Cooper… or the noise of Grand Funk, or the show business professionalism of Three Dog Night. The Aristocrats—the
really big groups like the Rolling Stones, Zeppelin, the Who—only came round once a year or two. So for some, the Dylan tour was nostalgia. It’s like after all the freaky psychedelia of the San Francisco scene in the late 1960s, the obvious backlash was a rash of singer/songwriters…”

But, Dylan was the prime example of a singer-songwriter, and his work and output in the years before the tour hardly reflected “backlash” to the psychedelia of the counterculture—just dismissal. If anything, his audiences were nostalgic for the components that gave impetus to and inspirations for the counterculture and even the “freak rock” that followed. Assessing the future of Dylan’s career based on the 1974 tour to that point, Robinson further predicted, “If he intends to continue his career as a musician, both on the performing stage and in the recording studio, he will have to be judged as a musician in the truly contemporary sense.” The problem for Robinson was Dylan could never live up to audience hopes based on that depth of nostalgia.

Fortunately, reviewing the tour, the 1966-1974 hiatus, and the subsequent Rolling Thunder Revue, embarking on a long career based around the “Voice of a Generation” was not in Dylan’s plans.32

By all contemporary reports, and listening through the representative live album Before the Flood, the tour was not simply about re-hashing old material and inviting audience nostalgia. The songs remained essentially the same, but arrangements and styles differ from the popular versions of a decade earlier. Despite personal expectations for identical reproductions, from the audiences or even critical appraisals, the repertoire of materials available, renewed collaborative efforts between Dylan and the Band, and spontaneity and improvisation on the tour, meant the songs

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were going to be presented differently. Some complained about “the harder, snappier way he’s singing some of the older songs,” but Dylan replied he was not being “mean” to audiences. Nostalgia ultimately intersected with Dylan’s work, including his status as a singer-songwriter and the history associated with the label “Voice of a Generation.”

“There’s the realization that the songs I’m singing mean as much to the people as to me, so it’s just up to me to perform the best I can. … For me, it’s just reinforcing those images in my head that were there, that don’t die, that will be there tomorrow. And in doing so for myself, hopefully also for those people who also had those images. … there’s still a message. But the same electric spark that went off back then could still go off again—the spark that led to nothing. Our kids will probably protest, too. Protest is an old thing. … There’s always a need for protest songs. You just gotta tap it. … You’ll always stretch things out or cut it up, just to keep interested. If you can’t stay interested that way, you’ll have to lose track. But I’m me now, that’s the way it comes out.”

When Dylan returned, his career was transformed by new inspirations, new work, and new critical appraisals that did not match the cultural value ascribed to his folk and rock periods. His music contrasted with the popular styles in the mid-1970s, but still enjoyed popularity and revenues. The 1974 tour with the Band demonstrated that despite an eight-year hiatus and self-described creative lull, Bob Dylan remained relevant and influential to audiences and critics.33

Considering the differences between buying records and buying concert tickets, Del Porter of the L.A. Voice commented how record buyers had “the option of buying or not buying, a judgment that should be based on hearing the product, either on the radio, through friends or, as a final alternative, after reading about it in

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33 Fong-Torres, “Knockin’ On Dylan’s Door,” 44; see Echols, 72. Echols points out how rock musicians “transformed rock into ‘art’—serious, and resonant with meaning,” distinct from pop, which became feminine and the domain of teenyboppers, while “rock as art” reflected social and political issues.
reviews.” Alternatively, concert audiences had “no such option: you buy your ticket, and then settle for what is thrown at you. No options after purchase; no refunds.” This sentiment seems to apologize and criticize at once issues like musician productivity and quality of output, notions not lost on American workers in the 1970s. If the “concert tour … was for Dylan’s audience,” designed to dredge up years of unaccepted profits, then per Porter’s contention it was no surprise that “Dylan and the Band settled on a program aimed at hitting as many fans, gathered at as many points in their career as possible.” However, if reviewed in the context of the consumer commodity culture generated in the postwar United States, the output of the tour matched consumer expectations, demonstrated productivity, and exhibited highly regarded quality of their work in music and on stage.34

When Greil Marcus reviewed Before the Flood, he figured the album “may turn out to be the least played Dylan record since Self Portrait,” because it revealed Dylan was not a “generational symbol.” Commenting directly on the album, and its representation of the tour:

“… the use of old songs is both a failed attempt to recreate a glorious past and an admission that Dylan cannot create in the present; that he no longer has any real relationship to the generation he helped recognize itself. It is said that at best the album is a substitution of physical energy for the imagination and innovation of better days. … Dylan’s generation dissolved as its members grew up. Dylan, quite some time ago, turned his back on the putative generation, just as he abandoned the structures of his old styles, and joined a bigger, more complex America. … Dylan now performs as an American artist, not a generational symbol.”

In dismissing Before the Flood, and ultimately the 1974 tour itself, Marcus hit the importance of Dylan’s return for the musician, his audience, and American culture in

the 1970s. This was an important revelation to consider, however, since playing a larger role in America afforded Dylan closer ties to listeners and consumers without offering a message or giving direction.

“Once, Bob Dylan cruised the strip with a cool eye, keeping his distance. Now, he’s right in the middle, and so are we. You hear Garth Hudson waltzing you down the road, making you feel as if it’s going to be a pleasant, Tom Sawyer sort of trip, and then suddenly he’s calling down from the mountain, Gabriel bent on Judgment Day, and yes, you’d better run, if only to keep up. That is the burden of joining a bigger, more mysterious America, of abandoning the comforts of my-generation. And to enter the center that will not hold, to affirm it, to do one’s work there—that is not, I think, a harmless act.”

Neither tour nor record revealed the “Voice of a Generation” but the tour committed to reveling in that history and those expectations while initiating new opportunities and openings.35

Dylan’s work in 1974 proves vitally important to understanding how popular entertainers and celebrities existed within American work culture and seemingly outside it, often to the point that their “work” is negated solely as a leisure activity. In the context of the “consumer commodity culture” following World War II efforts by workers to qualify gains made in the war, the 1970s presented struggles American workers were unprepared to manage. As service industry positions increasingly surpassed industrial manufacturing, and redefined notions of workplace productivity and output quality, new campaigns emerged to emphasize craftsmanship in the American workplace, including the “degraded forms of work” like fast food. Historian Natasha Zaretsky emphasized these efforts were designed to restore pride in the

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goods’ workers produced in the 1970s, after the decline of the American economy and new imported goods challenged American dominance. Musicians in the 1970s equally fared poorly in the redefinition of their work, notably “minority groups” and performers distanced from their output by technological and stylistic developments. Disco performers were denied authenticity because producers and technicians were seen in control of the entire process of writing, recording, and to a certain extent performing. But these groups compared to the service industry by providing a good consumers craved, and by playing his most recognizable materials, Dylan, too, demonstrated aspects of a “degraded form of work.” Those critics that charged the tour was about money challenged Dylan’s and the Band’s productivity, and the quality of their work.36

The dilemma for traditional images of labor in the white male worker during the 1970s was the lack of any one representation of prolonged success in the wake of the 1960s and counterculture. In an environment full of challenging confrontations, where other American groups laid prominent and diverse claims to cultural success and political equality, the economics and images fractured and the white male worker lacked a distinct form for identification and relevance. For historian Jefferson Cowie, the “rock innovators” utilized country music to explore claims of authenticity and artistry, while historian Alice Echols demonstrates forms of productivity and performance in disco outside normal and accepted modes. By the end of the 1970s, groups that supported disco and rock battled for dominance as the image of a unified labor faltered and fractured. Rock music, despite continued creativity and artistry,

36 Zaretsky, 130-135.
emerged as emblematic of the white male worker and fit squarely into a music industry that celebrated those traits at the expense of success generated outside those parameters.

