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It Was Honest: The Politics of Authenticity in the American Folk Revival and British Punk Subcultures

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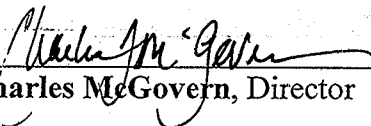
**“IT WAS HONEST”: THE POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE
AMERICAN FOLK REVIVAL AND BRITISH PUNK SUBCULTURES**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts with Honors in History from
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by

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Accepted for Highest Honors


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Laughing in Church—The American Folk Revival	12
Chapter 2: When the Kids Were United—The British Punk Movement	43
Chapter 3: Authenticity, Art, and Politics,	69
Conclusion	80
Bibliography	83

Introduction

“The person who's coming up now is a person who has in a sense... changed the face of folk music to the large American public because he has brought to it a point of view of a poet...Ladies and gentlemen, the person that's going to come up now has a limited amount of time...His name is...Bob Dylan,” announced Peter Yarrow to a roaring crowd of fifteen-thousand assembled at the Newport Folk Festival on the evening of July 25, 1965.¹ The festival was a product of what became known as the American folk revival, a revitalization and popularization of American traditional, rural, bluegrass, and country music that peaked in the mid 1960s.

A combination of sources from the late 1920s and early 1930s sowed the seeds of the revival. Academic interest was high during the decade as preservationists set about recording hundreds of folk songs from indigenous sources. Meanwhile, populist troubadours traveled the country performing topical songs and solidarity anthems for labor unions, migrant workers, and other predominately Left-leaning, working class audiences. By the early 1940s, folk enthusiasts were drawn to New York where they organized frequent concerts and benefit concerts in support of Leftist causes. Their emphasis on acoustic instruments, informal arrangements and production, and populist themes was in conscious opposition to the Tin Pan Alley brand of commercial music made popular at the time by crooners like Perry Como and Frank Sinatra and big bands like the Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman Orchestras. After the war, Pete Seeger and his group the Weavers helped bring folk into the national spotlight with their

¹ David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street* (New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 258; Bruce Jackson, “The Myth of Newport '65,” *The Buffalo Report*, <http://buffaloreport.com/020826dylan.html>; *No Direction Home*, Dir. Martin Scorsese. Paramount, 2006.

unprecedented success. The Weavers captured American listeners' attention in the early 1950s with their reinterpretations of traditional folk songs like "On Top of Old Smokey." The quartet managed to conquer the popular music charts only to come under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and subsequently blacklisted for their Communist political ties.

Its momentum derailed by McCarthyism, the folk movement dimmed in the mid-fifties but returned to prominence as the decade concluded. Thanks largely to the success of a new generation of pop-folk groups like the Kingston Trio and individuals like Joan Baez, folk made up for lost time and was booming again by 1959 when the first Newport Folk Festival was held. Just as some had questioned the success of the Weavers' radio-friendly folk in previous years, members of folk's Old Guard were suspicious of the new groups' intentions. They consider the newcomers a threat to folk's artistic and political integrity liable to compromise the subculture through commercialism and mainstreamization. With the decline of McCarthyism, this more traditional, Old Left segment reemerged to reassert folk's political program while maintaining customary emphasis on traditional instrumentation and performance. It was the Old Guard's set of hardened political and performative standards that Dylan, then a twenty-year-old Minnesota transplant, encountered when he arrived guitar-in-hand in New York's Greenwich Village in 1961.

Dylan initially performed only traditional tunes but soon switched to writing strikingly articulate original compositions, many with political themes and messages aligned with the ideals of the Old Left. By 1963 he had established himself as the preeminent topical songwriter and was viewed by many as a leader in the folk movement.

Although considered one of the folk establishment's favorite sons, Dylan became increasingly uneasy about his participation in the folk movement as well as encumbered by folk's political and musical prescriptions. In vain he attempted to distance himself from these labels and folk's restrictions by releasing two introspective albums (one of which was half electric). By July 1965, he was prepared to take decisive action and make a statement with the only channel he had left—the stage.

After Yarrow's introduction, Dylan, clad in a "matador-outlaw orange shirt," motorcycle boots and leather jacket, stepped into the spotlight with a sunburst Fender Stratocaster.² Backed by a five-piece band, he shouted, "Let's go!" as the band launched into "Maggie's Farm," a song from his most recent album.³ The crowd response was immediate and storied. Boos were almost instantaneous, though the reason for the crowd's jeers remains highly debated.⁴ The heckling continued through the next two numbers—"Like a Rolling Stone," which been released as a single just five days previous, and "Phantom Engineer," which would appear on Dylan's forthcoming album as "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry."⁵ A "stunned"—in his own words—Dylan announced, "Let's go, man! That's it!" after the third song, and the band, having practiced no other songs, left the stage.⁶

² Hajdu, 259; Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1986), 302.

³ Shelton, 302.

⁴ For varying accounts of the booing, see Peter Stone Brown, "On Dylan at Newport," *BobDylan.com*, http://www.bobdylan.com/etc/peterstonebrown_newport.html; Hajdu, 260; Jackson, 2002; Lee Marshall, "Bob Dylan: Newport Folk Festival, July 25, 1965 in *Performance and Popular Music*, ed. Ian Inglis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 98; Paul Nelson, "Whereas Newport...", *Sing Out!* 15 (Nov. 1965), 8-9; Tom Piazza, "Bob Dylan's Unswerving Road Back to Newport," *New York Times*, July 28, 2002, Arts/Music Section; Shelton, 302; Sean Wilentz, "The Roving Gambler at Scenic Newport," *BobDylan.com*, http://bobdylan.com/etc/wilentz_newport.html.

⁵ Hajdu, 260; Marshall, 17; Shelton, 302.

⁶ Hajdu, 262; Marshall, 18.

The crowd was stunned. Pandemonium in the audience mirrored the mayhem backstage.⁷ Pete Seeger “sputtered and fumed about this violation of everything Dylan represented” and even threatening to cut the sound cables with an axe.⁸ Seeger afterward denied that he was upset by Dylan’s music, claiming instead that his and others’ frustration stemmed from the poor sound mixing.⁹ Others like Bruce Jackson have attributed the commotion to the brevity of the performance and the limited amount of time that Dylan was awarded to perform.¹⁰ What remains indisputable from film footage is that Dylan’s electric performance, for whatever reason, caused an uproar amongst those present. Yarrow took the microphone and pleaded with Dylan to return and calm the audience. “What are you doing to me?” a flustered Dylan asked of Yarrow as he retook the stage, clutching an acoustic guitar to the crowd’s applause.¹¹ Teary-eyed according to some accounts, Dylan chose the song “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” with its telling “You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last” opening lyric to conclude his set. At the audience’s behest, he followed the number with “Mr. Tambourine Man” and left the stage for good.¹²

The audience and backstage response to Sunday evening’s performance rattled the seemingly cocksure Dylan. At a party after the show, he sat alone in a corner while others danced and celebrated. He later called what he had done at Newport that night a “very crazy thing,” but he did not regret it.¹³ Dylan critic and biographer Robert Shelton recalls seeing Dylan in the week following the show:

⁷ *No Direction Home*.

⁸ Hajdu, 261; *No Direction Home*.

⁹ Marshall, 18; *No Direction Home*.

¹⁰ See Jackson, 2002.

¹¹ Shelton, 302.

¹² Hajdu, 262; Marshall 27,

¹³ Hajdu, 260-262.

He still seemed stunned and distressed that he had sparked such animosity. He was shaken that people had yelled "Get rid of that electric guitar!" But he refused to enter squabbles. Of his introducing electric music at Newport and the years of controversy that ensued, Dylan said, over and over again, 'It was honest. It was honest.'¹⁴

Nearly thirteen years later, just after midnight on January 15, 1978, the Sex Pistols took the stage at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom. The crowd assembled ~~numbered in the thousands, making it one of the largest for which the group had ever~~ performed.¹⁵ It was a diverse audience, too; hardcore punks and wannabes, aged hippies, and rock journalists had all gathered to see this infamous British band that had been making headlines across the American South during their U.S. tour.¹⁶ Hopes were high, particularly among the music critics in the audience. San Francisco was the birthplace of psychedelic rock and the music magazine *Rolling Stone*, but the hippy scene was past its prime.

Punk provided a new hope. It was a raw, vibrant force in rock entirely unlike the predictable records being produced at the time by washed-up stars. American groups like the New York Dolls and the Ramones, self-acknowledged cultural misfits, formulated a combination of performative and stylistic elements that together would become emblematic of punk: straightforward music and rhythmic patterns, a do-it-yourself ethic, a defiant attitude, and a belief in individual creativity and difference. It was not long

¹⁴ Shelton, 304.

¹⁵ John Lydon, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* (New York : Picador USA, 1995), 1; Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 456-458.

¹⁶ Greil Marcus, "The End of an Antichrist: Sex Pistols, Winterland, San Francisco, 14 January 1978," *Rolling Stone* (Mar. 9, 1978) included in Greil Marcus, *In the Fascist Bathroom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21-22.

before punk and its virtues gained the attention of similarly disaffected British youth. The U.K.'s listening public had a long history of enthusiastic and, at times, violent participation in various rock subcultures, including the Mod, Rocker, Glam, and Teddy Boy styles.¹⁷ Punk was a logical next step in this parade of subcultures and styles.

England was at its cultural and economic nadir in the mid-seventies. Thousands of disaffected, alienated urban youth were either forced into menial, dead-end office jobs or found themselves on government relief. The doldrums in which London, in particular, languished by 1974 made it an ideal setting for this new brand of rock that glorified its street roots and celebrated amateurism. Over a three-year period, punk went from obscurity to the spotlight, evolving into one of the most recognizable youth movements in Britain.

While England and Northern Ireland boasted dozens of punk bands by 1978, the Sex Pistols were unquestionably *the* preeminent group. Under the guidance of manager Malcolm McLaren, the Pistols conquered the U.K. charts in a little more than a year. Along the way, they created the look, attitude, and sound of U.K. punk. Their spiky-haired, safety-pinned singer, John "Rotten" Lydon, was, for many, the movement's face, embodying its virtues of crudeness and malice in his dress, demeanor, and performance. Through a mixture of attitude, lyricism, and stage presence, Rotten and the Pistols inspired multitudes and appalled even more. Banned by town councils across England,

¹⁷ Stuart Hall's articulates a working definition of subculture in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subculture in Post-War Britain* (London : HarperCollins Academic 1991). Subcultures are "sub-sets-smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks" that are "focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture" (13-14). As Hall points out, subcultures are historically bound, "[appearing] at only at particular historical moments: they become visible, are identified and labeled: they command the stage of public attention for a time: then they fade, disappear, or are so widely diffused that they lose their distinctiveness."

the Pistols began touring Europe in 1977 and scheduled several American performances for January 1978.

The Winterland show was the last of the tour. The Pistols took the stage that night burdened not only by the stresses of the road but also by the expectations of the audience. The spirit of individual creativity that had characterized the punk ethos of the Pistols and other early groups of the previous eighteen months—the Clash, the Damned, the Buzzcocks, etc.—was fading. Where the punk lifestyle originally meant exercising freedom from musical and social conventions, participation in punk now demanded kowtowing to prerequisites for dress, attitude, and song structure. The underground movement had become what it had most despised: a mainstream fashion, collapsing in on itself in its own popularity. No one was more exasperated than punk's would-be figurehead, John Lydon. "I hated the whole scenario," he later wrote. "It was a farce."¹⁸

In his performance that night in San Francisco, Lydon made no attempt to hide his frustrations both with his group and with the state of the movement that he had helped create. Indeed he translated his discontent into his performance. According to critic Greil Marcus who attended the show, Lydon "[ate] the expectations the crowd brought with it" and, through his performance, exposed punk as a sham.¹⁹ Marcus goes on to explain that:

All one saw was an ugly, unlikely youth declaring that his time as a pop star had come to an end: you could see it happen, hear him deciding to quit. 'Ah, it's

¹⁸ Lydon, 2.

¹⁹ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1989), 84.

awful,' he said in the middle of 'No Fun' his last song as a member of the Sex Pistols, even his loathing leaving him: 'It's no good.'²⁰

As the last chords of "No Fun" whined out of the amplifiers, Lydon, crouched pathetically on the edge of the stage, tossed down his microphone in disgust and walked off but not before uttering his last words as a Sex Pistol, "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?"²¹

For Lydon to say he had "been cheated" or for Dylan to claim he was being "honest" implies that each man had his own understanding of truth and applied that knowledge to his own particular context. These applications took different forms. In Dylan's case, the evaluation was self-reflexive; in Lydon's, it was projective. While the two were distinctly different in orientation, they shared a great deal in motivation.

Dylan's honesty was introspective. As a result of his own self-examinations, Dylan felt compelled to embrace electrified media, even if (or, perhaps, *especially* if) that meant unsettling or offending his colleagues with a "very crazy" gesture that for many folk enthusiasts registered somewhere between taboo and apostasy. Broadly, Dylan's gesture represents a desire to reclaim his artistic identity from those attempting to define him not on his terms but on theirs. He demanded autonomy from the musical and political conventions of folk's Old Guard that were preventing him from controlling his own artistic vision. While Dylan's assessment of the Newport performance as honest was inwardly oriented, the symbolism of his gesture—his choice of songs, wardrobe, backing band, and electrification—was directed to the audience and to those backstage.

²⁰ Ibid, 123.

²¹ Ibid, 89.

Despite whatever anguish the aftermath caused Dylan, the message itself was one of deliberate and unapologetic condemnation.

Like Dylan, Lydon used the stage as a means of airing his grievances. His remark about having been cheated was, like Dylan's, a commentary on his condition in relation to his movement. But, unlike Dylan, Lydon did not appeal to his own creative or artistic conscience. Rather, he indicted his subculture, decrying as a farce the movement that had made him a star. In front of that crowd of critics and posers, he watched and even enacted punk's collapse. What had once been a community of creative, countercultural enthusiasm was now a musical commodity subject to popular, corporate, and media manipulation. Punk became either a trend to be commercialized and consumed or else a set of narrow-minded ideologies about anarchism and rebellion and two or three-chord musical prescriptions that lacked any tolerance for political difference or artistic ingenuity. For Lydon and those like him, it had, in essence, become no fun. Whatever validity he had once seen in punk had evaporated by the time he reached that San Francisco stage. Never one for subtlety or restraint, Lydon evaluated the scene as he saw it, dropped the microphone, and left the Sex Pistols and punk behind.

While both the American folk revival and the British punk movement continued after Newport and Winterland, Dylan's electrification and the Sex Pistols' last concert were climactic moments in the history of these subcultures. This study seeks to provide context for these momentous occasions so as to clarify their meanings. I will begin by examining the historical circumstances and settings from which folk and punk emerged. The first two chapters will trace the development of the American folk revival and the British punk movement, respectively, from their inceptions up to these climactic events.

I will pay particular attention to the evolution of each subculture's values and internal politics from its origin to its popularization. In the third chapter of this study, I will reflect on the striking similarity between the trajectories of each movement. This chapter will attempt to answer the question of how folk and punk played out in almost identical fashion even though they were historically and musically so far apart. Here I will propose that authenticity acted as the driving force for both the formation and the destruction of these two subcultures.