As white men, both Dylan and the Band fit into the “economic expansion of the postwar period,” even though the musicians factored in cultural growth rather than the heavy manufacturing industries. Like numerous rock musicians in the 1970s, Dylan and the Band perpetuated rock music as white, male, and working class. Disco and its popularity challenged the dominance of the “male industrial worker” as “both the symbol and agent of American dominance,” but Dylan failed to directly address concerns among his audience. Instead he offered a repackaging of hits in 1974 that harkened to 1960s youth while simultaneously attracting audiences increasingly opposed to disco and the challenges its performers made to dominant strands of American society and culture. Dylan’s hiatus denied the label “Voice of a Generation” by doing exactly the things that 1960s counterculture seemed to protest against: getting married, making a home, starting a family, and working to secure his lifestyle and trade.

Dylan was not working class, however, in fact he was raised in a family defined more appropriately as middle class in the 1940s and 1950s, and never faced economic worries like other Americans. But, cultural expectations caused hardships and forced Dylan to evaluate that problematic label and the reactions he faced as both a folk singer and rock musician in the mid-1960s. Coincidentally, the counterculture forces that labeled Dylan a “Voice of a Generation” were predominantly middle-class white Americans, who also never experienced the realities of being working class.
Dylan’s rejection turned him into a family man between 1966 and 1974, and he worried about his wife, his kids, their home, and their safety. For Americans in the 1970s, these aspects factored heavily in worries, struggles, and backlash at social and cultural developments like the counterculture. Natasha Zaretsky has argued that fears of national decline in the 1970s were directly related to fears about the decline of the American family as a source for stability and strength in the face of various uncertainties. Dylan told an interviewer in 1974 that, “a family brings the world together. You can see it’s all one. It paints a better picture than being with a chick and traveling all over the world. Or hanging out all night.” Without delivering a message, Dylan offered a vision of Americans and the working class through continuing to work despite professional and personal problems. Again, however, we must confront the economic realities of American workers facing dilemmas in productivity, output, and the family, where Dylan’s recordings and lifestyle remained connected to 1960s movements and messages.37

When the tour in 1974 finished in late February, Bob Dylan promised fans he would see them again the following year, but no follow-up tour materialized until late October 1975. But, in returning to the stage in 1974, Dylan’s career gradually took on aspects of performing that fit American traditions of work and life on the road. Migration to find work was a staple American cultural attribute, and musicians had occupied that role heartily by providing a “service” and consumer commodities to communities throughout the history of the United States. Dylan’s music before and after 1974 certainly did not enjoy unanimous praise or endure harsh criticism, but in

returning to touring and charting a career path defined by that work, Dylan shaped an image fitting him into notions of American history and society, particularly of a worker, and more specifically an itinerant worker. Americans in the 1970s, facing economic problems and questions about labor may not have made any widespread efforts to find work outside their communities, but musicians catered to fears by presenting idealized images of work and less conflicted visions of their successes and messages. Dylan’s return in 1974 revitalized his career success and creativity. The promises he made to continue touring took time to fulfill and fully map, but in late 1975 Dylan returned again with an entirely different idea for a concert. The experiences in 1974 illustrated further demand for Dylan’s productivity, but the subsequent experience emphasized quality of music as a consumer commodity and community tool.

**Welcome to Your Living Room: The Rolling Thunder Revue and History**

On October 30, 1975, Bob Dylan and an assembled “troupe” of musicians and friends kicked off a six-week tour called the “Rolling Thunder Revue.” Unlike Dylan’s 1974 tour, the “Revue” targeted smaller venues to more intimately connect with audiences. Dating back to the 1973 planning for his tour with the Band, Dylan expressed desires to “play for the people,” but was persuaded by management and organizers to play larger venues. Rock tour criticisms in the 1970s pointed out the enterprises as “big business” with minimized interactions between performers and audiences. When the Revue rolled out from Plymouth, Massachusetts in late October 1975, the performers traveled together in a caravan of buses and vans to destinations and tour stops, not a hired jet that nearly afforded direct transport from show to show.
The performers, including Bob Dylan, Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, Joan Baez, poet Allen Ginsberg, and other musician friends, made up a traveling community, and constituted Dylan’s modern form of circus. In the wake of the 1974 tour, and the impersonality of rock concerts, the Rolling Thunder Revue offered community and comfort to audiences through invitations of safety and home. Opening the concerts with “Welcome to your living room,” Dylan and the Revue treated their rock audiences to a ruminative affair, affirming values of the postwar working class by revisiting the folk movement and labor struggles rooted in the 1930s-1940s. In the strife and uncertainties of the 1970s, the Revue offered an idealized past, back to a time period when the working class was growing stronger and American productivity signaled world power.\textsuperscript{38}

Much of the historical legacy and considerations of the Rolling Thunder Revue have revolved around the attempts by Dylan and other performers to recreate a circus environment through stage organization and the community held among the performers. Historian Sean Wilentz’s chapter devoted to the tour in Bob Dylan in America provides the background to these elements of the tour, as well as his personal connections and experiences as a member of the audience when it stopped in New Haven, Connecticut. In particular, Wilentz’s examination glimpses the complex projects at work within and behind the tour, from Dylan’s renewed activism related to Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, to his filmmaking interests on tour that emerged as Renaldo and Clara in 1978. Wilentz’s intimacy and discussion further hint at Dylan’s work and

\textsuperscript{38} Larry Sloman, “Bob Dylan and Friends on the Bus: Like a Rolling Thunder,” Rolling Stone, December 4, 1975, 18; Wilentz, 168. Wilentz described a “richer historical layer to the tour, more out of the American 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s … sheltered in some of the old red brick New England towns and cities where the revue played …”
his desires to perform for the people, despite the “merchandising wisdom of the day” since it was not immediately clear in November 1975 that a new album was being supported—the single “Hurricane” came out as the tour started, but the album *Desire* came out in early January 1976 after the tour wrapped. Playing small shows “for the people,” rather than in big-city auditoriums, revealed a re-energized Dylan following the 1974 tour, as Wilentz conveys, “Dylan was on fire, eager to perform his newest work … along with revised versions of older material.” The Revue was not designed to fulfill contractual obligations, a new recording deal, or even support Dylan’s latest recordings, including *Blood on the Tracks* recorded a year earlier, in the fall of 1974.39

The Rolling Thunder Revue followed a planned, low-key schedule, initially limited to small venues in twenty-three cities, but as the tour proceeded some arena shows were included, meaning audience sizes ranged from 1800 to 13,000. However, like Dylan’s 1974 tour, tickets remained similarly priced—between $6.50-$9.50 depending on the venue—and every seat in the specific venue was priced equally. The Revue originated following the production of Dylan’s album *Desire*; he set up a rehearsal space for the band featured on the album, and started inviting friends and more musicians to join the rehearsals and the “troupe” in September and October 1975. The idea for the tour simmered with Dylan before the album was recorded, he reportedly mentioned doing “something like a circus” to Roger McGuinn over a game of driveway basketball at home in Malibu the previous summer. Dylan returned to New York to record *Desire* and carried “ideas about a rambling, tumbling tour of the northeast … It wouldn’t be announced, it would just ‘happen’.” This intention differed

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39 Wilentz, 149-150.
dramatically from Dylan’s 1974 tour with the Band, as well as other contemporary concert tours, where hype and “hoopla” created interest, excitement, and expectations, driving success critically and commercially. The organization for the Rolling Thunder Revue purposefully avoided this marketing tactic, taking on a smaller schedule in obscure cities that (intentionally) resembled a traveling circus.\(^{40}\)

After rehearsing for three weeks in October 1975 at the Other End in Greenwich Village, the Revue kicked off in Plymouth, Massachusetts, at the War Memorial Auditorium, to a very small audience of around 200. This figure easily summed up the Revue, as the promoters marketed the tour with little fanfare in the visited communities. They started small-scale poster and radio advertisements, even focusing on college stations, about a week before the Revue arrived and relied extensively on word of mouth to attract audiences to venues, at least initially. Although this meant early shows carried small audiences, before the end of the tour knowledge about the Revue and its performers spurred bookings at larger venues and greater awareness. From the small atmosphere of Plymouth’s War Memorial Auditorium, the Revue played through college auditoriums and gymnasiums, as well as larger basketball-arenas like Madison Square Garden in New York, the venue that closed the first leg of the tour in December 1975 for a benefit show intended to raise money for Rubin Carter’s defense fund. Although stops maintained an impromptu

\(^{40}\) Wilentz, 142; Shelton, 309. \textit{Desire} band members consisted of bassist Rob Stoner, drummer Howie Wyeth, and violinist Scarlet Rivera. Dylan also invited Roger McGuinn, T-Bone Burnett, Steven Soles, David Mansfield, and Ronee Blakley, to join the tour rehearsals.
nature, in reality organizers planned out the concerts and contracted venue managers to remain quiet, and the final shows played larger venues to offset tour costs.41

At every concert, the Revue meant to harken back to the American past, but many audiences looked forward to seeing Dylan and the performers and the efforts and extravagance of the stage and sets was lost. Paying attention to Dylan’s excursion, journalists and reporters compared the Revue to typical rock concerts in the 1970s and remarked on the differences. In the New York Times, John Rockwell reflected how the tour made a “symbolic correction” of the increasing reliance on large venues like basketball arena or gigantic stadiums, and that “the tour ... represents the loose institutionalization of both that club spirit and the desire to play directly to the fans.” Despite this accolade about the difference to typical concerts, Dylan and the performers denied these attributes when critics cited problems of the organization and audience complaints over ticket prices and venue sizes. Audience reception in the towns visited by the Revue was warm, but some complained ticket prices did not account for patrons far from the stage, or that some venues lacked adequate or modern sound systems to amplify the performances. Rolling Stone contributors Ben Fong-Torres and Larry Sloman articulated those complaints as they emerged from selected shows, in particular the Burlington, Vermont, and New Haven, Connecticut, shows (the latter the focus of Wilentz’s discussion in Bob Dylan in America). In New Haven, at Veterans Memorial Coliseum, many complained about the ticket price and how the music failed to reach throughout the venue. At the show in Burlington, Vermont,

41 Bill Graham argued in 1973 (for the 1974 tour), that reception would be large and travel costs, including the use of a private plane for Dylan and the Band, prohibited a tour as envisioned “playing to the people.”

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Rosalie Sorrels, a friend of the performers, in particular Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, called the Revue a “rip-off” because the college gym “was oversold” and from the “jammed” doorways audience members failed to see or hear the show properly. When asked about the size of the venue and price of tickets by his friend, Ramblin’ Jack reflected that he needed money and wanted a boat: “I’ve wanted a boat since I was 14 years old.”

While rumors circulated that the Revue was meant to play “nightclubs” and small venues, the direct opposite of the 1974 tour, Dylan and other musicians shrugged this off. Dylan, and Joan Baez in particular, reflected about the demands of going on the road and the costs of putting the tour together, including the staff needed to orchestrate the shows. As usual, Dylan’s responses remained typically unclear, denying the rumor on the one hand, and planning for further small shows on the other, he claimed he did not know where the Revue was booked: “we’re just playing the halls.” Reporters increased the scrutiny paid to the claim that the performers “played for the people.” But, this claim was also leveled at Dylan’s 1974 tour with the Band, and both included organization and planning that capitalized upon the fame and status Dylan held in the mid-1960s. According to Larry “Ratso” Sloman, a reporter for Rolling Stone asked personally (by his accounts) to accompany the tour on its journey, “the idea behind the tour, Dylan said, was to ‘play for the people,’ the people who never get the choice seats at a Dylan concert because they’re occupied by friends and

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celebrities” but the Revue “had also been planned as a spiritual reunion of the early Sixties.” John Rockwell similarly called the Revue “the most American and most democratic of all Mr. Dylan’s performing ventures” and applauded him for bridging a closer connection to his audience.43

The Revue channeled an “old-fashioned,” “vaudevillian feel” on stage, more akin to a “pageant or a fete,” according to historian Sean Wilentz, who attended the “matinee” in New Haven, Connecticut. When audiences arrived, a yellow stage curtain draped the stage, featuring the name of the show and the concert started with “gypsy-like musicians standing on a funky carpet, and they were playing instruments that were incongruous in the age of disco music – including mandolin, violins, and big, old acoustic guitars.” From this perplexing beginning, which lasted roughly half-an-hour, the show incorporated performances by Ramblin’ Jack, Mick Ronson, Joni Mitchell (for three shows), and other performers with the Revue band. Joan Baez admitted this arrangement created positive relationships between everyone in the troupe, “because everybody has some room onstage … [Dylan] said the guys in the band have to work day and night and so each of them ought to get some attention.”44

Tour director (and songwriter with Dylan on Desire) Jacques Levy timed Dylan’s entrance for dramatic effect: stage lights dimmed, the folk hero stepped out almost invisible on the dark stage, before Levy raised the lights and the audience cheered loudly. At the first show in Plymouth, Dylan wore a plastic mask over his face

44 Wilentz, 132 and 168-169; Sounes, 196; Hentoff, “The Pilgrim’s Have Landed on Kerouac’s Grave,” 35.
for the first number “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” before removing it and revealing himself, though his face was still covered in white paint—he claimed he did this so audience members in the back could make him out easier. The Revue played for over four hours some nights, though Dylan typically performed for about an hour: with the band, by himself, and in duets with Joan Baez. The second half of concerts began with a Dylan-Baez duet, before both played solo sets and the show ended with “This Land is Your Land.” The audience was treated to more than a rock concert: the Revue included political lectures (and two benefit concerts), poems read by Allen Ginsberg, and a variety of theatrical elements. Those in attendance witnessed “an oddly timeless journey: a rambling, almost casual camper and bus tour of college towns and blue-collar community halls.”