Authenticity has historically played a key role in countercultural movements.

Anxieties over the merits of mass culture and modernity prompt cultural critics and dissidents to deem the ways of the societal mainstream disingenuous. Dissenters seek to uncover more genuine expressions of culture by appealing either to folklore or to personal experience. Those with similar orientations on the authentic spectrum form communities based around their common values. Sociologist Regina Bendix argues that labeling these principles "authentic" provides communities a means of defining their ideologies, differentiating themselves from others, and developing "new paradigms."²² By labeling certain elements—behaviors, politics, attitudes, etc.—authentic, groups create unique value systems to which their members can relate and identify.

In the cases of folk and punk, these paradigms took the form of conventions regarding performance, politics, and fashion. Participating in countercultural movements initially away from the mainstream mass market, original folk and punk audiences and performers found comfort in their adherence to their shared principles. As these subcultures flourished, however, their standards began to be applied dogmatically by those both within and outside the movements. Ideals once reassuring became extreme

²² Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 5.

and overbearing. Conservative authorities within the music cultures who enforced tenets they considered genuine displaced those who had joined folk and punk precisely because of the movements' resistance to conformity.

Dylan and Lydon, through their actions at Newport and Winterland, exposed and decried this standardization and hidden conservatism. In one sense, their actions stemmed from their narcissism. The two possessed a common individualistic nerve that empowered them to make their condemnations. But rather than regard Newport and Winterland solely as acts of personal vanity, this thesis will broaden the framework applied to these artists and those performances. The intent here is to move the discussion beyond considerations of the two merely as individual actors or, worse, as salvific figures in whose absence changes in folk and punk would have never been affected. Their stories speak to something greater than themselves and even their specific movements. Their histories point to an insustainability inherent in music subcultures—a conflict between the mores and the movement, a tension between art and politics rooted in authenticity and cultivated by the market.

Chapter One: Laughing in Church

Scholars consider the American folk revival to have begun around the time of the release of the Kingston Trio's hit single "Tom Dooley" in 1958 and concluded by late 1965 after the cataclysmic events at Newport. But the revival and Bob Dylan's legacy within it cannot be understood solely in the confines of this eight year period. The reinvigoration of interest in folk music that occurred in the late 1950s had important antecedents that contributed to the development and dissemination of folk consciousness.²³ Many of the expectations of folk performers and the standards of authenticity with which folk would govern itself germinated as early as the 1920s. Therefore, before examining the revival period itself, I will begin by delving into the history that preceded it.

Scholarly interest in American folklore and folk music swelled in the late 1920s. Many had come to cherish what came to be called folk music for its democratic values and populist heroism. Folklorists like poet Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) were drawn to folk music for its valiant treatment of the common man and its commonplace origin. In 1927 Sandburg published *The American Songbag*, a collection of 280 songs including minstrel tunes, ballads, blues, and chain gang hollers that he had collected during his research and travels. A year later, the Library of Congress established the Archive of American Folk-Song, a division charged with collecting and cataloguing American folk songs. An enthusiastic amateur musicologist named John Lomax (1867-1948) was tapped to lead the division in 1933. In the summer of his first year in the post, Lomax and his son Alan (1915-2002) embarked on a trip across the South for the purpose of collecting traditional music. From sharecroppers, hillbillies, penitentiary inmates

²³ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 21.

(including the famed Huddie Ledbetter (1888-1949), better known as “Lead Belly”), and other rural peoples, they recorded indigenous music they considered untainted by modern and political influence.²⁴

While John Lomax’s work spoke to a democratic spirit amongst musicologists, his conservative, Old South bearing made him hesitant to investigate Left-leaning, politically conscious folk music.²⁵ The elder Lomax avoided the progressive, protest strains of folk music while his colleagues like Charles Seeger (1886-1979) at the Leftist Works Progress Administration (WPA) championed them.²⁶ Seeger and others participated in the Composers Collective, an organization whose purpose was to discover and encourage means of composing revolutionary music based on vernacular forms in order to build community amongst members of the Communist Popular Front and resist capitalist oppression.²⁷ During World War II, these same radical folklorists shied away from the Communist party’s initial anti-war stance and proffered their propagandizing and song-gathering talents for the war effort. Assuming positions at government bureaus such as the U.S. Resettlement Administration, the Library of Congress, and Radio Research Project, they collected and promulgated folk songs to encourage national unity.²⁸

The association of folk music and political solidarity was by no means unique to these folklorists. Folk song had long been an integral part of labor unions like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or “Wobblies”), who used songs as a means of

²⁴ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 10-19.

²⁵ Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 111-112, 391.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19, 23.

²⁷ Cantwell, 92, 93, 98.

²⁸ Scott Nelson, *Steel Drivin’ Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163-164.

fostering solidarity amongst their members during strikes and labor disputes.²⁹ Because of folk songs' working class derivation, Leftist groups like the IWW and the Communist Party (CPUSA), in particular, considered them more acceptable for camaraderie-building than pop songs. Pop music was deemed inadequate for its bourgeois, capitalist affiliations and its lack of social realism. Union and party officials borrowed familiar folk melodies and introduced new lyrics to fit their particular cause or struggle.³⁰

By infusing folk songs with social awareness and political messages, these songwriters created a folk consciousness that acted as a foundation for the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s.³¹ The folk conscious worldview promoted an opposition to capitalistic oppression and commercialism (especially regarding Tin Pan Alley), big business exploitation, and, later, fascism in keeping with its Leftist and union roots.³² It celebrated populism and the difficult lives of the lower and working classes, especially farmers, factory workers, miners, and migrants. In response to the Roaring Twenties' emphasis on empty (in folkies' view) virtues like progress, consumerism, commercialism, folk consciousness offered stability by promoting traditional, time-tested values like hard work, courage, and, in particular, community in the midst of the Depression.³³ Community became the key features of this ideology as folk musicians encouraged "one big union" for the proletariat and stressed a need for unity in support of common sociopolitical causes.

²⁹ Cohen, 19.

³⁰ R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 16-17.

³¹ Denisoff, 25.

³² Folk troubadour Woody Guthrie would famously write "This machine kills fascists" on the body of his guitar.

³³ Cantwell, 99.

Many of these folk singers were neither rural people nor working class people but middle class urbanites drawn to folk music by their political ideals and eager to reinvent themselves in response to their newly acquired folk consciousness. As scholar Robert Cantwell has suggested, folk performance provided an opportunity for “effacement of received social identity.”³⁴ Young men like Earl Robinson (1910-1991) and Pete Seeger dropped out of college (University of Washington and Harvard, respectively) to pursue the performance and study of “people’s” music. Robinson went on to write the score for John La Touche’s “Ballad for Americans” and Alfred Hayes’ “Joe Hill.”³⁵ Seeger, son of famed musicologist Charles, traveled banjo in-hand across the country in 1939 learning and performing folk songs. By early 1940, Seeger had settled in New York, where he joined a community of folk notables that included Woody Guthrie (1912-1967), Cisco Houston (1918-1961), Lead Belly, Aunt Molly Jackson, Burl Ives (1909-1995), and Alan and Bess Lomax.³⁶

The folk community’s most significant achievement during these pre-war years was the formation of the Almanac Singers. The Almanacs emerged in late 1940, the offspring of a new friendship between Pete Seeger and two active labor unionists, Millard Lampell (1919-1997) and Lee Hays (1914-1981). Lampell was a topic songwriter and college graduate, and Hays had extensive experience in the Southern labor movement from his time as an instructor at Arkansas’ Commonwealth College. United by their passion for labor songs and their belief in the union cause, the three moved into a loft together in Greenwich Village and began hosting rent parties. Informal concerts (termed “hootenannies”) at the Almanac Loft and later the Almanac House became a gathering

³⁴ Cantwell, 120.

³⁵ Cohen, 26; Denisoff 71-72.

³⁶ Denisoff, 74, 80.

place for the folk faithful, many of whom would become official or informal members of the group. Once assembled in one of its various incarnations, the group traveled and performed throughout 1941 and into 1942 for Leftist audiences across the country such as the National Youth Congress and chapter meetings of the CPUSA, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the United Auto Workers, and the Longshoremen's Union.³⁷

The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted the Almanacs' momentum. America's entry into the war compelled the group to retract much of their prior anti-war rhetoric. Moreover, the draft made soldiers out of many of those who once fought for folk consciousness. Pete Seeger was drafted into the army; Guthrie and Houston joined the Merchant Marines. Individual members of the Almanacs reunited for a few special projects during the war, but the group's collective activities largely ceased by early 1943.³⁸ The presence of radical folklorists in government did allow the folk Left to maintain a degree of activity during the war, but the folk community centered in New York around the activities of the Almanacs temporarily dispersed.

During their time together, the Almanacs managed to carefully tailor their presentation to suit what the members considered to be the highest ideals of folk music performance, working class culture, and Leftist principles. Despite many of the members' formal education and middle class backgrounds, the group adopted a working class posturing, appeared in work clothes, and occasionally invented folk-ish personal histories. Embracing their lack of vocal training, the group allowed voices and accents to

³⁷ While the Almanacs were not officially affiliated with the CPUSA, the stance of the group was often in accord with that of the party, and the Singers were frequently profiled in the *Daily Worker* and other American Communist publications; Cohen, 28-30; Denisoff 80-86.

³⁸ Cohen. 35-38.

mix freely in an “unprofessional heterogeneity.”³⁹ This aural informality combined with their casual, spontaneous attitude toward performance blurred the line between themselves and their audiences, who were frequently encouraged to sing along with the group. The accessibility they cultivated as performers reinforced their self-estimation as interpreters of people’s music.⁴⁰ In addition, their cohesion as a singing group rather than an assembly of individual stars was in conscious opposition to the star system of the Hit Parade. Unlike the “Tommy Dorsey Band” or the “Glen Miller Orchestra” which centered on the leadership of one person, the Almanacs were an anonymous community.

To them, the collective message was more important than personal recognition.⁴¹

While very active and dedicated to their cause, the Almanacs largely failed to accomplish their goal of indoctrinating the proletariat with any great degree of folk consciousness. Working class audiences questioned the social background of the individual Almanacs, the political feasibility of the group’s message, and the credibility of the group’s claim to be purveyors of genuine people’s culture.⁴² As Serge Denisoff notes, the “people”-oriented message of the Almanacs often failed to make inroads with the people themselves.⁴³ Urban laborers were more familiar with jazz and Tin Pan Alley music and were unfamiliar with the rural labor camp melodies and lyrics of many Almanac songs.⁴⁴ But rather than evaluating the group’s success at transmitting an ideology, the Almanacs deserve consideration for their contribution to the institutionalization of folk consciousness on a communal scale. Through their

³⁹ Cantwell, 140.

⁴⁰ Cantwell, 142; Denisoff, 84.

⁴¹ Denisoff, 84.

⁴² Cantwell, 142-145; Denisoff, 77-78.

⁴³ Denisoff, 78, 85.

⁴⁴ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1998), 284-285, 329-330.

performance style, fraternal attitude, and idealistic worldview, the Almanacs molded and formalized what would become the authenticating standards of participation of the folk community and the folk revival. They created a template for how “proper” folk groups should look and sound, what kind of songs they should sing, how they should be instrumented (acoustic guitars and banjos and occasionally harmonicas, accordions, and/or mandolins), and where their political ideals should rest.⁴⁵ The Almanacs were an experiment in non-conformist, folk-conscious lifestyle, and their brief existence in that two-year period set the tone for the folk community’s postwar actions.⁴⁶

The folk community reassembled and reactivated once the war concluded. People’s Song Inc. (PSI) was founded in January 1946 as an organization dedicated to the study and promotion of folk songs, particularly for union activity. PSI became one of the strongest supporters of Henry Wallace’s candidacy for President on the Progressive ticket in 1948. People’s Songs members traveled across the country campaigning for Wallace, and the budget of their organization became increasingly dependent on contributions from the Progressive Party. Wallace’s pitiful showing that November signaled not only his political demise but also that of PSI. However, the void created by PSI’s collapse was quickly filled by its sister organization, People’s Artists Inc. (PAI), a sort of folk singer talent agency founded around the same time as PSI. People’s Artists’ greatest achievement was the organization and publication of a new folk song monthly entitled *Sing Out!* to replace the former *People’s Songs Bulletin*.⁴⁷

In its first issue of May 1950, the editors elaborated the mission statement of their fledgling publication. According to their opening page, *Sing Out!* was to be “about

⁴⁵ Denisoff, 105.

⁴⁶ Cantwell, 145-147.

⁴⁷ Cantwell, 150; Cohen, 42-61; Denisoff, 106-129.

music;" not just any sort of music, but "people's music." The editors' tastes were particular; as they put it, "Well, there's music and there's music." Condemning the mainstream music industry, which in their opinion had separated itself from the masses, *Sing Out!* claimed that the brand of music they considered authentic "[had] to do with the hopes and fears and lives of common people." Their litmus test for genuineness was "How well does it serve the common cause of humanity?"⁴⁸

As the sheet music and articles included in the early issues attest, the political and cultural sentiments of *Sing Out!* reflected its allegiance to folk consciousness. The magazine filled its pages with union, antiwar, and topical songs reminiscent of the Almanacs' early repertoire. Traditional songs from around the world were included to suit the Lomax-led folklorist strain along with so-called Negro songs, which reflected not only the influence of black artists such as Lead Belly on the folk community but also the growing concern for civil rights amongst Leftists. Fittingly, the first issue included a young white folksinger's report of his recent trip to the South to work with the Civil Rights Congress.⁴⁹ The February 1951 issue was dedicated to "Songs for Negro History Week" and the March 1951 magazine featured a graphic of a protest vigil for lynching victims on the cover and an accompanying article. Older causes also received given attention. A series of five articles by Ralph Ditchik entitled "Forming a Chorus" about how and why to organize a community and workers' chorus began appearing in the fifth issue, and editorials extolling the value of folk songs for bringing peace (particularly during the Korean War, which began in 1950) were frequent.

⁴⁸ Robert Wolfe, "The First Issue," *Sing Out!* 1 (May 1950), 2.

⁴⁹ Ernie Lieberman, "...Things I Heard and Saw," *Sing Out!*, 1 (May 1950), 4-5.

Sing Out! and the folk community's politics led to unwelcome confrontations with McCarthyists during the Red Scare. Suspicion of folk singers' loyalty was not new; the FBI had investigated the Almanacs for their Communist affiliations as well as People's Songs and People's Artists.⁵⁰ But these instances paled in comparison to the new investigations the folk community faced in the early 1950s. In June 1950 the right-wing journal *Counterattack* published the first edition of *Red Channels*, a compendium listing the names of supposed Communists in broadcasting and show business. Included on the list were numerous folk artists and supporters including Pete Seeger, Oscar Brand, Burl Ives, Earl Robinson, Alan Lomax, and Millard Lampell. By 1951 folkies began receiving subpoenas to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and performers unwilling to cooperate found themselves blacklisted by radio and television networks.⁵¹

The Weavers were the group most conspicuously affected by the Red Scare. Formed in September 1948, the Weavers were composed of former Almanacs Lee Hays and Pete Seeger along with Ronnie Gilbert, and Fred Hellerman. One of People's Artists' most popular acts, the group appeared at a variety of union and political benefits throughout 1949. Producer and arranger-conductor Gordon Jenkins (1910-1984) of Decca Records heard the group and convinced his superiors to sign them in early 1950. The Weavers recorded "Tzena, Tzena," an Israeli folk song, and "Goodnight, Irene," a Lead Belly tune, accompanied by Jenkins' orchestral arrangements. The single proved to be runaway successes in the pop charts; "Irene" and "Tzena" climbed to numbers one and two, respectively. Other traditional songs like the South African "Wimoweh,"

⁵⁰ Cohen 30, 55; Denisoff, 119.