By making more intimate connections with fans and audiences through playing smaller venues, the Revue complicated designs to match a circus because it relied on components of the music industry and performers reputations to drive success. Larry Sloman reported Dylan told him that playing smaller venues, such as Plymouth’s War Memorial Coliseum, “is more conducive to what we do.” Dylan’s reputation as the “Voice of a Generation” seemed bolstered by renewed relationships with countercultural forces like folk musicians Ramblin’ Jack Elliott and Joan Baez, and Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, and the concerts ended with a full Revue performance of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land,” a tactic Wilentz commented “[concluded] where Dylan’s proper artistic career had begun.” The performers that

\[\text{\textsuperscript{45}}\text{Pat Toomay, “Buffalo Bills Meet Rolling Thunder: Bob Dylan Scores,” } \textit{Rolling Stone}, \text{January 1, 1976, 13: “In short, the tour grew less to resemble standard concert format and began to take on the overtures of a variety show: entertainment on a grand scale”;}\text{ James Willwerth, “Music and Dance: the Masked Man,” } \textit{Time}, \text{November 17, 1975, 69-70.}\]
made up the Revue band, and even specific musicians like Baez, had “set fees” agreed to for taking part, pointing to a very arranged, and hardly improvised tour that wound through a sleepy northeast in the fall of 1975. Dylan’s exact role within the “community” of the Revue troupe was even minimal, as his off-stage whereabouts were kept guarded and secret. Of course, for audience members, these details would have been unknown and not regarded as components of the music industry and careers maintained by the working musicians. The Revue offered a cultural alternative to 1970s developments as Americans struggled and fought over economic decline and political backlash to the previous decade. The tour illustrated Dylan’s trade and musicians at work as much as traveling in a circus community and inspiring audiences.46

The participants of the Rolling Thunder Revue all reportedly shared similar intents and motivations for taking part in the tour and enjoyed operating within the Revue community. Coming years after the counterculture of the 1960s, the rationales for the designs of the Revue looked backwards to confront the realities of work and American society in the 1970s. In the Rolling Stone cover story by Nat Hentoff, Allen Ginsberg called the Rolling Thunder Revue “a signal to the country” like the cultural developments of the 1950s and 1960s:

“What happened in the San Francisco renaissance of the mid-Fifties was one of those signals that characterize the rise of a generation’s poetic consciousness and its sense of social rebellion. And that happened in the very mindset of McCarthyism. Then, in the mid-Sixties, the peace marches and the rise of rock—the Beatles and things like that—were among the signals for a further rising of consciousness, a wider sense of community. Now, the Rolling Thunder Revue will be

one of the signal gestures characterizing the working cultural community that will make the Seventies.”

To create a successor to the Beats and the Hippies Ginsberg emphasized Americans would have “to get back to work or keep on working … because the work that went before has been good, even though people got discouraged.” However, inspiring Americans to such bold pronouncements required more than a “different tour,” in this case it meant looking back without the strife of the previous decades in order to compose a scenario where Americans could find comfort in their own homes and working realities.47

Writing about the working class in the 1970s, historian Jefferson Cowie argued “the search for a politics of authenticity that informed, and ultimately failed, the Port Huron generation had collapsed in the face of formal politics by the 1970s.” As the musicians in the Revue struggled to present an alternative to a rock concert, despite being categorized largely as rock musicians, this meant they worked to present music as an art form outside the traditions and community they formulated earlier in their careers. Cowie emphasizes that these disconnections distanced the success of endeavors like the Revue because “working people believed that a good time could certainly be had, but communal joy—and certainly the release of inhibitions—were misguided goals.” However, it seems clear that the Revue and increasingly Dylan’s career shifted to reflect not specific goals, but strictly entertainment and leisure through his trade and work, even if the Revue and later tours included political and social goals directed at audiences (the circus in 1975, born-again Christianity in 1978-1980). What Dylan offered was unlike emerging musicians, like Bruce Springsteen, or

artists like Johnny Cash, that directly celebrated or spoke to immediate concerns of the working class. As he disrupted the “Voice of a Generation” and embarked on new and different tours, Dylan presented forms of nostalgia and history that catered to hopes and dreams fulfilled and possibly lost.  

The “remains of the working-class hero of the 1930s were pulled into … fragments in the early 1970s” according to Cowie, but Dylan’s revived career illustrates how the hopes of the working class persisted, even though Dylan hardly wanted to lead another movement. While his tours revealed continued popularity and stayed musicianship, Dylan’s recorded output enjoyed a critical and commercial revival as well, and the albums that followed the 1974 tour and Rolling Thunder Revue paralleled rock themes as well as personal insights from a musician detached from the connections he held to the counterculture and youth movements. Without exploring Dylan’s often denial of intent or inherent messages to songs and meanings, from the start of the 1974 tour to the Desire album that influenced the Revue, here were songs performed and recorded that hinted at loneliness, internal struggles, and feelings of love for his wife, his children, and music in his life. In liner notes written for Desire, reflecting the recording of the album and the first leg of the Revue in late 1975, Allen Ginsberg called Dylan’s newest recorded output “Songs of Redemption” and enthused “if he can do it, we can do it. America can do it.” To Ginsberg, Dylan’s materials led the charge to get America back to work, linked through the Beats and the 1960s generation, the revelations gave Dylan a “historical confession” that made him a Walt Whitman in 1976. Idealized and prophetic musings from Dylan’s close friend

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48 Cowie, 180.
and an important American poet, but these dreams emphasized popular culture’s reliance on the “fragments” of the 1970s as forms working class unity shifted dramatically by the 1980s. Cowie argued alternatively, that it was Elvis Presley that represented a “beacon of safety, whiteness, and postwar affluence” as he “had become a living repository of fifties virtue.” The Rolling Thunder Revue and Bob Dylan may not have achieved such praise or cultural dominance in remaking the 1930s-1940s, but they offered visions of safety and home for the 1970s.49

The Rolling Thunder Revue concluded what turned out to be its first leg by playing a benefit concert for New York state prisoner and former boxer Rubin Carter at Madison Square Garden. Just as Dylan’s participation at events in the 1960s, specifically like the 1963 March on Washington, paired the struggle with the folk movement and popular music, so, too, was the end of the Revue supposed to pressure authorities for Carter’s release based on a problematic murder conviction. Reviewing the Rubin Carter concert for New York Magazine, Nik Cohn cheered the energy and work output by Dylan at the end of the Revue. Cohn, six months ahead of writing another, more famous piece about disco music for the same magazine, also called the concert “an exercise in remembrance” as throughout the Revue, audiences “had come, not to protest, but to worship Dylan, and to glory in their own shared roots.” Before he characterized young Americans looking back at the 1950s for Saturday nights, Cohn characterized Dylan’s audience as “close to 30” and reveling in the counterculture of the 1960s despite aging past “beautiful” revolution. Dylan’s career moved beyond the ties made as a “Voice of a Generation,” but the connections persisted into apolitical

49 Cowie, 199-200 and 354.
territoire. A crucial gesture in the 1970s, Dylan complimented audiences by bringing
them home to American history and their memories. The output he made on stage and
from the studio continued to emphasize postwar working class ideals, even when
images of a white-faced Dylan in a “Pat Garrett hat” speak to other influences and
artistic endeavors outside the wants of audiences looking to escape from then
problems.\(^{50}\)

Dylan’s other artistic interests during the Rolling Thunder Revue, referenced
by the white face paint and “Pat Garrett hat,” was the shooting of footage that later
made up the film *Renaldo and Clara*. Sean Wilentz argues that Dylan’s films close
resemblance to the 1945 French film *Les Enfants du Paradis*, reflected some of the
endeavors Dylan engaged during his eight year seclusion from public appearances.
Unfortunately for Dylan, while the Rolling Thunder Revue proved successful,
audiences and the performers likewise enjoyed the entertaining value of the concert
tour, and film experiment failed to create equal success, either critically or
commercially. On the other side, Dylan seemed inclined toward plans that would take
him on the road more permanently. The financial difficulties he faced after the Rolling
Thunder Revue—prominently, his divorce from Sara Lownds, and a film over budget
and not profitable—indicated motivations behind the massive worldwide tour Dylan
embarked on in 1978. However, the Revue was not a single excursion, and after two

\(^{50}\) Nik Cohn, “Low and Outside: Night of the Aging Children,” *New York Magazine*, December 22,
1975, 65. Roughly six months later, Cohn penned the fictional “Tribal Rites of the New Saturday
Night” (June 7, 1976) about young Americans, disco, and work culture in New York.
*Saturday Night Fever*. 