⁵¹ Cohen, 72-77.

American standards such as "On Top of Old Smokey," and more recent "folk" songs like Guthrie's "So Long (It's Been Good to Know Yuh)" were also successful.⁵²

Despite their popularity in the charts, the Weavers came under attack almost immediately for their prior Communist affiliations. The appearance of Seeger's name in *Red Channels* closed many doors for the group and prompted the cancellation of numerous gigs. By 1952 they were under FBI surveillance and investigation by both HUAC and the Senate Internal Security (McCarran) Committee. Intimidated by authorities and banned from most decent venues, the frustrated Weavers decided to break up.⁵³

The rise and fall of the Weavers confronted the folk community with two dilemmas: how to stay united as a subculture amid outside political threats and how to counter the commercialization that accompanied participation in the music industry. The folkies desired to maintain outwardly the ideological tenets of their community which had held them together since the rise of the Almanacs. Upholding these principles required non-cooperation with HUAC and the McCarran Committee, a stance that folk's most faithful were willing to take. As Denisoff has written, "The radical consciousness of these songsters opposed any *détente* with the committee; those who did not cooperate were denounced as traitors."⁵⁴ Songs like the "Talking Un-American Blues" and the "Investigators Song" mocked the committees and discouraged "stoopigeons."⁵⁵ People's Songsters like Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, Tony Kraber, and Pete Seeger

⁵² Cohen, 62-69; Denisoff 146.

⁵³ Cantwell, 180; Cohen, 79; Denisoff, 164-165.

⁵⁴ Denisoff, 142.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 141-142.

appeared before HUAC and refused to name names.⁵⁶ Folk authorities castigated figures like Oscar Brand and Burl Ives who cooperated with Congress.⁵⁷

The folk community's intolerance for dissent amongst its members testifies to the coalescence of the subculture's governing principles regarding the political authenticity of its performers. In addition, the scathing criticisms directed at Brand and Ives also had roots in another facet of folk consciousness: anti-commercialism. By the time of their appearances before these committees, both Brand and Ives had distanced themselves from their former People's Songs affiliations to pursue their professional ambitions.⁵⁸

Their success in interpreting folk music for the general public through their respective radio programs proved the commercial viability of folk to the music industry and inspired many imitators. Folk performers understood the need for financial solvency and were certainly not opposed to larger audiences. But purists were both suspicious of those who would use populist music for personal profit and fearful of the commercial means by which folk was successfully spreading. In the eyes of these self-styled authorities, popularization of folk at the hand's of record executives was moving "their" music perilously closer to Tin Pan Alley and further away from their proletariat ideal of folk as people's music.

The tentative way in which the folk faithful received the Weavers illustrates folk purists' apprehension. Despite having Seeger, Hays, and Hellerman—three of the staunchest members of the folk Left—as members, the Weavers were criticized in *Sing Out!* for their financial success and Jenkins' schmaltzy production of their traditional

⁵⁶ Cohen, 84.

⁵⁷ See Irwin Silber, "Folk Singer Oscar Brand Joins Witch Hunt Hysteria," *Sing Out!* 2 (Nov., 1951), 2, 16; Irwin Silber, "Burl Ives Sings A Different Song," *Sing Out!* 2 (March 1952), 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

material.⁵⁹ In his review of their concert at New York's Town Hall in December 1950, editor Irwin Silber expressed his misgivings about the group's lack of performative and aesthetic intimacy, suggesting that "the Weavers would have sounded far better in the more vital and vibrant Hootenanny setting than they did in their formal evening attire on the Town Hall stage." The editor also voiced his concerns about "musical hacks" appearing in the Weavers' wake who lacked the quartet's "integrity" and allegiance to people's music.⁶⁰ That Frank Sinatra had recorded a version of "Goodnight, Irene" was more than a little unsettling to folk authorities like Silber who originally associated the song with a black ex-convict from Louisiana.

These questions of political and professional authenticity remained important to the folk faithful, but the mid 1950s posed more immediate problems. The McCarthy era left the community in shambles. Those on the blacklist struggled to find work. Alan Lomax went abroad, ostensibly to research folk music in Europe but more to dodge HUAC. Meanwhile, Guthrie was diagnosed with Huntington's disease in 1952, and as his health deteriorated, the community gradually lost one of its most cherished spokesmen. *Sing Out!*'s fitness was also in jeopardy. Financial constraints forced the magazine to become a quarterly rather than monthly publication in 1954. While the themes of many of the songs it published remained loosely Leftist, the ideological edge of the editorials and articles dulled.⁶¹ As Cantwell has noted, the change indicated a greater shift in the folk community toward more innocuous, "inherently political" material rather than overtly political topical songs.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid, 79.

⁶⁰ Irwin Silber, "The Weavers--New 'Find' of the Hit Parade," *Sing Out!* 1 (Feb., 1951), 6, 12.

⁶¹ Cohen, 90.

⁶² Cantwell, 280-281, Cohen 101-104.

Pete Seeger's career at this juncture reflected the trend. The one-time Weaver published a guide to banjo playing and began writing a column for *Sing Out!* entitled "Johnny Appleseed, Jr." dedicated to the "the thousands of boys and girls who today are using their guitars and their songs to plant the seeds of a better tomorrow in the homes across our land."⁶³ The column provided encouragement for young folk ensembles and choruses and called for the organization of folk festivals and community events. Emulating the folk hero of his column's title, Seeger traveled across the country to perform at progressive universities, summer camps, and fundraisers.⁶⁴ His performances provided a populist message, subtle in its radicalism. "It seemed to me that I could make a point if I made it gently." Seeger explained. "I suppose you could say what I was doing was a cultural guerilla tactic."⁶⁵ His folk-conscious agenda coupled amateurism and the power of song to touch many members of the young generation who would stock the budding folk revival. Dave Guard (1934-1991) of the Kingston Trio and Joan Baez, for instance, were both inspired to become folk performers after seeing Seeger.

By 1958 momentum for the revival was building. Venues like the Gate of Horn, Club 47, and the hungry i [sic] opened in Chicago, Boston, and San Francisco, respectively, and hosted many folk acts. New York, however, remained the nerve center. Greenwich Village coffeehouses stocked folk artists, and Washington Square and a newly opened Folklore Center became other popular hangouts with folk enthusiasts.⁶⁶ These venues played host to a new generation of folk performers, so-called citybillies, born around the time Seeger picked his first banjo. Among them were artists like Dave Van

⁶³ Pete Seeger, "Johnny Appleseed, Jr.," *Sing Out!* 4 (Fall 1954), 30.

⁶⁴ Denisoff, 166.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Hajdu, 8.

⁶⁶ Cohen, 120-124.

Ronk (1936-2002), John Sebastian, Eric von Schmidt (1931-2007), Mary Travers, Carolyn Hester, the New Lost City Ramblers (John Cohen, Mike Seeger, Tom Paley), and Joan Baez. But perhaps the most notable and certainly the most financially successful of the new crop of performers was the Kingston Trio.

The Kingston Trio is most frequently cited as the group responsible for kicking off the folk revival. Californians Dave Guard, Bob Shane, and Nick Reynolds formed their group in 1957. Clean cut, middle class suburbanites of a younger generation, the three were interested in folk for its aesthetics rather than its politics. The Trio performed polished renditions of traditional, apolitical folk songs. Their self-titled album released by major label Capitol Records in 1958 included covers of Weavers, Guthrie, and Seeger songs. By the year's end, their single, a rendition of the Southern murder ballad "Tom Dooley," went to number one on the pop charts. Many attribute their tidy, inoffensive style to their popular success; their wholesome image won them fast acceptance in middle class American households still reeling from the sinful chaos of Elvis Presley and rock n' roll. Their single and album along with subsequent television appearances introduced millions of teenage listeners to folk music, and the success of the Kingston's pop-folk inspired numerous imitators.⁶⁷

The sensational reception of the Kingston Trio and their imitators alarmed folk's Old Guard. While many were elated with the sudden popular enthusiasm for folk music amongst America's youth, this pop-folk generation aggravated their fears of commercialism anew. To many of the older generation, pop-folk groups, as well as city folksingers, lacked the politics of folk consciousness and were, therefore, inadequate,

⁶⁷ Cantwell, 2, 50-51; Cohen, 129-134; Denisoff, 167; Hajdu, 8.

inauthentic purveyors of the folk tradition. The pages of *Sing Out!* provided a forum for the discussion.

The first article criticizing aspects of the folk revival was written by folk radical Ron Radosh in the wake of the "Tom Dooley" craze.⁶⁸ Entitled "Commercialism and the Folk Song Revival," Radosh's piece outlined his and others' concerns and suspicions regarding the revival. Firstly, he feared a lack of historical appreciation from folk fans who "sing the songs... without any understanding of what the songs are talking about, how they developed, or why people sing them."⁶⁹ But while newcomers' ignorance was clearly bothersome to Radosh, he reserved his sharpest criticism for the opportunism of new folk groups. "These groups who are supposedly building upon the folk tradition," he wrote, "are actually commercial 'pop' singers using guitars and banjos...snugly fit into the Tin Pan Alley notch." They were using a "meaningful art form in a way they would not have if acceptance by commercial channels was not their standard."⁷⁰

Just as revealing as Radosh's article was the debate that took place in the next issue over the place of folk consciousness in the revival. Published just prior to the first Newport Folk Festival of 1959, the exchange featured Alan Lomax and John Cohen, representing the Old Guard and city folksinger positions. Lomax suggested that the new crop of folksingers lacked an awareness of "the singing style or the emotional content of these folk songs, as they exist in tradition."⁷¹ To Lomax, forever the preservationist, the chief priority of the folksinger was to be "an interpretive artist...one link in a vital

⁶⁸ Ron Radosh, "Commercialism and the Folk Song Revival," *Sing Out!* 8 (Spring 1959), 27-29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁷¹ Alan Lomax, "The 'Folkniks'--and The Songs They Sing," *Sing Out!* 9 (Summer 1959), 30.

musical chain anchored in the hearts of humanity and of the past.”⁷² The assumption behind Lomax’s argument was that contemporary folksingers ought to be held accountable to the same concerns for tradition and populism that his generation considered genuine. John Cohen disputed Lomax’s prescription in his defense of city folksingers. The sentiments Cohen expressed reflected his perspective as a folkie of the post-McCarthy, post-Popular Front generation. In his article, Cohen claimed “the emphasis [in folk singing] is no longer on social reform” but “on a search for real and human values.” “We are not looking for someone to lead us,” he wrote. “We are looking within ourselves.”⁷³ In an implicit challenge to the old order, folk conscious generation, Cohen went on to suggest that while “tradition is heavily respected and goes unquestioned” in “folk societies,” the “search for values” was “becoming the tradition of the city.”⁷⁴

Cohen was not the only member of his generation of folk performers chafing under the prescriptions of the Old Guard. In 1959 young folksingers Dick Ellington and Dave Van Ronk published an expanded edition of the *Bosses’ Songbook*, a parody of PSI’s *People’s Song Book*. Rather than target old enemies like Tin Pan Alley and arch-capitalists, the *Bosses’ Songbook* turned the tables and lampooned the Old Left. Songs like “Hold the Line” and “The Ballad of the Party Folk-Singer” teased their elders for their self-righteous politics and presumptuous attitudes.⁷⁵ Together, the *Bosses’ Song Book* and Cohen’s “Defense of City Folksingers” represent the stirrings of a new consciousness amongst the up-and-coming generation. Folk’s younger population had

⁷² Ibid, 31.

⁷³ John Cohen “(A Reply to Alan Lomax) In Defense of City Folksingers,” *Sing Out!* 9 (Summer 1959), 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁵ Cohen, 142; Denisoff, 171.

different worldviews and life experiences than those of folk's Old Guard. They had not faced the struggles of the prewar folk community, and many young folkies were eager to assert their autonomy from what they considered to be antiquated prescriptions of folk consciousness.

By 1960 the revival was in full swing. *Time* magazine wrote of the folk music "frenzy" sweeping the nation, and *Newsweek* reported that banjo sales were up 500% in the last three years.⁷⁶ Folk clubs and festivals were springing up in major cities and drawing crowds. Kingston Trio albums continued to sell in the hundreds of thousands, Joan Baez played to sold out auditoriums across the country, and a new group, Peter, Paul, and Mary, sold over two million copies of their self-titled debut album. Older teenagers and young adults chiefly drove folk's upsurge in popularity. The generation who grew up with rock n' roll, rockabilly, and pop saw in folk a more sophisticated, intellectual alternative to coincide with their own personal maturation. Devouring records of new and old folk artists alike, some of these folk aficionados even made the pilgrimage to folk's mecca, Greenwich Village. Among them was Robert Allen Zimmerman, a young man who had recently rechristened himself Bob Dylan.

The early life story of Bob Dylan is comparable to that of the countless other young folk enthusiasts who were fueling the revival. He was born into a middle class family and had a comfortable childhood. His teenage interests were typical: motorcycles, James Dean, and Westerns. Hank Williams was one of his favorite artists as an adolescent, but rock n' roll and rhythm and blues were his true first loves. He idolized the rock stars of the day—Elvis, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, etc.—learned to play guitar and piano, and even fronted a garage band in which he imitated

⁷⁶ Cohen, 160.

Little Richard. Like many of his contemporaries, however, Dylan's preferences changed once he entered college.⁷⁷

Dylan's exposure to folk music began upon his enrollment at the University of Minnesota in 1959. It was in the folk circles of the college's bohemian district that Dylan began absorbing a myriad of traditional folk artists whose popularity was being reborn thanks to the revival--Woody Guthrie in particular. Dylan began emulating Guthrie's musical style and dress in his performances at local coffeehouses under his new stage name. Inspired by the thrill of the road and the dream of meeting his idol, he made his way to New York in January of 1961. Upon his arrival, he visited Guthrie several times in New Jersey's Greystone Park Hospital, where the folk legend was slowly dying from Huntington's chorea. Although much would later be made of the symbolic value of Dylan's meetings with Guthrie, it was the experience Dylan gained performing in Greenwich Village that was most important to his development at the time.⁷⁸

Dylan initially received only a lukewarm response from the Greenwich Village scene. He had neither the rural styling of the Appalachian performers like the New Lost City Ramblers, nor the polished delivery of a Kingston, nor even the few years experience of a city folksinger like Van Ronk. Thus, he found himself low on the totem pole. As though to make up for lost time and as yet unearned respect, Dylan, in David Hajdu's words, engaged in the "application of...elusion and artifice in the name of truth and authenticity."⁷⁹ Not unlike the posture of the Almanacs a generation before, he performed in work clothes and a corduroy hat, adopted a coarse timbre in his singing

⁷⁷ Hajdu, 66-68; Shelton, 1986, 22-55.

⁷⁸ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Vol. I* (New York : Simon & Schuster, 2004), 98-99; Hajdu, 68-71; Wayne Hampton, *Guerilla Minstrels* (Knoxville : University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 149-152; Shelton, 1986, 55-56, 68-75.

⁷⁹ Hajdu, 73.

voice in imitation of wizened black bluesmen, and created a colorful personal history for himself that sidestepped his non-descript, middle class background.⁸⁰

Thanks in part to a favorable review in the *New York Times* from folk critic Robert Shelton, John Hammond (1910-1987) at Columbia Records took an interest in Dylan and offered him a contract on his major label.⁸¹ Dylan's self-titled first album appeared in 1962. *Bob Dylan* featured much of the same material from his live set—"House of the Rising Sun," "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," "Man of Constant Sorrow," etc.—as well as two originals, a talking blues about his time in the city and a tribute to Guthrie entitled "Song to Woody." Initially, the album drew little attention, but the process encouraged Dylan to continue his career in folk.

Topical songwriting, the writing of songs about specific social causes or historical incidents, was growing increasingly popular as folk renewed its political interests in response to the events of the early sixties. Cold War calamities like the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and the U.S. intervention in Vietnam coupled with the activities of the Civil Rights movement contributed to the amplification of the political element of folk consciousness that had been intentionally muted since the McCarthy era. Baez, Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary boycotted the new folk TV program *Hootenanny* in response to the ongoing blacklisting of Pete Seeger while other folk artists like Tom Paxton and Billy Faier helped form the Folksingers Committee to End the Blacklist.⁸² Artists like the New World Singers and Guy Carawan traveled south to sing for integrationist causes.⁸³ Peter, Paul, and Mary took Seeger and Hays' Old Left ballad "The Hammer Song" to the Top

⁸⁰ Cantwell, 345; Shelton, 1986, 108-111.

⁸¹ Robert Shelton, "Bob Dylan: A Distinctive Folksong Stylist," *New York Times*, Sept. 29, 1961, reprinted in Benjamin Hedin (ed.), *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 16-17.

⁸² Cohen, 195-197.

⁸³ Irwin Silber, "He Sings for Integration," *Sing Out!* 10 (Summer 1960), 4-6.

10 in 1962. Even the Kingston Trio went political and recorded Seeger's antiwar anthem "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" in 1961. In delayed response to a *Sing Out!* letter urging "the publication of a song book or journal of topical songs...arising out of the peace, labor, [and] civil right movements," former Almanac Agnes "Sis" Cunningham and Gordon Friesen founded *Broadside* in February 1962.⁸⁴ Its pages were soon filled with compositions from zealous young songwriters eager to participate in the folk tradition as composers rather than simply interpreters. Among this group were Phil Ochs (1940-1976), Tom Paxton, Mark Spoelstra (1940-2007), Peter LaFarge (1931-1965), Len Chandler, and a new, topical Dylan.⁸⁵

Dylan quickly mastered the art of the topical song, becoming one of the most productive topical songwriters on the scene and the toast of the folk elite. His compositions littered the pages of *Broadside's* subsequent issues. Songs like "The Ballad of Emmett Till," "Masters of War," and "Let Me Die in My Footsteps" touched on issues of racism, nuclear war, and the military-industrial complex. He was pictured on the cover of the April/May issue of *Sing Out!*, and six pages of the magazine were dedicated to Dylan's songs and a flattering accompanying article. The author praised Dylan's talent and mystique as a performer and songwriter and portrayed the object of his article as a socially conscious, anti-corporate idealist of the Old Left folk mold.⁸⁶ Dylan's recording sessions at Columbia for his second album began to reflect his shift toward political, topical material. Playful tunes like "Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie" and "Sally Gal" were replaced by more politically oriented material like "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," which recounted the horrors of nuclear war, and "Oxford Town," inspired

⁸⁴ Malvina Reynolds, "Dear SING OUT," *Sing Out!* 10 (Dec.-Jan. 1960-1961), 2.

⁸⁵ Cohen, 180; Denisoff 176; Hampton, 158.

⁸⁶ Gil Turner, "Bob Dylan-A New Voice Singing Songs," *Sing Out!* 12 (Apr.-May 1962), 5-11.

by James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi.⁸⁷ Entitled *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, the album was finally released in May 1963.

Dylan began to appeal to the young people of the revival as well. One of his most eager new converts was Joan Baez, who was inspired to take up political causes in response to his new music. According to Hajdu, it is Baez who deserves much of the credit for introducing Dylan to folk fans. Her incorporation of some of his material into her set, his unbilled appearances during her ensuing summer concert tour, and their public romance inspired the pop-oriented young folkies to take a second look at his work.⁸⁸ Were Baez's praises not enough, Dylan's writing credit for Peter, Paul, and Mary's 1963 hit single, "Blowin' in the Wind," also reinforced the growing aura that Wayne Hampton has referred to as "the Dylan mystique."⁸⁹ Robert Shelton's declaration of late 1961 that Dylan's career "would seem to be [going] straight up" was premature at the time but pertinent by mid-1963.⁹⁰

In July 1963 Dylan appeared at the newly resurrected Newport Folk Festival, which had not taken place since 1960. Dylan's set was brief and unremarkable; Peter, Paul, and Mary's performance was the extraordinary one. At the conclusion of their program, they invited Dylan, Baez, Pete Seeger, the Freedom Singers, and Theodore Bikel up on stage with them to close Saturday night's program by singing "Blowin' in the Wind" followed by "We Shall Overcome." Hajdu describes the symbolism of the

⁸⁷ Hajdu, 162.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 147-148

⁸⁹ Hampton, 164.

⁹⁰ Shelton, 1961.

moment: "The old guard joined with the new, the commercial and the Communist, black and white, leading a sea of young people in a sing-a-long for freedom."⁹¹

The event was the most definitive in the folk movement since the first Almanac hootenanny. But whereas the Almanacs early concerts had signaled the amalgamation of folk consciousness, the 1963 festival marked its zenith. The audience was neither politically active nor working class, and neither were many of the performers, despite their posing. The message was loosely Leftist, though "Blowin' in the Wind" lacks some of the certainty inherent in "We Shall Overcome." The medium was certainly right, and folk was successfully competing as an alternative to Tin Pan Alley and rock n' roll. But the real triumph of Newport 1963 was the community. Newport assembled a crowd of over forty-thousand and united them in socially conscious folk song. Having sacrificed so much in the last decade in expectation of this kind of popular reception of their ideals, folk's Old Guard was overjoyed. But the elation of the Old Guard at folk's victory blinded them to a fundamental flaw foreshadowed by John Cohen four years earlier: the assumption that a revival staffed predominately by young people would continue on the elders' terms and with their goals.

As early as late 1963, Dylan was showing signs of his wariness with the dotting patronage of the aging folk elite. He had recorded another batch of topical protest songs in October for his forthcoming album *The Times They Are a-Changin'*. The title track along with social justice sorts of pieces like "Ballad of Hollis Brown," "With God On Our Side," "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," and "Only A Pawn In Their Game" earned their composer a litany of praise upon the album's release in February 1964. But by that date, Dylan's worldview had changed dramatically. President Kennedy's

⁹¹ Hajdu, 166.

assassination in November 1963 had dealt a severe blow to Dylan's idealism and made him question the worth of social criticism.⁹² When the Old Left Emergency Civil Liberties Committee selected him to receive their top honor, the Tom Paine Award, a drunken Dylan appeared and ranted at the distinguished audience: "You people should be at the beach...It is not an old people's world. Old people when their hair grows out, *they* should go out."⁹³ Dylan went on to question what he saw as put-on radicalism of the March on Washington in which he and Baez had participated and even expressed a measure of sympathy for Lee Harvey Oswald, whom he considered a product of the chaos of the times.

Dylan's writing reflected his crisis of conscience and took on, in Hampton's words, a "personal, subjective, and existential" nature.⁹⁴ His new songs lost their overt political sentiment. As he explained to *New Yorker* columnist Nat Hentoff during a June recording session, "There aren't any finger-pointing songs in here...Those records I've already made...Me, I don't want to write *for* people anymore. You know—be a spokesman...From now on, I want to write from inside me."⁹⁵ Some of the new material even assumed rock chord structures, reflecting Dylan's fascination with the Beatles, who made their American debut on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in February 1964.

Dylan unveiled some of the material gleaned from his new approach at Newport in July of that year. At a workshop nominally dedicated to topical songwriting, Dylan perplexed the audience by singing two songs nearly devoid of the expected political content, "Mr. Tambourine Man" and, perhaps metaphorically, "It Ain't Me, Babe." In

⁹² Shelton, 1986, 199.

⁹³ Quoted in Shelton, 1986, 200-201.

⁹⁴ Hampton, 169.

⁹⁵ Nat Hentoff, "Profiles: The Crackin', Shakin', Breakin' Sounds," *The New Yorker*, October 24, 1964, 66, 90, reprinted in Benjamin Hedin (ed.), *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader*, 2004, 25.

introducing Dylan's mainstage set, the Weavers' Ronnie Gilbert seemed to share the topical workshop audience's expectation that Dylan had gone unchanged since the previous year. "And here he is...take him, you know him, he's yours!" she announced, anticipating Dylan would behave as the "voice of his generation" as so many had billed him.⁹⁶ Dylan's performance, however, was quite the opposite. His set list was almost entirely apolitical in content.

While audiences' reactions to Dylan remained positive, the folk press resented Dylan's change in direction. Silber took the unprecedented step of writing him an open letter in *Sing Out!*. Just months earlier the editor had reviewed Dylan's newly published songbook and praised him for being "unafraid to look at the world as it really is, or at least as it seems to him."⁹⁷ Silber was content with Dylan's approach so long as it corresponded with his own, "as if he alone and a few others had the keys to the real world," Dylan would later write.⁹⁸ Failing to recognize any failings in his own ideology, Silber was convinced that Dylan had been brainwashed by the promise of folk's old enemies: fame and celebrity. "I saw at Newport how you had somehow lost contact with people," he wrote. "Your new songs seem to be all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious...You're a different Bob Dylan from the one we knew."⁹⁹ In *Broadside*, Paul Wolfe wrote of the "renunciation of topical music by its major prophet," criticized Dylan for his "utter disregard for the tastes of the audience" and his "self-conscious

⁹⁶ Dylan, 115.

⁹⁷ Irwin Silber, "Bob Dylan," *Sing Out!* 14 (Feb.-Mar. 1964), 53.

⁹⁸ Dylan, 67.

⁹⁹ Irwin Silber, "An Open Letter to Bob Dylan," *Sing Out!* 14 (Nov. 1964), 22-23.

egotism,” and crowned the still-topical Phil Ochs “the most important voice in the movement.”¹⁰⁰

August 1964 marked the release of *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, a collection of the songs Dylan had been writing that spring and summer. While many of the tracks reflected Dylan’s intentional distancing of himself from the politics of folk consciousness, “My Back Pages” was particularly evident of his disassociation. Hampton writes of how the song “exposes the hypocrisy of his old approach.”¹⁰¹ The song recounts Dylan’s former, Old Leftist worldview (“lies that life is black and white spoke for my skull,” “good and bad, I define these terms quite clear, no doubt somehow”) and then abandons it in favor of a New Left relativism with the refrain of “I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.” Silber’s fears for Dylan’s Old Left potential were realized. As Denisoff describes it, “the great white hope of folk consciousness had turned his back on it; in effect, he ‘laughed in church.’”¹⁰²

No one could fill the gaping hole that Dylan left in his departure from protest songwriting, but the topical singing community continued to thrive in his absence. Phil Ochs released his first album *All the News That’s Fit to Sing* that included songs like “Talking Vietnam” and “Cuban Crisis.” Tom Paxton earned praise from *Sing Out!* for his “radical approach to the problems of society” with his album *Ramblin’ Boy*.¹⁰³ But even Ochs and Paxton displayed a certain disregard for what Denisoff calls the “collective ethos” of the Old Left. The author quotes Paxton as saying, “Every artist’s

¹⁰⁰ Reprinted in Cohen, 222.

¹⁰¹ Hampton, 170.

¹⁰² Denisoff, 184.

¹⁰³ Josh Dunson, “Topical Singers,” *Sing Out!* 15 (Mar. 1965), 75.

first responsibility is to himself.”¹⁰⁴ Ochs voiced similar support for individualism and artistic merit in his contribution to *Sing Out!*'s symposium on topical songs and folksinging:

Too many bad songs are being accepted and applauded simply because they have the right message...I give much more consideration to the art involved in my songs rather than the politics...I'm only singing about my feelings, my attitudes, my views...This is the difference between now and the thirties, an uncompromising artistic sense of quality rather than a view of music that borders on the functional.¹⁰⁵

Ochs' new composition, "Love Me, I'm A Liberal" spoke to his deviance from the Old Left line. "Sure once I was young and impulsive, I wore every conceivable pin," the song goes, "...but I've grown older and wiser, and that's why I'm turning you in." This biting satire on the Socialist and union causes of decades past patently suggested that Ochs, like Dylan, felt his forefathers' politics were unfit for the 1960s and the New Left.¹⁰⁶ It was perhaps no accident that Ochs was excluded from the program at Newport in 1965 by a board composed predominately of Old Lefters like Seeger, Bikel, and Jean Ritchie.¹⁰⁷

Ochs may have disappointed members of the folk establishment, but his actions paled in comparison to those of Dylan in 1965. The folk community still considered Dylan as belonging to their ranks, even if he had lost his political edge. His new album *Bringing It All Back Home* included one side of acoustic tracks he had debuted in

¹⁰⁴ Denisoff, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Phil Ochs, *Sing Out!* 15 (Sept. 1965), 10-11.

¹⁰⁶ Denisoff, 174.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, 209, 236.

concerts during the previous summer and fall like “Mr. Tambourine Man,” “Gates of Eden,” and “It’s All Right Ma” as well as several new ventures into his former passion, rock n’ roll. Dylan was fascinated with the Animals’ electrified rendition of “House of the Rising Sun” and sought to effect a similar amalgamation of folk and rhythm and blues in his sessions. The result was songs with folk under-girding and rock facades like “Subterranean Homesick Blues” and “Maggie’s Farm.”¹⁰⁸ Dylan was able to adapt most of the electric tracks for solo acoustic performance during his tours in the spring of 1965: ten dates in the U.S. with Joan Baez (with whom Dylan soon broke up, largely over political differences) and a solo tour of Great Britain (captured in the film *Don’t Look Back*). He dropped much of the topical material from the set lists of these shows and refused audience requests for “Masters of War” and “With God on Our Side.”¹⁰⁹

By late July Dylan was ready to unveil his electric transformation for the folk community. Five days before Newport, Columbia released his new rock single, “Like a Rolling Stone.” Dylan was eager to recreate the sound of his latest song and album for the Festival audience. To assist him he reassembled his team of studio musicians as well as a few members of the electric Paul Butterfield Blues Band for some impromptu practice sessions. The result was his legendary performance of July 25, 1965.