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months on hiatus in early 1976, Dylan recruited new players and regrouped with some of the first “troupe” for a second leg. 51

When Dylan took the Revue out for a second leg in the spring of 1976 it was very unlike the previous fall and came to be regarded as connected but separated from the intentions in 1975. The second leg of the Revue has come to be viewed as essentially a stripped-down, less enthusiastic venture missing the artistic attributes and qualities that defined the fall 1975 tour. Dylan and company seemed to be working through performances, and the tour’s reception paled when it was compared to the influences and community championed during the first leg. The Revue in 1975 was “experimental” and created a unique environment for performance and consumer commodity interactions, but the second leg moved primarily into larger auditoriums and outdoor theaters and lost much of the atmosphere in its recreations. The Rolling Thunder Revue, therefore, holds a dynamic position relating Dylan as representative of work culture and American concerns in the 1970s, because it was intended to reflect artistic endeavors yet adhered to expectations of a major tour. The variety of acts and materials demonstrated impulses of informality and improvisation in how musicians practiced their craft and shared it with audiences as their work output, but Dylan’s second Revue made the tour a component of the consumer commodity culture as it paired down to a television special and another live album (Hard Rain).

**Song and Dance Man: Bob Dylan and the Itinerant Musician**

Bob Dylan’s return to American stages in the first six months of 1974 set in place a lengthy, successful music industry career based on writing, recording, and

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51 Sounes, 304.
performing. Though Dylan also engaged areas of interest and artistic endeavors outside music, such as the film *Renaldo and Clara* shot during the first leg of the Rolling Thunder Revue, or *Masked and Anonymous*, another film effort shot and released in 2004, from 1974 to the present he has mostly worked in performing and recording, closely tied to demands of the music industry. Only three years in the early 1980s divide a long touring history that ultimately led critics and fans to dub Dylan’s touring since 1989 as the “Never Ending Tour,” another label he has rejected in interview. From a historical perspective, Dylan’s hiatus between 1966 and 1974 serves a valuable insight into his career and the place of musicians as entertainers and American workers. Rather than continue as the “Voice of a Generation,” Dylan returned as a cultural icon and legend who built a long career from a work history designed for efficiency and privacy. Like many fans and the working class in America, Dylan dreamed of an existence built upon scenarios centered on the family and productivity. His hiatus and return highlighted complex developments around the working class in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the decline of the American economy after two decades of labor productivity and worker pride in output, and the successes and impacts of musicians and popular music in American society and culture.

When Americans faced economic hardship and job losses in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they turned defensive and retreated to notions of what America had been and reacted against forces they saw as destructive to their ideas. An economic welfare system afforded Americans that kind of opportunity even when it proved self-defeating or created tensions about who received aid and what that aid provided for all Americans. By the 1970s, the American worker that first experienced government
assistance was under threat by forces and groups that demanded equal access to those programs or funds, and in turn the identity of the American worker came under scrutiny and redefinition. Into this mix, postwar developments added greater technological access and popular culture. These functioned in American society and culture to bring more Americans together through shared interests. Historically, the expansion of technological access and popular culture impact was rooted in the America prior to World War II, but movement after the war spurred more sharing and forced an eruption of output, tying into renewed economic growth and expansion after years of economic depression and world war. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, musicians and performers inhabited larger and more influential roles in American society, creating fan bases and expectations they might never achieve or could possibly fulfill—such as Dylan as the “Voice of a Generation.”

Numerous changes affected American society by the announcement of Dylan’s return in late 1973, notably a great amount of political discord and controversy surrounding President Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal, but also an energy crisis revolving around oil and foreign imports, and a growing backlash to the successes and continued efforts of civil rights movements. If Dylan ever sought the “Voice of a Generation” label, here was a moment rife for discussion, direction, and cultural leadership. The hiatus proved Dylan longed for an American experience as a worker and did not buy into the momentum of the counterculture or groups looking at him for meaning and messages. In his words he was a “song and dance man,” a performer and a tradesman skilled in a craft. As economic needs threatened the cultural and social image of the American family, Dylan struggled to construct and
protect his own and provide them with safety and security despite his popularity and significance.

Dylan’s recordings and tour in 1974 fulfilled images of a male breadwinner working outside the home and within the home economy. The 1970s saw mothers and single women enter the workforce in larger numbers, while men’s successes and industry work opportunities changed as countercultural rebels joined the ranks of blue collar working men and the Vietnam War opened positions previously held by men. Dylan’s return offered different and nuanced support for Americans, including the working class. His contractual negotiations with Columbia Records illustrated how Dylan and musicians struggled against industrial controls, while he also confronted claims made about “Bob Dylan,” his career, and his output. Returning to the road after eight years, Dylan took steps to reshape his career as a trade, representative of his skills, interests, and training. His prominence in American popular culture helped reshape ideas of rock musicians and performers as embodiments of the working class—despite realistic class definitions, and limited political or social messages about the values and struggles of workers.

After returning to the stage in 1974, Bob Dylan’s career gradually took on aspects of performing that fit American traditions of life on the road and movement in order to find work while providing a service to the community. Dylan’s music and concerts did not always enjoy universal praise or escape criticism, but in charting a career path defined by touring, Dylan shaped an image built from American history and that of the itinerant worker. Musicians who prospered during an era of economic prosperity maintained careers by working constantly and presenting less conflicted
notions of success and American values. Politicized images and messaged proliferated, especially for those musicians more directly tied to championing the white, male worker like Bruce Springsteen, but Bob Dylan personified commitment to the working class by traveling to entertain his fans and share his music with Americans—no matter any responsibility to take such an action beyond the work as part of his trade in music.

Dreamed or fanaticized, intentional or not, in the wake of his hiatus and two successful tours, Dylan was inexorably tied to the working class and the music industry. In the end, he demonstrated a definite American trade through his work and proved complimentary to the worries and concerns of the working class throughout the 1970s. Dylan effectively worked a “nine-to-five” existence to provide and protect his family and home, and as a popular figure and celebrity, Dylan operated as a source of entertainment and comfort to those who loved his music and matured as his career developed in the 1960s. As Dylan prepped the new tour in late 1973 and agreed to a new deal with David Geffen and Asylum Records, *Rolling Stone* contributor David Felton commented: “Most music lovers would agree that America owes a great deal to Bob Dylan. And now Bob Dylan apparently is ready to collect.” A week after the tour opened, *Melody Maker* reporter Michael Watts reflected that “eight years roll back, and he’s still lean and thin and hungry-looking in the circle of light, scruffy and magnetic in his black sweater with a white shirt hanging out. The one-time street urchin poet of the streets returning to his old haunts, where they’re waving out the windows and cheering at the homecoming.”

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And so as American politics and economics changed and faltered in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bob Dylan focused his career back into the “consumer commodity culture.” By focusing on his family and his work, Dylan disrupted any notion he was the “Voice of a Generation,” and quietly and without fanfare operated as a “song and dance man,” an American worker producing his trade (and art) within the music industry. Paired with the career changes the Beatles sought in the same period, Dylan represented a certain rejection of the meanings both these examples enjoyed and endured, as well as problematic historical constructions of massively popular musicians that overshadowed their own influences and countless other musicians that never achieved similar successes. He struggled with the reception afforded his output in commercial and critical terms, conflicted the industry over contracts and expectations, and invested in the expansion of his art through personal motivations and interests. When Americans redefined their work and relationships between management, labor, and politics, so did Dylan, and his image and output resembled historical and cultural definitions of the ideal American worker as a white man even though diversity played a heavy role in determining popular success and raised questions about authenticity in the period. His excursion to the Mayflower replica in late October 1975 inescapably linked Bob Dylan and those around him to historical American images. At Plymouth Harbor, Dylan, Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, and Allen Ginsberg, connected to the first settlers in New England and the hardships they faced as they founded, created, and expanded notions of work, religion, and leisure in America.
But in the realities of the 1970s, Dylan, too, experienced the personal worries of many Americans, as his family life changed dramatically from his divorce from Sara Lownds. The family as a symbol of American strength remained useful and popularity in American thought, and though separated by circumstances and three decades, Bob Dylan’s career in the 1970s matched the descriptions and affect historian George Lipsitz attributed to Hank Williams in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Lipsitz expounded upon Williams’ working class background and loneliness at the center of his work and celebrity all while “he created a music that underscored the connections between whites and blacks, that lamented the schisms between men and women, and that cried out for a more just and more loving existence for ordinary men and women.” These sentiments, core to evaluating the working class ties to popular culture after World War II, are valid in thinking how Bob Dylan and musicians continued that trend. Dylan’s return to the stage in 1974 and experiments in the Revue a year later committed him to working and demonstrating the value of worker productivity and output in American structures.53

Four years later, Bob Dylan spoke to his 1978 world tour band in Miami about “keeping the show on the road into the following year” and resonated lingering thoughts of the Rolling Thunder Revue carrying on and on. Despite promises of continued touring, Dylan seemed to change his mind during a break over Christmas in 1978. In the next year, Dylan “fired the whole band” and “decided to take a radical new direction in both his life and his music,” becoming a born-again Christian. Much as his career became entwined with radical shifts and furious reactions, Dylan repeated

53 Lipsitz, Rainbow at Midnight, 28-29.
the process at the end of the 1970s, producing a set of gospel-inspired albums in 1979 and 1980 before going back on the road and refusing to play his “secular” material. Whatever Dylan’s motivation for converting to born-again Christianity, it followed trends in the United States, coming in a period of increased religious conservatism and the rise of the New Right that culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan. Behind these changes, however, Dylan’s work remained consistent before another hiatus reverted his career in 1983. The Bob Dylan that returned (again) remained committed to his trade and productivity that celebrated his status in American music and the 1960s counterculture, but increasingly took in more folk traditions and American stories, ultimately embodying his own singular image as a uniquely American musician outside class, race, and economic divisions.54

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54 The albums in 1979-1980 directly referenced Christian themes, compared to Dylan’s frequent use of biblical allusions in his work previously and since. Sounes, 323.
In April 2014, former Beatle and career musician Paul McCartney announced that the American leg of his latest world tour would commence in Lubbock, Texas, on June 14, 2014, his first ever concert in “the hometown of his beloved Buddy Holly.” Two weeks later he revealed plans to play Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles and the final concert at Candlestick Park in San Francisco (before the stadium is demolished) in August, purposefully repeating the final dates of the Beatles’ 1966 tour. Nearly fifty years after the Beatles abandoned touring following their concert at Candlestick Park on August 29, 1966, however, McCartney’s career remains successful primarily through touring, live performances, and concerts, an attribute shared with contemporaries like Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones, and successors like Bruce Springsteen and Rush. These musicians recorded prolifically throughout their careers, and success was readily visible as they toured and performed to audiences, an experience McCartney’s website claims as “a once in a lifetime opportunity; in just three hours some of the greatest moments from the last 50 years of music are relived; music which for many has shaped the very soundtrack of their lives.” These events, drawing on McCartney’s long career, identify influences and events tracked in this dissertation that reflected and challenged postwar American culture and society. McCartney, in particular, helped reshape popular music as artistic expression, leaning toward cultural influence in economic definitions, even though his income from
performing and recording dismissed working class roots and middle class identity in the counterculture.¹

Forty-eight years after the Beatles faced scrutiny and public backlash due to John Lennon claiming the band was “more popular than Jesus,” McCartney (again) toured the United States without any negative attributes or concerns about security or success at the concert dates. To the contrary, McCartney will celebrate the Beatles final tour in 1966 and make conscious links to his first repeat appearances at two of the venues. Cultural biographer Devin McKinney commented that Lennon’s comment reflected a “new order” for thoughts and challenges, influential to audiences in the 1960s and representative of the roles celebrities held in consumers’ lives and the value and politics associated with music as a consumed good. At the time, older Americans, familiar with hardships during the Depression and World War II, viewed a younger generation taking work and working class ideals for granted in a “consumer commodity society” where popular music and popular culture reflected affluence and success. Now, those links are hidden further beneath a larger consumer culture derived from perceived attacks on American institutions like the working class and the family, yet the continued success and dominance of the music industry by white, male musicians reflects the outlooks of Americans frustrated with postwar developments in

the 1960s and meanings attached to revolutionary behaviors that challenged dominant trends and experiences.²

The work of white, male musicians and their influences in American culture and society remains dominant in the twenty-first century, and McCartney (as a stand-in for the Beatles), in particular, as well as Bob Dylan still excite audiences and inspire recollections of the postwar environment when they first entered the music industry. With long careers, these examples have enjoyed greater control and opportunities within and from outside the industry, fulfilling cultural attributes established in the 1960s and 1970s as they settled into careers defined by tours and performances more than through recordings that impacted social and cultural thinking as revolutionary at the start of their careers. McCartney’s 2014 tour and Dylan’s yearly touring schedule illustrate how music provides a regular source of work over long periods of time, as well as how the music industry constantly changed the receptions of musicians’ work and the meanings of performing and touring. That Paul McCartney and Bob Dylan are celebrated in the early twenty-first century, in part for touring and performing, as well as for their long careers and cultural influences, illustrates where consumer expectations for the music industry were focused throughout the postwar environment and in the modern incarnation.

As relevant and obvious as it may be to point at recordings and continued output of new music as reflecting the long careers of the Beatles and Bob Dylan, the reality was both of these examples, as well as the majority of other 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s musicians, maintained their statuses and economic successes through constantly

working and personifying the historical American worker. Regardless of
developments after World War II that took advantage of new technologies in
recording and distribution, the primary method of working in the music industry
remains performing, and renewed focuses and emphases on the economics and
incomes from concerts and touring in the twenty-first century have in ways reduced
recordings to marketing and advertising tools more than consumer goods. The
economics of these developments emerged with Dylan’s return to touring in the mid-
1970s, as well as Paul McCartney’s first American tour since 1966 with his band
Wings in 1976, when both visited large venues in order to capitalize on their careers
and popularity. Linked to their careers in the 1960s and popular ideas of their
influences in that decade, Dylan and McCartney have remained prolific recording
musicians since the 1970s, but they create excitement by reflecting stability in popular
music, rather than continued revolutionary influences or messages. In these two
examples, new materials infrequently appear on tour set lists, instead the musicians
replicate or revise older and familiar songs that mass audiences recognize.3

In the twentieth century, popular music and the music industry provided
important tools and reflections of American culture and society. As this dissertation
explores, musicians as performers and as recording artists encompassed political and
economic roles that expanded the values of the working and middle classes and the
input and impact of American workers. Focused on sketches and examinations of

3 Wings’ 1976 world tour incorporated McCartney-penned Beatles songs, including “Eleanor Rigby”
from Revolver, and “Lady Madonna” and “The Long and Winding Road.” The live album Wings Over
America documented that tour, and a 2013 reissue included bonus tracks from the Cow Palace show in
white, male musicians from local and regional settings like western swing performers and Buddy Holly to hugely successful contributors like the Beatles and Bob Dylan, this dissertation argued that a culture of work within the music industry interacted with larger historical developments for American workers between the 1930s and 1970s. Importantly they functioned in the expansion and renewal of the American economy after World War II and the emphases upon the “consumer commodity society” and consumer goods as sources for definitions of worker productivity and output. The access to popular music from the Depression through the three decades after the war facilitated greater links between musicians and audiences, primarily as products and consumers, but also aided in the construction of a larger and broader community across the United States as Americans shared common interests. Changes in American communities occurred with popular culture and popular music inhabiting important roles and illustrating changes over time. Those developments are rooted in the migrations of American workers during and after the war, when rock ‘n’ roll commanded an important presence in American culture as an artifact of productivity and output that provided images and satisfaction in the economic and cultural lives of Americans.