Dylan’s performance that night was heartbreaking to many and even unsettling to Dylan himself, as has already been described. It was not that electric music was uncommon to the Newport crowd. Country and blues musicians like Muddy Waters and Johnny Cash had performed electric music for Newport crowds before, and while the Paul Butterfield Blues Band was criticized by Alan Lomax at 1965’s festival, the

¹⁰⁸ Hajdu, 236.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 218-219.

folklorist's objection was to their appropriation of a traditionally black music form, not their electrification. It was not that the audience was unaccustomed to Dylan's electric music, either; his album had been released more than four months prior and "Like A Rolling Stone" dominated the airwaves at the time of the festival.

The startling, upsetting quality of Dylan's performance had to do, like everything else in folk, with precedent. Dylan chose to give his first electric performance since high school at the venue at which he had only two years prior linked arms with folk's Old Guard and new stars to signal folk's arrival. The music of the new Dylan was loud and un-intimate; the attitude was brazen and unapologetic. Folkies had heard electric Dylan before, but they had never seen it. To witness him on that stage sporting a leather jacket and brandishing an electric guitar, two symbols of folk's sworn enemy rock n' roll, was overwhelming. Folk saw its favorite son transformed. As one observer put it,

Bob is no longer a neo-Woody Guthrie...He has thrown away his dungarees and shaggy jacket. He has stopped singing...about 'causes'...they [the audience] seemed to understand that night for the first time what Dylan has been trying to say for over a year—that he is not theirs or anyone else's.¹¹⁰

To the folk faithful, Dylan had reconfigured himself into the image of everything it stood against, and they were powerless to stop him.

In the wake of Newport, Silber floundered to salvage the Old Guard position by pinning Dylan's change on commercialism. The third page of the next *Sing Out!* featured a full page photo of Dylan, Stratocaster in hand, with a caption by Silber that read: "The era of Folk-Music-as-Show-Business reached what may prove to be its ultimate peak."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Jim Rooney quoted in Nelson, 3-4.

¹¹¹ Irwin Silber, "What's Happening," *Sing Out!* 15 (Nov. 1965), 3-4.

The younger editors, however, knew better. Paul Nelson painted the scene as an ideological struggle between Seeger and Dylan in which “the audience had to choose.”¹¹² (Seeger had led a chaotic sing-a-long for civil rights a day after Dylan’s performance). Pete Seeger was the “nice guy who has subjugated and weakened his art through his constant insistence on a world that never was and never can be,” while Dylan was the “angry, passionate poet who demands his art to be all” and who portrays the world as a place “where there isn’t often hope, where man isn’t always noble.” According to Nelson, the audience chose Seeger, who represented “backwards over forwards” and “the safety of wishful thinking rather than the painful, always difficult stab of art.” “It was a sad parting of the ways for many, myself included,” wrote Nelson, who left *Sing Out!* immediately afterward. “I choose Dylan. I choose art.”¹¹³

The folk revival did not come to a grinding halt after Newport, but the die had been cast. Those artists who played predominately traditional material, mountain music, and bluegrass continued to thrive, perhaps because of the apolitical nature of their music. Many of folk’s more promising young performers, however, turned to folk-rock in Dylan’s example: Phil Ochs and the Lovin’ Spoonful on the East Coast, and the Mamas and the Papas, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, the Grateful Dead, and Buffalo Springfield in the West. Psychedelic, hippy culture blossomed in 1966 and distracted most groups from any concrete political agenda aside from a general anti-authority, anti-war sentiment. Subsequent Newport Folk Festivals featured an array of traditional, commercial, topical, and now folk-rock groups, but, in time, audiences dwindled. By the late 60s, the folk revival was out of touch and outmoded. Joan Baez’s

¹¹² Nelson, 8-9.

¹¹³ Ibid, 9.

performance at Woodstock in 1969 epitomized folk's obsolescence. Baez, still a dogmatic anti-war advocate of the Old Leftist mold, opened with the old organizing song "Joe Hill" and came across as something of a relic, "awkward and awed, certainly out of place" in Cohen's words.¹¹⁴

Amidst all the chaos within folk that he had no small part in creating, Dylan continued his foray into electric music. He toured the U.S. with his band, playing acoustic and electric sets and released an entirely electric album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, in August 1965. In 1966 he returned to England for another tour. Unlike American audiences who had been largely accepting of the electric Dylan, English crowds were hostile, expecting, as they had the year before, the Dylan of 1963. Booing was frequent, and in a particularly famous instance, one man shouted out "Judas!" at his would-be betrayer.¹¹⁵ Dylan, however, was unfazed. "I don't believe you! You're a liar!" he responded and commanded his band to "play f_cking loud!" as they launched into "Like A Rolling Stone." After months of performing with a backing band, Dylan appeared confident that he had made the right choice at Newport.

From the Almanac loft to the Newport stage, folk artists grappled with authenticity. Both as individuals and as a subculture, folkies pursued political and musical ideals which reflected their experience and perspective of American music and society. Though initially united under the banner of folk consciousness, in time the community's cohesiveness was strained. Red Scare anxieties tested tribal loyalties and nearly drove the subculture to extinction. Later, record sales and radio airplay of younger folk acts catapulted the movement from its intimate Greenwich Village origins to national

¹¹⁴ Cohen, 165; *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music*, Dir. Michael Wadleigh. Warner, 1970.

¹¹⁵ Bob Dylan, *Live 1968 (Bootleg Series: Vol. 4, The "Royal Albert Hall" Concert)*. Columbia, 1998.

popularity. Inculcating folk conscious values on the masses of new converts was a tall order for folk's Old Guard, and their successes were temporary at best. Generational and political differences, exemplified by the careers of Dylan and others, challenged traditional views of folk authenticity and ultimately led the folk revival's quiet descent.

Chapter Two: When the Kids Were United

Popular perceptions of punk and punk rock have been so colored by their British incarnations that it is sometimes easy to forget that the phenomenon began in the United States. American artists to whom the labels were originally applied—Richard Hell, the Ramones, Blondie, Television, Talking Heads, etc.—emerged in the mid-1970s, predominately in New York venues like CBGB's, Max's Kansas City, and the Mudd Club. The stylistic and musical roots of these groups, however, ran deeper. Bohemian, avant-garde bands like the Fugs and the Velvet Underground; mid-1960s garage rockers such as the Troggs and the Kingsmen and, later, the MC5 and the Stooges; outrageous burlesque performance artists like the New York Dolls and Alice Cooper; and British “glam rock” acts like David Bowie, Mott the Hoople, Gary Glitter, and T-Rex all influenced what would come to be considered “punk” and “punk rock” in the United States.¹¹⁶

Though they inspired legions of imitators individually, the original New York groups shared neither a common style of dress nor an identical approach to music. The Ramones, for instance, wore ripped jeans and motorcycle jackets and sped through their songs at breakneck speeds, while Talking Heads dressed in neat shirts and slacks and artfully varied their pacing. What united them as “punk” were the three elements they considered most appealing in their predecessors: an unorthodox sound, an uncompromising attitude, and an unusual approach to music when compared to the mainstream.

Unlike the prevailing music of the time that featured dense production, complex guitar solos, and intricate stage shows, punk music was based around stripped-down,

¹¹⁶ Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 12-13.

basic guitar patterns and melodies and was performed in more intimate club atmospheres.¹¹⁷ The artists made no attempt at virtuosity; instead, they unapologetically embraced a do-it-yourself ethic. They believed strongly in creativity and artistic license. Through song lyrics and diverse styles of dress, punks celebrated their eccentricities and unusual habits. Legs McNeil, editor of the fan magazine (“fanzine”) *Punk* and frequently-cited creator of the term “punk,” claims that punk was “...about advocating kids to not want to be told what to do, but make life up for themselves,...to get people to use their imagination again...It was about saying it was okay to be amateurish and funny, that real creativity came out of making a mess.”¹¹⁸

Not surprisingly, McNeil became a harsh critic of the British form of punk to which he was exposed upon the Sex Pistols’ arrival in America in January 1978. The punk ideals of entertainment and originality that he and his fanzine embraced appeared absent from British punk, which to him seemed too preoccupied with economics and class politics. McNeil’s peer Danny Fields voices their objection at the time: “There was no music in the coverage of the Sex Pistols. It was simply that this sociological phenomenon from England happened to play music.”¹¹⁹

Fields’ sentiment is largely accurate. By the time the Pistols left England that January, the British press was focusing almost exclusively on punk as a moral outrage and a social ill rather than a musical style, and that perception carried over to the American press. How the American brand of punk transferred to Great Britain and transformed itself is the focus of this chapter.

¹¹⁷ Andy Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music*, (Philadelphia : Open University Press, 2001), 59-60.

¹¹⁸ Legs McNeil, *Please Kill Me*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 334.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid*, 330.

The person most frequently credited with bringing punk to England is Malcolm McLaren. As fashion designer and boutique owner, McLaren took a keen interest into youth style and music subculture. His shop on London's King's Road (variously named "Let It Rock," "Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die," and "Sex" by 1974) initially specialized in apparel and paraphernalia for "Teddy Boys."¹²⁰ In time, McLaren and his partner Vivienne Westwood switched to selling leather garments and fetish wear. The change was partly in response to the more outrageous and shocking styles to which McLaren was exposed upon the New York Dolls' visit to his shop in late 1972 and during the owner's subsequent trip New York's underground proto-punk scene in 1973.¹²¹

It was around this period that McLaren and his designers also began incorporating Situationist themes into the Sex merchandise. Situationism was a radical countercultural and artistic movement organized in 1957. McLaren had been exposed to its tenets while in art school and even visited Paris, its epicenter, in 1968. In the example of preceding avant-garde groups like the Letterists, Surrealists, and Dadaists, Situationists demanded that art no longer be seen as a separate sphere of society but instead be infused into everyday life.¹²² Adherents to Situationism critiqued post-war culture and modern society.¹²³ Theoreticians like Guy-Ernest Debord argued that society was becoming more representational than "directly lived" as commodities were replacing interpersonal relationships.¹²⁴ According to Debord, social relations in advanced societies were almost

¹²⁰ Teddy Boys or "Teds" were a British youth subculture that emerged in the early 70s. Teds idolized fifties icons like James Dean and Gene Vincent and mimicked their style of dress (greased hair, leather jackets, etc.) They were punks' primary rivals and enemies by the late seventies.

¹²¹ Kris Needs, "Make Up America: The New York Dolls," *Mojo*, 151 (June 2006): 59.

¹²² Savage, 30-32.

¹²³ Marcus, 1989, 351-357.

¹²⁴ Guy-Ernest Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. (Trans. Fredy Perlman and John Supak. Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), Theses 1, 42.

entirely “mediated by images.”¹²⁵ Situationist artwork highlighted and satirized this mediation through collages of images from print media emblazoned with bright colors and radical political slogans. McLaren and Westwood were intrigued by this artistic approach and incorporated many Situationist themes and slogans into the apparel and advertisements of their shop on the King’s Road.¹²⁶

Based on his experiences with Situationism and his exposure to the budding American punk scene, McLaren became intent on starting his own youth cultural movement in Britain. Late in 1974, he, Westwood, and colleague Bernie Rhodes designed a t-shirt that acted as a sort of manifesto of the values and goals of McLaren’s original vision. The top of the shirt featured a decisive message so as to signal the start of a new era: “You’re gonna wake up one morning and *know* what side of the bed you’ve been lying on!”¹²⁷ Below the statement were two columns of loves and hates. The hates reflected their frustration with mainstream music, entertainment, fashion, politics, and media. Condemned were “pop stars who are thick and useless” including Yes, Elton John, Rod Stewart, and Mick Jagger, television personalities, “good fun entertainment when it’s really not good nor funny,” “rich boys dressed as poor boys,” “old clothes, old ideas,” the suburbs, politicians of the Left and the Right, and “the narrow monopoly of the media causing harmless creativity to appear subversive.” The loves included a different array of musicians (Eddie Cochran, Bob Marley, Iggy Pop, John Coltrane), an assortment of obscure artists and writers, “imagination,” and the first ever mention of McLaren’s newly assembled rock group, “Kutie Jones and his SEX PISTOLS.”

¹²⁵ Ibid, Theses 4, 36.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 28, 30-32; Savage 58-69.

¹²⁷ Reproduced in Savage, 84-85.

McLaren understood the power of rock music amongst British youth and decided that a band would make the ideal vanguard for his "new wave" movement. His store Sex attracted a sizeable number of alienated working class and middle class youth, which made the assembling of a new group relatively easy. Steve ("Kutie") Jones and Paul Cook were from a working class neighborhood in West London and had some amateur experience in a neighborhood band called the Swankers playing guitar and drums, respectively.¹²⁸ McLaren paired them with bassist Glen Matlock, another Sex regular, and named his new group the Sex Pistols. The new manager secured a rehearsal space and instruments for his band, who began practicing together in the fall of 1974.

Shortly after the Pistols were announced on the Loves/Hates t-shirt, McLaren returned to New York and volunteered to manage the declining New York Dolls. His lack of qualifications for the position was quickly apparent. McLaren made an unsuccessful attempt at redesigning the Dolls with a Communist motif, and it was not long before the band folded.¹²⁹ Despite McLaren's failure, his stint with the Dolls gave him firsthand experience managing a group and inspired him to continue his efforts at managing the Sex Pistols and promoting Sex's agenda, not to mention its merchandise. While eager to fulfill his Situationist dreams of youth revolt, McLaren was a businessman. Throughout the Sex Pistols career, he remained very conscious of the group's commercial as well as countercultural potential. Upon his return from America in the spring of 1975, he took a more active role in overseeing and promoting the group in pursuit of these two ends. Feeling as though something was lacking from the band's

¹²⁸ Clinton Heylin, *Nevermind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols/ The Sex Pistols* (New York : Schirmer Books, 1998), 11.

¹²⁹ Laing, 24; Needs, 65.

image, he decided they could use a fourth member to act as lead singer. In John Lydon, McLaren found his missing piece.

A group of ill-mannered teens nicknamed “the Johns” because of their common first name were frequenting Sex by the summer of 1975. Two of their more distinctive members were John Simon Ritchie (1957-1979) and John Lydon. Ritchie, popularly known as Sid Vicious, was quiet and impressionable but took great interest in the Sex image. Lydon was the angry, brooding one of the two, known for his blank stare, dyed spiky hair, and self-styled, provocative wardrobe (a “I Hate Pink Floyd” t-shirt, for instance). Lydon’s distinctive look, caustic attitude, and foul mouth made him the perfect blend of distinctiveness and offensiveness to McLaren, who invited him to tryout for the Pistols in August. For his audition, Lydon “sang” along to Alice Cooper’s “Eighteen” on a jukebox, contorting his body into Quasimodo postures and screeching haphazardly. McLaren was sold on the shock value alone. He began rehearsing with the group, and his new bandmates gave him the stage name “Johnny Rotten.”¹³⁰

Throughout their associations during the Sex Pistols years, McLaren and Lydon were foils for one another: McLaren the pretentious, art savvy, entrepreneurial “peacock,” Lydon the churlish, street-wise ruffian.¹³¹ The juxtaposition of the two in some ways mirrored British punk’s early composition; avant-garde, middle class former art students beside upstart, working class street-urchins. Historical circumstances united the two halves.

Both sides were a product of their country’s economic and social decay. By 1975 the U.K. was undergoing a severe recession. The global oil crisis combined with trade

¹³⁰ Marcus, 1989, 27-28.

¹³¹ In McLaren’s own words. See *The Filth and the Fury*, Dir. Julien Temple. New Line, 2000

deficits stemming from Britain's largely fruitless membership in the European Economic Community contributed to a runaway inflation rate of 24%.¹³² Retail prices were 150% higher than they had been just twelve years prior. Despite the promises of Harold Wilson's Labour government for full employment, 700,000 people remained out of work.¹³³ Career opportunities for working class youth were often limited to menial office work and manual labor. Creatively inclined middle class teens took refuge in art schools but, like their working class contemporaries, often found few outlets for their talents upon graduation.

Disillusioned with the prospect of boring jobs and predictable lives, many London teens, working class and middle class alike, lived off government unemployment payments ("the dole") and moved into abandoned tenement houses, nicknamed "squats."¹³⁴ As has been the case with proletariat posturing in folk, much has been written on the working class pose that many middle class youth assumed as squatters and later as punks. But rather than risk drowning in the sociology of the British class system, I will affirm the position of scholar Sean Albiez that the working class posing of middle class Britons is best understood as an act of solidarity with their working class counterparts and a sign of their alienation from middle class values.¹³⁵

Along with petty thievery and football hooliganism, rock and roll was a primary interest of the squatters. One of the squats' greatest perks was the ample rehearsal space they provided. Many of the bands that would come to make up the punk movement got

¹³² Bill Coxal and Lynton Robins. *British Politics Since the War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 36-37, 219.

¹³³ Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), 341-342.

¹³⁴ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1979), 63-65; Laing, 29-30; John Street, *Rebel Rock* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 175.

¹³⁵ Sean Albiez, "Print the truth, not the legend: The Sex Pistols: Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, June 4, 1976," in *Performance and Popular Music*, ed. Ian Inglis (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2006), 98

their start practicing in squats. Some like the 101ers, Eddie and the Hot Rods, and the Stranglers began as so-called "pub rock" bands. They emulated the classic rhythm and blues sound of the fifties and insisted that rock return to its roots by playing in small clubs and bars.¹³⁶ Others were more image-conscious. Groups like the London SS, whose members would go on to form the Clash and Generation X, idolized the flash and absurdity of the Dolls and glam rock groups like Mott the Hoople.¹³⁷ Stylistic concerns aside, the groups were united in their objection to mainstream music and were eager to participate in a creative revolution.

Though it was the Sex Pistols' seminal example that catalyzed many groups and inspired them to perform and unite under the banner of punk, the Pistols' original appeal was in neither their proficiency nor their professionalism. The first performances in late 1975 and early 1976 were chaotic and disorganized. Their early repertoire consisted of haphazard covers of sixties pop songs like the Who's "Substitute" and the Monkees' "(I'm Not Your) Stepping Stone" with lyrics carefully corrupted by Rotten, who taunted the crowd from stage, hung on the microphone, and unsettled the audience with his glassy-eyed stare and frequent spitting. Original compositions celebrated idleness, laziness, noise, and amphetamine habits, spewed invective, and condemned mainstream fashion. "We don't care about long hair! I don't wear flares!" screamed Rotten in "Seventeen." Most of the group wore Sex apparel while Rotten's costume was typically homemade, a pauper-look that involved torn trousers mended with safety pins, tattered sport coats, and mohair sweaters.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Laing, 8, 13.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 22.

¹³⁸ Albiez, 98

Early audiences were baffled by the group's careless playing, provocative attitude, and unusual wardrobe. "You can't play!" was a common insult and "So what?" the Pistols' customary response. A February 1976 concert review attempted to capture the unusual character of a Sex Pistols show. "A musical experience with the emphasis on Experience," the author wrote. When asked about the group's musical goals, one of the Pistols responded, "Actually, we're not into music... We're into chaos."¹³⁹ For the group and especially their manager, the Pistols were more than simply entertainers; they were a catalyst for reckless, spontaneous social and stylistic upheaval, one pub or art college crowd at a time.

The Sex Pistols' extraordinary approach to music and performance failed to catch on with straitlaced college audiences and the music press. But to squatter bands and many urban youth they were the heralds of a new era in youth music. In addition to the Johns, a group of misfit art students from southeast London dubbed the Bromley Contingent were some of the Pistols most enthusiastic fans, not to mention punk's premier fashionistas. Their outlandish hairstyles, makeup, and dress were individually crafted to reflect each member's unique style and deliberately made to arouse suburban ire. In one writer's words, this "artful, intelligent and often dangerously attired vanguard of proto-punk misfits did much to create the aura of illicitness and cultural degeneracy that characterized the early punk aesthetic."¹⁴⁰ In the ensuing years, members of the Bromley Contingent would form the group Siouxsie and the Banshees, but other Pistols fans were more immediately inspired to put together their own groups. An April 23, 1976 gig at London's The Nashville inspired several young musicians who would become key

¹³⁹ Neil Spencer, "Don't look over your shoulder, but the Sex Pistols are coming," *New Musical Express*, Feb. 18, 1976, reproduced in Heylin, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Paytress, "Suburban Guerillas: Siouxsie and the Banshees," *Mojo* 151 (June 2006), 72.

players in punk. Tony James formed Chelsea and recruited Billy Idol to sing not long afterward. Dave Vanian soon became the frontman for the Damned. And after the show, Mick Jones convinced Joe Strummer (1952-2002), whose 101ers had closed the concert, to quit pub rock for punk and form the Clash.¹⁴¹

Just as the folk community had enclaves in major cities away from the epicenter in New York, punk and the Pistols made inroads outside of London. Manchester's Peter McNeish and Howard Trafford changed their names to Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto after seeing the group and brought punk to Manchester by forming their own band, the Buzzcocks.¹⁴² When the Pistols visited Manchester upon the Buzzcocks' invitation and performed on June 4 and July 20, 1976, they inspired the formation of a satellite punk community that would eventually include groups like Warsaw (later renamed Joy Division), the Fall, Magazine, and the Smiths. In his writing on the Manchester concerts, Albiez precisely captures the Pistols ability to rouse their audience with their immediacy:

Rotten made the members of the audience aware that he was alert to their presence, demanded a reaction, challenged them...It was an affront, an assault and it dared the audience to take a stand. The message had little to do with show business. It was a call to arms and was suffused with realism and tangible authenticity.¹⁴³

Sex Pistols' concerts were extraordinary wake-up calls which overturned many onlookers' traditional understandings of rock performance and performer-audience relationships. The urgency and audacity with which the group performed and the ways in which Rotten, in particular, engaged the audience made the Pistols exceptional, and their

¹⁴¹ Marcus, 1989, 37; *Westway to the World*, Dir. Don Letts. Sony, 2001.

¹⁴² Savage, 198.

¹⁴³ Albiez, 99.

confidence in this unusual and unique music form made their message appear genuine. The promise they offered of participation in a punk culture built around, among other things, “imagination” was an intriguing and exciting possibility for many bored London youth and, before long, for young people all over the U.K.

The tell-tale sign of punk’s growing popularity was the formation of its first fanzine. *Sniffin’ Glue (and Other Rock N’ Roll Habits for Punks!)* premiered in July 1976.¹⁴⁴ Its founder and editor Mark Perry (“Mark P”) fit the classic punk profile: a disillusioned, twenty-year-old bank teller drawn to the growing London music scene as a distraction from the drudgery of his everyday life. To Mark P, punk rock was a welcome alternative dedicated to “enjoyment and nothing else—leave the concepts to likes of Yes.”¹⁴⁵ *Sniffin’ Glue* offered a print forum for discussion and criticism within the subculture much like *Sing Out!* had functioned for the folk revival. Though early issues of the fanzine were primarily dedicated to praising established groups like the Ramones and Television, Mark P always reserved encouragement for up-and-coming local punk: “We’ve got to make somethin’ real happen here. Most British rock is past it now but the punk scene isn’t...London punk is great so let’s go!”¹⁴⁶ The growing number of punk groups and shows throughout the late summer and fall of 1976 provided *Sniffin’ Glue* with plenty of fodder for discussion. A Screen on the Green concert in Islington on August 29 included sets by the Pistols, the Clash, and the Buzzcocks, but it was quickly outshone by the 100 Club’s Punk Festival the next month.

The two-night Punk Festival was a kind of punk Woodstock that featured nearly all of the major players in punk at the time: Subway Sect, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the

¹⁴⁴ “Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue” is a song by the Ramones featured on the group’s first album.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Perry, “MP’s Sniff Contents,” *Sniffin’ Glue* 1 (July 1976), 2.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Perry, “The London Scene-Punk Wise,” *Sniffin’ Glue* 1 (July 1976), 8.

Clash, the Pistols, the Damned, the Vibrators, and the Buzzcocks. The shows were not without incident, however. The Pistols' most ardent fan, Sid Vicious, already infamous for attacking a journalist with a bike chain at an earlier Pistols gig, hurled a glass during the Damned's set. A spectator was injured, prompting the 100 Club to cease booking punk groups. The incident solidified the largely specious public association between punk and violence that had already gotten the Pistols banned from many London clubs.

Despite their notoriety amongst club managers, the Sex Pistols remained the patriarchs of the scene. But, as the 100 Club event attested, rival punk bands were emerging by the latter half of 1976. While in competition with the Pistols, these groups adopted much the same musical and artistic framework. Their music and performances evidenced a belief in punk as a primitive, immediate, and, above all, creative form of rock. They appealed to disaffected youth and designed their subculture to be in deliberate opposition to mainstream radio and fashion.

In terms of political approach, the groups were less similar. The Pistols' two primary competitors, the Damned and the Clash, did not endorse the negative, negationist slant of the Pistols. The Damned (Ray Burns/Captain Sensible, Chris Miller/Rat Scabies, Dave Vanian, and Brian James) claimed to be out "to have a bit of fun" and were loved by their fans for their frantic pace and campy theatrics rather than their politics.¹⁴⁷ Conversely, the Clash (Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Terry Chimes, and manager Bernie Rhodes) were serious about politics and channeled their "lunatic, overboard Stalinist behavior" into songs about urban alienation, street riots, and dead-end

¹⁴⁷ Mark Perry, "Damned Interview," *Sniffin' Glue* 3 (Sept. 1976), 5.

jobs.¹⁴⁸ But unlike the Pistols, the Clash presented a constructive political program that sought, in Mick Jones' words, "to encourage people to do things for themselves, think for themselves, and stand up for their rights."¹⁴⁹

While these three groups and many others varied in terms of their exact political attitudes, the first punks shared a fundamental perspective on the British political structure. Owing to similarities in life experience, punks agreed on two political tenets: aversion to institutional authority and a belief in individual freedom. In the early and mid-1970s, working class and lower middle class urban Britons who would later staff the early punk movement led disappointing if not depressing lives under both Conservative and Labour administrations. Punks who came of age during this period grew disillusioned with both parties and disgusted with the institutional political process. Their strong distaste for traditional forms of government led them to espouse a decentralized political system in which personal license trumped established authority. Songs like the Buzzcocks' "Autonomy," Chelsea's "Right to Work," the Clash's "Remote Control," and the Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." testified to the fiercely democratic (if not libertarian or anarchist) values of the early punk community.

The commonality of aesthetic and political values amongst the punk community became evident in the standards by which they chose to accept or reject the authenticity of up-and-coming "punk" groups. The Vibrators, for instance, were made to feel unwelcome because of their casual approach and traditionalist vestiges (long hair, covering Beatles and Rolling Stones standards). Punk historian Jon Savage writes of

¹⁴⁸ Uninterested in the Clash's radical political outlook, Chimes eventually left the group and was replaced by Nicky "Topper" Headon. For an account of the Clash's changes in cast, see *Westway to the World*; Joe Strummer quoted in *Westway to the World*.

¹⁴⁹ Mick Jones quoted in Steve Mick, "The Very Angry Clash," *Sniffin' Glue* 4 (Oct. 1976), 3.

their incongruity, “the Vibrators were passers-by as far as Punk taste-makers were concerned...they lacked moral content,” that is, genuine commitment to punk’s aesthetic and political values.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the Jam received tentative reception from punk authorities. Mark P’s review of a Jam concert in Soho, for instance, reflected his uneasiness with the group:

It’d be great if they could start writing some strong Material [sic], you, know, [sic] this sixties revival thing’s alright for a start but what we need now is more serious bands who have got something to sing about. The Jam are good but they’ve got a lot to think about (and change) before they break into the London-scene with any credibility.¹⁵¹

For a subculture that demanded novelty and contemporary meaning, the throwback character of the Jam’s music and presentation was unwelcome.

By late 1976, punk’s value system had coalesced. That December, the Pistols, the Clash, and the Damned joined forces for an “Anarchy Tour” of England organized by the Pistols’ new record company, EMI. The name of the tour was derived from the name of the Pistols’ first single released in late November. While “Anarchy in the U.K.” was not the first punk single released, it was the most important to date and rapidly became punk’s anthem.¹⁵² The immediacy of its message (“Rrrright now” growls Rotten at the song’s start), the shock value of its lyrics (“I am an antichrist, I am an anarchist!,” “I wanna destroy passers-by”), the song’s resounding chorus (“I wanna be ANARCHY!”), all coupled with the palpable vitriol of Rotten’s delivery encapsulated punk’s artistic and

¹⁵⁰ Savage, 221.

¹⁵¹ Mark Perry, “The Jam-Newport Court, Soho, 16/10/76,” *Sniffin’ Glue* 4 (Oct. 1976), 7.

¹⁵² The Damned cut their first single “New Rose” with Stiff Records. The song was released on October 20, 1976.

political ethos. "It's what all this new wave scene is about," said *Sniffin' Glue*.¹⁵³ With their new single, the Sex Pistols affirmed their standing as punk's rightful rulers and Rotten as crown prince of the new wave. These two mantles would become onerous in the weeks that followed.

EMI had hoped to garner national publicity for the Pistols with the Anarchy Tour. But a notorious live interview with the group on the nationally syndicated *Today* television program two days before the tour's start on December 1 earned the band, and punk in general, more attention than any tour could have ever offered. As a result of a last-minute cancellation by the mainstream rock group Queen, the producers of *Today* invited the Sex Pistols to appear on their evening program hosted by Bill Grundy (1923-1993). Accompanied by members of the Bromley Contingent, the Pistols, already rather drunk, fielded the host's questions with their characteristic sarcasm and swearing, unaware that the program was live. Over the course of a less than two minute interview, Grundy, in Dave Laing's words, "managed to sketch in the popular stereotype of punk" as a culture of crude, outrageous miscreants with his line of questioning and his encouragement of the group's inappropriate behavior.¹⁵⁴ Public outrage at the Grundy interview was immediate, and the press quickly became captivated by punk. Steve Jones recognized the significance of the moment: "From that day on, it was different. Before then, it was just music: the next day, it was the media."¹⁵⁵ On December 2 the Sex Pistols appeared on the cover of every major English newspaper with headlines like "The Filth

¹⁵³ "Sex Pistols-Anarchy in the U.K. (EMI)," *Sniffin' Glue* 5 (Nov. 1976), 9.