As the examples documented in the chapters of this dissertation illustrate, a dynamic trajectory existed between the economic problems and opportunities in the Depression through the questions about the role of popular music as a cultural component of American life in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Musicians went from workers with experiences in agriculture and manufacturing to those that aspired to avoid those experiences in exchange for “careers in music,” particularly visible by
Buddy Holly as a young man growing up and entering the music industry in the immediate postwar period and 1950s society. The changes and opportunities for working as a performer in the Depression additionally signaled that performing on stage, as well as through technological developments like the radio, was not contingent on urban locations. Western Swing musicians in Texas demonstrated that working in smaller and rural communities could provide regular work and lucrative careers, eventually inhabiting identities as workers outside existing expectations and identifications of workers in industries and as itinerants. Furthermore, local musicians made significant contributions from these developments, as they migrated with Americans and facilitated cultural and community sharing from the bottom up, leading to links and contributions by the working class in American politics and the economy. It remains worth noting that despite the growth of recording as an indicator for growth by the music industry, local and regional performers prolifically build careers from performing that never attain statuses similar or represented by the examples discussed in this dissertation.

Popular music presented as a consumer good indicated divisions between the sources and places for the developments of skills and talents and the receptions of those tools as work in American society. The key component of the music industry that created this division after World War II was recording, which was not new or unknown to musicians, but underwent technological changes that expanded the abilities and meanings of careers in music. Recordings in the Depression and early 1940s did not supplant performing and touring as the major indicator of success or source of income for musicians. Options to record for musicians like those that played
Western Swing were based on regional and broadcasting popularities, and typically required additional work and traveling to access rudimentary and make-shift studios set up in urban and commercial centers like New Orleans, Houston, or San Antonio. While these experiences added important resources to musicians’ repertoires and granted access to markets across the United States through the use of jukeboxes and lowered broadcasting restrictions of recorded materials, until the postwar period performing facilitated the reception of musicians as valuable community members and productive workers in American society. Performing likewise continued to link musicians with audiences directly, but the explosion of recording opportunities after the war and the larger incorporation of popular music as a consumer good diminished the operations of performing musicians in broadcasting and live venues. Americans who purchased recordings looked to the good they held and expected musicians to easily replicate that item in live performances, even when technological limitations existed and recording granted a different professional and economic status for the musicians, such as Buddy Holly and his working class roots elevated into the middle class by recording and performing successes over a brief career.

Naturally, the popular music examined throughout much of this dissertation was rock ‘n’ roll and its influence in the postwar environment and the “consumer commodity society.” Numerous groups and musicians found voices as a result of the popularity of rock ‘n’ roll across markets and artificial divides, such as racial, gender, and sexual interactions. White male musicians explored in this dissertation offered critical connections and challenges to the experiences of American workers and the working class in American society throughout the twentieth century, but an omission
of African American and women performers, for example, hints at further discussions possible regarding who worked in the music industry, and what roles they played as workers, as indicators of class, and as popular and successful contributors to American history and society. Questions of race and gender are prominently valid in the 1970s and through the early twenty-first century, too, as popular styles like disco and hip-hop faced scrutiny and claims against authenticity as music or positive aspects in American society and culture. But women rock ‘n’ rollers and country musicians equally struggled to contribute as visibly as white, male performers as African Americans. Looking at these groups and the questions about popular music raises alternate ideas that allowed Americans to negotiate popular music in shared and individual experiences. Focuses on race and pushes for equality expanded the historical impact of the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll, and the expansion of popular music styles only exacerbated a revolution in culture and society.

The mid-1960s facilitated an uncoupling of racial integration in popular music and the counterculture occurred as a middle class white experience that also devalued markings and struggles over work and class in America. Those developments are valuable to the exploration of popular music and popular culture within American history, too often minimized when we take apart the familiarity and access Americans enjoyed with popular music as entertainment. African American musicians, in particular, were crucial to the management and cultivation of popular music as a career throughout the twentieth century, and constructed rock ‘n’ roll with performers across the United States after the war. Musicians like Buddy Holly and the Beatles succeeded because they shared interests in African American performers like Chuck
Berry, Larry Williams, Ray Charles, and Little Richard, as well as female groups that enjoyed similar successes in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Research, biographies, and similarly lengthy careers by performers like Little Richard and Chuck Berry indicated their popularities, as well as the confrontations they faced or made with regard to religious backgrounds and social concerns. As other histories tell us and a portion of this dissertation explores, Americans enjoyed more diversified interest in music styles throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Earlier popular styles like ragtime and jazz in the late 1910s and 1920s fostered important historical discussions about popular music, race, class, and the urban atmosphere, too, and illustrated that race and gender equally offered new economic opportunities for American performers.\(^4\)

The intensity of 1960s culture and the popularity of the musicians that emerged to immense success in that period left a massive mark on American history and society. Those musicians’ legacies exist in part due to cultural and popular impacts, but examples like the Beatles and Bob Dylan also factored heavily in the politics and economics of the 1960s and 1970s, producing goods that attracted audiences and consumers to popular music. Ties to the working class and aspirations for economic opportunities facilitated how musicians after World War II trained and entered the music industry, but they also intersected new demands for products and commodity goods not defined by experiences performing to audiences. Recording and distribution

\(^4\) Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 246-247. Wald argues that the Beatles appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was the catalyst for a split in popular music and racial integration, as “rock music” and “soul music” spurred from rock ‘n’ roll, but the split caused increased musical diversity and individualism in American music culture.
technologies afforded those changes, and created the legacies musicians’ enjoyed, as consumer goods represented a myriad of success levels beyond the 1960s. But, these technologies also detached musicians from working backgrounds and ties to class and economic issues. The turn to artistic expression through recording challenged the prominence and meaning of performing as audiences expected songs they recognized and purchased, as well as confronted limitations in stage reproduction of studio advancements.

In the 1960s, popular music facilitated revolutionary ideas and contributed to social movements and the counterculture, but even with that development, music remained work and hinted at efforts to maintain security and stability in a fluctuating economy. Alternatively, the music industry gains economically from the deaths of popular musicians like Buddy Holly and his continued influence beyond 1959, and musicians like Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain (of Nirvana), who both died in the midst of growing influence in their careers. The death of musicians leaves opportunities to experience them in concert impossible, but recordings have fundamentally changed the work output and cultural influence of popular music far beyond finding a career in music. At one end, artistic expressions through recordings illustrated cultural sustenance, but this development facilitated continued rehashing of revolutionary impact by working musicians. For musicians that worked to express artistic or political sentiments and the music they produced, it is possible these activities devalue their output and influence, but continued revisiting of music and perceptions of musicians facilitates careers and provided regular income far beyond initially intended from a performance or a recording.
As a contemporary of both the Beatles and Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix factored heavily in reshaping popular music as a social and revolutionary tool in the 1960s, and he accomplished that role by working as a performer and recording musician. Hendrix expanded the innovations in sound and style of his music within the studio as a space for artistry and work, and despite technical limitations outside that environment introduced new elements in his performances. Research conducted for this dissertation indicated that Hendrix’s cultural impact occurred because he worked diligently in both those spaces, and his recordings reflected the counterculture and social movements taking place in the 1960s akin to those and other contemporaries. Additionally, and crucial to thinking about further discussions available in the consideration of work as a continuing element maintaining popular music was the money invested by Hendrix and the record company that backed him to develop and construct a groundbreaking and forward-thinking studio space in Electric Lady, which opened roughly a month before Hendrix’s untimely death in September 1970. Much like Buddy Holly’s interests in the capabilities of the studio for creativity, and the Beatles recording career after Candlestick Park in 1966, Hendrix’s use of the recording studio as a professional environment spurred his creativity and offered a chance to reshape the possibilities of popular music career.