¹⁵⁴ Bennett, 61; Laing 36. Savage, 256-260; *The Filth and the Fury*.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Savage, 260.

and the Fury!” and “The Foul Mouthed Yobs.”¹⁵⁶ Most of the dates of the Anarchy Tour were cancelled.

Media coverage of punk began in earnest after the Grundy show and continued into the next year to help make 1977 British punk’s pinnacle year. Punk had always carried with it the promise of a new, alternative lifestyle, but never before had it been able capture the attention of more than a few hundred maladjusted London and Manchester teens. The Grundy incident took the phenomenon to the national stage and inspired youth across Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Punk’s newcomers were not necessarily drawn to the movement for its economic and social principles nor were they as concerned with its musical ideology.¹⁵⁷ It was punk’s subversive, revolutionary aesthetic that enchanted them. “Kids want something that can change their whole way of life,” McLaren explained to the *Daily Mirror*, and punk provided that option.¹⁵⁸

Record executives could not ignore the growing enthusiasm for punk rock and began signing some of punk’s premier groups in 1977. The premise of contracting with major record labels provided some punks with a quandary. Large record companies had the marketing infrastructure in place to spread punk’s music and message further than any independent firm possibly could. But many punks shared Old Guard folkies’ apprehension about working with major labels, considering the practice decidedly inauthentic and akin to consorting with the enemy. Punk had initially defined itself in opposition to the products and practices of the mainstream music industry—slick production techniques, arena rock shows, and detached pop stars like those identified in

¹⁵⁶ See inset on Savage, 263.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen Colgrave and Chris Sullivan, *Punk: The Definitive Record of a Revolution* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001), 187.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Russell Miller, “Who Are These Punks?” *Daily Mirror*, Dec. 2, 1976, reprinted in Colgrave and Sullivan, 166.

the "Hates" column of Sex's 1974 t-shirt. Some branded as "sell outs" those punk bands who signed contracts with major labels. "Punk died the day the Clash signed with CBS," Mark P famously remarked. But Joe Strummer's response spoke to the dilemma: "Well, if we hadn't signed with CBS none of you lot would've heard of us."¹⁵⁹

Not all groups had misgivings about major labels, however. The Sex Pistols (McLaren, in particular) delighted in their relationships with big record companies. To their way of thinking, they were not colluding with the record companies but scamming them. In what was later labeled "The Great Rock N' Roll Swindle," McLaren combined his commercial and countercultural agendas by creating such excitement around the band that companies simply had to sign them, even if they found the group's sound and image repugnant.¹⁶⁰ Once signed, the group, which now included bassist Sid Vicious in place of Matlock, was too objectionable to promote and was released. In early 1977, the Pistols were dropped by two labels (EMI and A&M) in three months and compensated handsomely each time. After they signed with Virgin Records in May, the pandemonium continued.

Their new single "God Save the Queen" was released to coincide with Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee celebration. "God Save the Queen" was Lydon's attack on the hypocrisy of English society. The song was an anti-national anthem that condemned the monarchy as a "fascist regime" and claimed that there was "no future in England's dreaming." The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) immediately banned the broadcasting of the song for fear it offended "good taste or decency" and was "likely to

¹⁵⁹ Mark P quoted in Marcus Gray, *The Clash: Return of the Last Gang in Town* (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), 196; Strummer quoted in Street, 144.

¹⁶⁰ "The Great Rock N' Roll Swindle" is the title of the Sex Pistols film released in 1980.

encourage or incite crime, or lead to disorder.”¹⁶¹ The IBA’s ban, coupled with the media’s sensationalized coverage of the Pistols’ arrest during an anti-Jubilee Thames river cruise, only served to stoke youth fervor for the Pistols’ new single. The song sold over 300,000 copies by the conclusion of the Jubilee week, sending it to number one in the British pop charts.¹⁶²

Although punk gained new audiences and new bands thanks to all the attention generated by the Pistols, punk’s originators seldom received any more power to define the image of their subculture. Much to the chagrin of individuals like McLaren who simply wanted the press’ *attention*, the media became the primary *interpreters* and *articulators* of punk’s message and meaning.¹⁶³ “Don’t let the Sunday papers tell you how to behave or it’ll all be over by Christmas,” Mick Jones and a friend warned *Sniffin’ Glue* readers in July 1977. “Spray your own graffiti.”¹⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the efforts of Jones’ and others were well-intentioned but in vain.

Media attention stereotyped punk as a defined set of attitudes and ideologies so as to make the outrageous phenomenon comprehensible to the general public. In one instance of many, TV personalities on BBC’s *Young Nation* program explained to viewers at home that punk was “basic rock music—raw, outrageous, and crude.”¹⁶⁵ The commentators proceeded to pigeonhole the style into a precise list of elements with no suggestion of any opportunity for individual innovation. “Punks *have* multi-colored hair,” the hosts explains, “vampire makeup, ripped t-shirts held together with safety pins,

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Colgrave and Sullivan, 255.

¹⁶² Savage, 351-367.

¹⁶³ Savage, 278.

¹⁶⁴ Mick Jones and Robin Crocker, “A Communique from Clash City,” *Sniffin’ Glue* 11 (July 1977), 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Young Nation*. BBC. Nationwide, London. September 1976, available on Sex Pistols. *Wanted: The Goodman Tapes*. Skyclad, 1988. Columbia, 1998.

swastika armbands, pink plastic trousers, and tight leather jeans.”¹⁶⁶ Whereas dress had been an outlet for self-expression in the punk culture of 1976, media definition led to the emergence of a standardized punk uniform, available, in some cases, by mail order.¹⁶⁷ Much of the press’s idea of punk attire was derived from the style of punk’s most prominent figure, Johnny Rotten, whose firm belief in individualism and personal uniqueness could not have made a more unenthusiastic model.¹⁶⁸ Lydon would later explain his frustration: “The one thing that used to piss me most...was our audience all turning up in identically cloned punk outfits. That really defeated the point...it showed no sense of individuality or understanding of what we were doing. We weren’t about uniformity.”¹⁶⁹

By capturing the attention of the recording industry and the media, punk emerged from an underground subculture to become a mainstream phenomenon. Sociologist Dick Hebdige describes this surfacing process at length. According to Hebdige, the influence of “big fashion interests” and, I would add, the recording industry “made [the outrageous elements of the punk subculture] comprehensible” to the general public.¹⁷⁰ Through a process of popular interpretation and commodification of its style and music, punk lost its initial shock value and unfamiliarity to instead become “incorporated as a diverting spectacle within the dominant mythology”¹⁷¹ Punk was certainly not welcomed or embraced by British society, but it did gain social acceptance. And for a movement that

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁷ Hebdige, 96.

¹⁶⁸ Albiez, 102; “An absolute sense of individuality is my politics,” (Lydon, 309).

¹⁶⁹ Lydon, 3.

¹⁷⁰ Hebdige, 96.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 93-94.

had prided itself on its alternativeness and deviance, assimilation into mainstream culture was discomfoting.

Punk's appearance on the mainstream stage induced schisms within the movement that would eventually contribute to its collapse. Since its inception, British punk had been included both artistic and political elements. Those who expressed particular interest in one or the other components have been alternatively labeled the "arties" and the "social realists" (Jon Savage) or the "vanguard" and the "populists" (Simon Frith).¹⁷² Arties/vanguard refers to those like the Bromley Contingent who

participated in punk because of their interest in social experimentation, artistic expression, and introspection, whereas social realists/populists refers to groups who were most concerned with promoting youth empowerment and revolutionary political agendas. David Laing explains that the two camps were initially united because of a shared perspective: "The notion of avant-garde could coexist with that of realism because...both represented a rejection of the cultural status quo."¹⁷³ The two sides lived under one roof and even supported each other when "punk rock was still embattled," but once punk began to be assimilated into the mainstream music industry and mass culture, fissures began to appear.¹⁷⁴

By the fall of 1977, groups began to take sides over punk's meaning and direction. Populists saw punk's popularity as a chance to spread their radical (though typically vague) ideologies to youth across the country. To them, punk was at its most genuine when it involved street politics and gang-like organization. Thus, social realists like Sham 69 resorted to sloganeering and addressed their message directly to youth with

¹⁷² Frith, 162; Savage, 397.

¹⁷³ Laing, 104.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 109.

songs like "If The Kids Are United." Group names amongst the social realists become more postured (Criminal Class, Cockney Rejects, Exploited, Crass, Conflict, etc.), fashion became even more uniform (leather jackets, ripped jeans: a look borrowed from the Ramones), and sound was standardized (extremely basic song structures, often comparable to football cheers).¹⁷⁵

The vanguard segment abhorred such homogenization and shied away from any definition of punk that would inhibit rather than liberate. The arties embraced punk because its do-it-yourself attitude offered an outlet for artistic license with the only prerequisite being an opposition to mass culture. Over the course of 1977, as punk absorbed into the mainstream and developed a more rigid political and stylistic platform, the vanguard grew uneasy and eventually balked. Because of their dedication to individual freedom and their distrust of uniformity, their new venture, termed "post-punk," lacked any discernable agenda or cohesiveness. Groups like Siouxsie and the Banshees, Alternative TV, the Cure, Wire, the Smiths, Magazine, Joy Division, and Public Image Ltd. each assumed their own distinctive look, adopted a self-conscious, generally apolitical lyrical style, and drew liberally from a plethora of other musical influences like reggae, German electronic, free jazz, and even folk.¹⁷⁶

The Sex Pistols were initially on the sidelines as punk's inner turmoil unfolded. With most their gigs in England banned by apprehensive town councils, the group began to lose momentum. Lydon began chafing under his manager's direction of the group. McLaren demanded control over the "Johnny Rotten" character that the manager

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 108-113.

¹⁷⁶ Alternative TV was fronted by Mark P, who left *Sniffin' Glue* in September 1977 out of frustration with punk's institutionalization. See Mark Perry, "A Bit on Chiswick," *Sniffin' Glue* 12 (Aug./Sept. 1977), 9; Laing, 115; Savage, 422-424.

considered his own creation.¹⁷⁷ Incessant press attention compelled McLaren to keep a tighter leash on Lydon so as to preserve the desired public image he had for his frontman. Lydon, however, was intent on drawing a distinction between himself and his stage persona. "You don't create me. I am me. There's a difference," he would later explain.¹⁷⁸ In an appearance on Capitol Radio's Tommy Vance show on July 16, 1977, Lydon angered McLaren by telling the host he (John Lydon) liked "all sorts of music" (including sixties holdovers like Neil Young and Captain Beefheart) rather than conveying McLaren's preferred "Year Zero" mentality for Johnny Rotten.¹⁷⁹ Lydon, in Savage's words, "had had enough of being dehumanized" and lost patience with the role he was being forced to play.¹⁸⁰ The public's expectations and McLaren's prescriptions began to dictate his behavior, and Lydon became concerned for his autonomy as an artist.

The Sex Pistols were restless by the end of 1977. They finally released an album, *Nevermind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*, in November but were only able to perform sporadically in England and Holland to promote the record. An American tour was scheduled for early January 1978 in the hope of introducing the group to the U.S. market. The Pistols' notoriety preceded them, however. Delayed by visa troubles, the group missed all of the shows originally scheduled for cities in the northern United States. The tour was reduced to seven cities, predominately across the American South, beginning in Atlanta and culminating in San Francisco.¹⁸¹ Crowds at these shows were aware of the Sex Pistols' reputation for violence and often hostile.¹⁸² By the time the

¹⁷⁷ Savage, 381.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in *The Filth and The Fury*.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Savage, 381.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 381.

¹⁸¹ Savage, 430.

¹⁸² Lydon, 243-244.

band arrived in San Francisco, the atmosphere within the group was tense. Lydon was furious at McLaren for the slapdash tour arrangements and equally frustrated with his band mates for “[wanting] to go back to that quirky little Who ditty” rather than attempt more bold, innovative songs like Lydon’s recently composed “Religion.”¹⁸³ For Lydon, the band’s negative attitude towards his new material along with Sid Vicious’ rekindled heroin habit were, signs that the group was transfixed by popular success and descending into the kind of rock n’ roll cliché’s that the Loves/Hates t-shirt had condemned.¹⁸⁴

Lydon channeled his growing aggravation into his performance at Winterland.

The Winterland Ballroom was nothing like the small clubs in which the Pistols were accustomed to playing. The venue, a former ice skating rink, held five-thousand people.¹⁸⁵ Just a year earlier it had hosted the Band’s last concert that featured a parade of some of punk’s greatest enemies like Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and Ringo Starr. The irony of playing a venue normally home to aging rock star elites was probably lost on the Pistols; Lydon was troubled by something more obvious. When he looked out at the audience and around at his group, it was as though he encountered the embodiment of everything wrong with punk and the Sex Pistols. Popular expectations of punk rather than individual choices seemed to govern behavior. Applying those aspects of British punk that they had learned from the press, the crowd spit on the group as soon as they took the stage and engaged in acts of meaningless violence amongst themselves.¹⁸⁶ According to Marcus, Sid Vicious bought into the crowd’s expectations,

¹⁸³ Ibid, 3, 261; Savage, 451.

¹⁸⁴ Lydon, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Savage, 456.

¹⁸⁶ Marcus, 1989, 83-84.

baiting the audiences with his postured aggressiveness and “begging for...the absolute confirmation he was a star.”¹⁸⁷

Lydon, however, was unwilling to put his stage personality above himself and compromise his integrity, particularly not if it meant assuming the pretensions of a rock establishment he had sworn to oppose. He decided he could no longer play that role and that punk had lost its promise. He translated his discontent into his performance, at various times writhing in pain, screaming nonsensically, crossing his arms in disgust, and crouching pathetically at the stage’s edge as though to act out punk’s decline.¹⁸⁸ “The

show had gone far enough,” Marcus explains. “All one saw was a failure; all one saw was a medium.”¹⁸⁹ With that famous phrase “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?,” he buried the Johnny Rotten character and terminated his relationship with the Sex Pistols and punk as he left the stage that night.

By May Lydon had formed a new group with one-time Clash guitarist Keith Levene and one of the Johns nicknamed “Wobble.” Together with drummer Jim Walker, they were Public Image Ltd. Their sound was intentionally unlike the Sex Pistols. Heavy, reggae-inspired bass lines and shiny, choral lead guitar replaced Steve Jones’ slashing riffs. Lydon retained the same vitriolic delivery, however, particularly for the group’s first single, aptly named “Public Image.”¹⁹⁰ Released in October 1978 after some delay, the song is a denunciation, firstly of McLaren for taking credit for the success of the Pistols and attempting to manipulate Lydon while he was a member of the group. “I will not be treated as property!” Lydon cries. But beyond simply a

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 84.