A final example worth noting to illustrate developments beyond the 1970s in the perceptions and definitions of musicians as workers was the late 1980s and early 1990s band Nirvana, led by guitarist, vocalist, and songwriter Kurt Cobain. This band, cited as a founder of the “grunge rock” style, performed in tune with predecessors noted in this dissertation and further developments in punk styles of the 1970s.
Additionally, Cobain was identified as a type of “voice of a generation” akin to Bob Dylan three decades earlier, and equally rejected that notion and the use of his music beyond his intents. Nirvana was a band that toured and performed relentlessly, literally working their way from the bottom to the top, which meant grimy working class venues to larger spaces and television broadcasts across local, regional, national, and international markets. Nirvana additionally helped renew and expand popular music again in the 1990s, by integrating “grunge rock,” influencing other musicians, and introducing other bands from the local market and Northwestern United States that Nirvana originated in the mid-1980s. Like Hendrix and Holly, when Cobain died in April 1994, the band remained popular and since that time, the music industry has continued to rehash the band’s output and performances for economic productivity and “output.”

In the postwar consumer commodity society, the music industry prospered because working and middle class Americans consumed new products and music, and this practice has persisted into the early twenty-first century. Musicians’ (workers) productivity, however, did not always signal economic strength (based on popular success), and technology (both in production and distribution) challenged the economics of the music industry as cultural and societal demands changed over time. The focus on popular music and its effects considers how Americans negotiated the revolutionary changes that emerged with greater access to technology, more options for listening, and direct contact with musicians, performers, and products. Consumption of music in the postwar period demonstrated political activities of Americans as presented by historians Lizabeth Cohen in *A Consumers’ Republic* and
George Lipsitz in *Rainbow at Midnight*. Cohen described the “purchaser as citizen,” where postwar economics of mass consumption became synonymous with political lives as citizens after two long decades defined by depression and war. This discussion indicates the nature of mass consumption within American postwar political structures, as this activity operated as a lynchpin against economic worries, much as Lipsitz’ workers fought for greater access to industrial work afforded by the war and to maintain those positions after the war ended. The emergence of rock ‘n’ roll was vital to understanding these distinctions, and as more Americans incorporated popular music into their lives, more diversity and voices emerged. In her discussion of disco, historian Alice Echols emphasized that “Disco’s influence extended beyond the realm of popular music,” and allowed numerous groups to find identities and places in American society and culture, even though critics increasingly questioned the legitimacy and value of musicians’ work and creativity.⁵

Despite the arguments as this dissertation progressed that music as work diminished when cultural and artistic endeavors redefined success, popularity, and meanings in the 1960s and 1970s, that notion of working and retaining productivity and output remains a crucial tool for performers and musicians in 2014. Recording remains the method for measuring a musicians’ career, despite performing serving a better indicator of prolonged success and career relevance. The relevance of the working class in this discussion cannot be undervalued as even in the twenty-first century the production and distribution of music relies on industrial-based productivity

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⁵ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: Norton, 2010), xxiv: “Promiscuous and omnivorous, disco absorbed sounds and styles from all over, and in the process accelerated the transnational flow of musical ideas and idioms.” This idea is evaluated with Bob Dylan in the 1970s (Chapter V).
and output. Popular music came to be more effectively defined by cultural influence than class or economic issues, despite industrial concerns about the workplace, productivity, and output. Country musician Dolly Parton, who has performed since she was a child in the 1950s, released her forty-second album, Blue Smoke, in January 2014, and proceeded to embark on a world tour at the age of 68. Interviewed by Rolling Stone, contributor Rob Tannenbaum jokingly asked her “since it’s so difficult to count all of them accurately, can we say this is your 500th album?” Parton took the joke in stride, commenting that, “It feels like it! Back in the old days, you’d have an album done in just a few days’ time. But, Lord, now we have to slave over it until we kill all the fun and the naturalness. I wanted to be a star, so I worked hard for many years. It hasn’t hit me yet that I might be a star. I still think of myself as a working girl.” In this exchange, another performer who started a career over a half-century ago illustrates where music served to provide an identity as a worker, even though cultural value seemed to overshadow productivity, and questions of gender complicated Dolly Parton’s impact throughout her career.  

The ideals of the working class in American society and culture likewise remain strong and continue to govern musicians that have emerged to success and prominent in the early 21st century. A notable example cited in the introduction to this dissertation is the rock duo (band) the Black Keys, who originated in Akron, Ohio, before relocating to Nashville, Tennessee. The band’s eighth album Turn Blue was released in mid-May 2014 and reflected themes of heartbreak and failed relationships due to a messy divorce for guitarist and singer Dan Auerbach in 2013. In a featured

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interview for *Rolling Stone*, drummer Patrick Carney acted as a spokesman for the band and Auerbach, commenting on the impact of careers in music upon ideals the two were raised upon:

“We’re dudes from Ohio. We were raised to get a job, have a family. No one prepares you for what it’s like to want to hold on to those ideals and balance it with this job. For years, you don’t make anything and you’re treated like shit. And then it flips. No one can prepare you for that transition, and it causes real problems.”

Although it is relevant to note that celebrity culture throughout the late 20th century and early 21st century has created more examples of failed relationships and exposed private lives of popular figures, the growth of rock ‘n’ roll and popular music since the end of World War II was constructed on identities and connections derived from experiences expressed and relatable. Carney’s interview additionally points to the expectations of white, male Americans as productive workers, breadwinners, and caregivers. That *Turn Blue* could reflect such heartbreak for a musician continued those constructions, illustrating where popular music still factored as a revolutionary mode of thought in addition to providing a lucrative source of work for those musicians. The Black Keys, particularly, also illustrate the continued relevance of performing as work in the music industry, literally working from small and unfriendly venues traveled to in a used, near run down van, to a high grossing touring unit that visits arena venues and regularly performs on television and other media programs.7

In conclusion, music is work and music is revolution. The commodities and entertainment music provides to audiences occurs due to extensive productivity and output by performers and musicians with specific and valued skill sets in that trade.

Rock ‘n’ roll and its precedents were long designed for audience and performer interactions, as well as physical activity portrayed through dancing, meaning popular music was designed as a commodity and received likewise. The examples of this dissertation illustrated a history of work and work culture in the United States between the 1930s and 1970s that favored white and male musicians and the links they represented to political and economic ideas of the working class in American society. However, they were the most prominent group of Americans that elevated careers in music to a prominent position in society and culture, and demonstrated the complex confrontations and conflicts over the meanings of popular music and its influences and impact on all Americans. The point for diverging notions of work and revolution in this dissertation was the year 1966, when the Beatles stopped touring and Bob Dylan retreated to secure a home and family with his work and career, and in 2014 those two examples maintain cultural relevance, tied to those moments, but sustained by very visible identities as workers in the music industry.
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