¹⁸⁸ Savage, 457-460.

¹⁸⁹ Marcus, 1989, 123.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 495.

condemnation of a former manager, "Public Image" offers something greater. It is, in effect, Lydon's obituary for the punk community. Superficiality and unrealized potential caused its death, in Lydon's eyes. "You never listened to a word that I said," he rages at the song's opening. "You only see me/For the clothes that I wear/Or did the interest go so much deeper?/It must have been/The colour of my hair."

Other groups had offered similarly scathing censures of the punk over the course of the year. Twelve months prior, the Adverts released "Safety in Numbers," a broadside against punk's newcomers for running after the "latest craze" rather than "looking for [their] own answers." In June 1978 the Clash put out "(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais," Joe Strummer's rant on British society which included pointed criticism at "punk rockers in the UK" for being "too busy fighting for a good place under the lighting" and too preoccupied with "turning rebellion into money." But while the Adverts and the Clash offered potent deprecations, Lydon's statement carried special weight. Here was the former Johnny Rotten--punk's standard bearer, the man once labeled by *Sniffin' Glue* as "the scene's face"--declaring that the punk community, his community had failed him and itself.¹⁹¹ The promise of punk as a subculture based in creativity and faithfully opposed to the vestiges of mainstream rock n' roll had evaporated. Punk had lost the "imagination" heralded on the Loves/Hates t-shirt; all it could offer now was feuding factions and fashion clichés. Lydon wanted no part in it. "Goodbye!" he echoes across the final seconds of "Public Image."

In the span of less than four years, British punk evolved from an underground lifestyle for alienated urban youth to a mainstream fashion and, ultimately, to a cliché.

¹⁹¹ Mark Perry, "London's Burning With Groups," *Sniffin' Glue* 6 (Dec. 1976), 2.

Along the way, punk's originators struggled to maintain control over punk's definition as they wrestled with the forces of the recording industry and the media. Popularization coupled with reactionary attempts at preserving punk authenticity often exacerbated internal tensions between the movement's artistic and social realist factions. Rivalries between these two segments and the subculture's mainstreamization ultimately led to punk's downfall.

Chapter Three: Authenticity, Art, and Politics

In the introduction I cited Stuart Hall's definition of "subculture." Hall describes subcultures as being "focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts...which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture."¹⁹² As we have seen, the activities and features of the American folk revival and the British punk movement correspond neatly with Hall's prerequisites. In each case, a small cadre of disillusioned urban radicals was drawn together by its members' disenchantment with life and music in the cultural mainstream. Together they developed an unconventional set of paradigms regarding music, politics, and performance.

In the folk revival, these standards originated in the tenets of folk consciousness cultivated by the Old Left during their political and musical struggles of the previous decades. Folk adherents valued music that was played on acoustic instruments for the sake of intimacy and historical accuracy. They largely promoted liberal and unabashed political sentiments. And folk performances had to accurately reflect or mimic the aesthetic of traditional folk music. In British punk, the principles were rooted in both the ideals of the American punk scene and in the originators' experience of English popular culture and urban life. Punk's music was to be basic, loud, and haphazard, its politics non-conformist and individualistic, its attitude impolite and unapologetic, and its performances unpretentious, passionate and magnetic.

Initially, the platforms of folk and punk were celebrated by their constituents as viable alternatives to the confines and routine of mass culture. Folkies and punks were confident in their ideologies precisely because their values did not conform to popular conventions. To these subcultures, the offerings of the political and musical mainstream

¹⁹² Hall, 13-14.

were disingenuous and dishonest; they did not reflect the social experiences of those on the cultural margin. In place of the establishment's flawed political programs and dubious commodities, the subcultures revered their own artistic and political values as authentic. Their pursuit of authenticity assumed an almost religious quality. The allure of an unorthodox lifestyle based in refreshingly honest values and unique products inspired people like Pete Seeger to renounce his bourgeois roots and take to the road and compelled groups like the Sex Pistols to get on stage and perform for less than appreciative audiences.

Authenticity for these subcultures necessarily arose from their status as social outsiders. Folkies and punks gained moral authority by refusing to participate in dishonest mass culture. Adherents reprimanded their members for colluding with the mainstream—Radosh's condemnation of pop-folk groups and Mark P's reproach of the Jam, for instance. Here folk and punk's authenticators enforced a distance between culture and *subculture* by discouraging elements of the former in the latter. Yet this moral distance dissolved once folk and punk gained the attention each sought.

Although self-assured in their authenticity, folkies and punks still wanted to be noticed and heard. Folkies longed for popular reception of their music, and evangelism of folk-conscious values was at the core of the folk Left's mission from the time of the Almanacs' into the 1960s. Punks flaunted their outlandish forms of dress and crude behaviors in an effort to gain attention and elicit the disgust of the respectable British citizenry. When folkies and punks first began promulgating their movements' musical and political values, they had no intention of compromising their subcultural principles. On the contrary, they sought to express their positions to the public. However, this

process of articulation on any kind of grand scale inevitably required cooperation with the marketplace, specifically record companies and the media which together controlled access to the general listening public. As a result of engagements with these market forces, authorities within the movements lost control over the definition of their subcultures.

As their subculture's entered the public sphere, folk and punk authorities perceived a loss of subcultural integrity. Young people with no firsthand experience of prewar picket lines or tenement housing in urban London absorbed only those tenets of folk and punk that they heard over the radio and read about in magazines. Some of these newcomers like John Cohen's city folksingers or punk groups like the Adverts were sincere in their desire to develop an appreciation for folk and punk even if their goals differed from their predecessors'. Countless others were participating for stylistic rather than moral reasons. Former Elvis fans became Baez converts, hippies cropped their hair to become punks, and the stalwarts of folk and punk cringed.

The rising popularity of their subcultures presented the principal players of folk and punk with a quandary. How could movements which defined themselves by their exclusivity survive mass popularity and still remain loyal to those original principles that made them "authentic"? And, more immediately, what was "authentic" about those original ideals? Two primary schools of thought predominate with regard to this second question. Punk historian Dave Laing has identified these factions in punk as *substance* and *spirit*.¹⁹³ Given the similarity I have established between the trends of the two movements, I think it reasonable to apply these designations to folk as well.

¹⁹³ Laing, 108.

Reactionaries and preservationists were those who might be designated as belonging to the substance crowd. To them, authenticity was a historically bound concept; their perspective on genuineness was almost exclusively retrospective. What the substance segment deemed most authentic were characteristics of folk and punk present at their inceptions, measurable phenomena such as song structure and instrumentation, political sentiment, community orientation, and modes of dress. Since folk and punk had coalesced around these behaviors originally, returning to these roots seemed valid and appropriate. Figures like Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, and Irwin Silber fit this mold in folk. In punk it was predominately the second generation, social realist groups like Crass and Sham 69.

The substance faction's brand of cautious conservatism successfully encouraged the perpetuation of the earliest ways of the folk and punk communities. However, substance-based notions of authenticity also tended to be prescriptive rather than permissive. Preservation of the external vestiges of their subcultures meant that substance folkies and punks criticized and policed expressions of individual creativity that did not directly correspond with the subculture's musical and political stances. Silber's "Open Letter" of November 1964 or the Pistols' unwillingness to accept Lydon's "Religion" bear witness to that reluctance. Conservatism was an effective mechanism for guaranteeing the perpetuation of the earliest ways of the folk and punk communities. Yet this hesitancy toward innovation contradicted a key feature of the original subcultures.

A great contributor to folk and punk's early vibrancy was that last item on the Loves/Hates t-shirt: imagination. Young people flocked to folk and punk early on because the two offered an outlet for their creative energy and an escape from the cultural

homogenization of the mainstream. Earl Robinson's classic score for "Ballad for Americans," for instance, arose from the creative atmosphere fostered in the early years of the folk community, just as the realist, street-level character of British punk inspired creative outpourings from early groups like the Clash in the summer of 1976. By discouraging this spirit of creative audacity, substance folkies and punks were, in effect, pigeonholing their subcultures just as readily as they were safeguarding them.

Inevitably this enforced standardization led to revolt among the adherents to the second of Laing's categories, *spirit*. Bob Dylan and John Lydon are the two of the most conspicuous adherents to this school. They joined folk and punk out of an attraction to each movements' romantic allure. Dylan saw folk as a means of escaping his bourgeois roots and reinventing himself in an Americana milieu, while Lydon considered punk an affirmation of his antisocial personality and his belief in fierce individualism. But regardless of each man's specific interest, it is clear that both were strongly attracted to the intangible, creative possibilities inherent in the spirit of their subcultures. Folk and punk gave them and many others an opportunity to sidestep department store fashions and Musak and to explore a more personal, relevant forms of artistic expression, ones that allowed them to assume new monikers and pursue alternative ideas.

Given Dylan and Lydon's spirit-oriented motivations for joining their subcultures, one can understand why folk and punk's favorite sons would eventually repudiate their associations with their increasingly substance-oriented movements. Throughout a majority of each man's tenure, he accommodated his subculture's external standards in his performances, speech, and appearance. But Dylan's obedience to folk and Lydon's to punk were not blind. As Dylan's remarks at the Tom Paine Award dinner and Lydon's

comments on the Capitol Radio show illustrated, their deference had its limits. Dylan and Lydon were, above all, individualists, and the prospect of belonging to movements that increasingly forced community and imposed requirements was greatly unappealing to them. Whereas folk and punk had originally acted as vehicles for their individual creative expressions, in time it became apparent that continued participation in either subculture would mean forswearing personal interests in favor of communal prescriptions and popular expectations.

By mid-1965 and early 1978, Dylan and Lydon could no longer bear the pressures being imposed on them. Dylan, who had already foresworn folk's political ideologies in 1964, was compelled to publicly break with folk's musical conventions at Newport. Lydon's disgust over punk's mainstreamization and conventionality forced him to make a similar break at Winterland. The pursuit of authenticity which had brought these two seminal figures to their subcultures just as readily compelled them to leave. Dylan and Lydon could not participate in movements that, to them, had lost their honesty and relevance for the sake of preserving their appearances.

These two artists (particularly Dylan) were prophetic in condemning their movements. The spirit segment of folk and punk went off to jumpstart new genres (folk-rock and post-punk, respectively) which thrived while their forebears withered. Without the creative contributions of the spirit faction, the residual, substance-oriented folk and punk communities lost their momentum and became clichéd. Amid the turbulent political climate and dynamic music scene of the late 1960s, folk appeared anachronistic and obsolete. Old Left politics and acoustic instrumentation were upstaged by the amplified abandon of folk-rock and psychedelia. The story was much the same in punk.

Hard-core reactionaries painted themselves into a corner, and by the early 1980s, their gang politics and predictable image lost its appeal. Meanwhile, post-punk groups flourished as did the so-called "new-wave" acts like Elvis Costello, Adam Ant, and Devo, who borrowed punk's stripped down approach and edgy attitude, added synthesizers, and conquered the pop charts.

Folk and punk were undone by their own quests for authenticity. While the two movements varied greatly in political program, musical and performative style, and historical setting, they had very similar trajectories and faced comparable dilemmas because of their rabid insistence on authentic standards for participation and performance. I have explained how authenticity operated in these subcultures, but there is a greater issue underlying this discussion that also warrants attention: the rivalry between art and politics. Folk and punk engaged these two volatile elements as a basis for their own authenticity as subcultures, and in so doing, they unwittingly set themselves up for trouble.

How are the terms art and politics to be understood here in reference to folk and punk? By "art," I refer to the aesthetic orientation of each movement, its representational concerns and the media through which those values were expressed. The art in folk was originally centered on an appeal to traditional, acoustic instrumentation and performance as a means of connecting aurally and emotionally with the romanticized historical past. Punk's art consisted of borrowing disparate elements of popular fashion and the most basic pieces of rock n' roll to create an unconventional form of personal expression that conveyed the experiences of disaffected individuals..

By "politics," I mean the socially motivated agenda of each subculture, its criticisms of contemporary society and its strategies for remedying social issues. Folk politics was based predominately in the labor, civil rights, and anti-nuclear movements and strongly influenced by the philosophies and approach of the Old Left. Punk lacked folk's concrete political framework, but its members were united in their opposition to authority and bureaucracy and their approval of a decentralized political structure.

Considered in abstraction, the artistic and political programs do not appear to be mutually exclusive, and indeed, in the initial stages of each subculture they were not. If anything, the two elements complemented each other early on. Folk was able to package its Leftist political program and its belief in traditional instrumentation and performance neatly together under the umbrella of folk consciousness in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Traditional rural melodies and song structures were justified in political terms; these musical forms were easier for union members to learn and had a more unadulterated origin in working class culture than did the bourgeois offerings of Tin Pan Alley. And since the Popular Front, Almanac-era folk community was most immediately occupied in politics, political themes were a natural choice for folk songwriters, and the association of the music and the message was seldom questioned.

Similarly with punk, politics was an expected component of the aesthetic because of the contemporary experience of punks themselves. Living in the squats and on the dole, working class and middle class punks were some of the most direct victims of the collapse of the British economy in the mid 1970s. Economic and social marginalization was their reality and therefore made a natural choice for lyrical material. Furthermore, punk's artistic side stressed an overturning of popular practices. Exposing the grim

underbelly of the British social structure in an era when conventional authorities (both political and musical) turned a blind eye to the plight of urban youth was decidedly unorthodox and, therein, appropriate. In short, the political and the artistic components of folk and punk informed and galvanized one another as they came together to form the authenticating cores of the two movements.

There came a point in folk and punk, however, when these two sets of values could no longer coexist, when, in Paul Nelson's words, "the audience had to choose."¹⁹⁴ Folkies and punks could no longer agree on situating authenticity completely within both realms, and allegiance to one made commitment to the other difficult. What had transpired to effect this change? As has been said, folk and punk's growth through contact with the media and the recording industry caused authenticators to lose control over the definition of their subcultures. But in addition to lessening the influence of the authorities in each subculture, participation in the market also created a fissure between artistic and political elements.

Market forces separated folk and punk from their original contexts. Folk and punk culture became not only accessible but adaptive to individuals belonging to a broad range of social backgrounds. Ordinary people embraced the movements' aesthetics but were disconnected from the politics and the political community because of their distance from the originating environments. In folk, this distance was both geographical and temporal. People like Dave Guard listening to Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger in California in the late 1950s were hundreds of miles from New York and a generation removed from folk's political and cultural roots. Young folk fans grew up unaware, unconcerned, or uncommitted to Old Left history. Certainly some like Guy Carawan,

¹⁹⁴ Nelson, 8.

Joan Baez, Dylan (early on), or the audience of Newport 1963 took up the political struggles of the Old Guard as a result of in-person exposure and direct communication. But as John Cohen's article suggests, many simply grew attached to the folk aesthetic and used the medium to pursue their own questions rather than their elders' politics. Sound was what had attracted them to folk, and many were introduced to the genre by groups like the Kingston Trio, for whom politics was at best peripheral. Having never experienced folk's political heyday in the forties or its trials in the early fifties, younger participants, both on stage and in the audience, could more easily make the distinction between politics and art in folk music.

The situation was much the same in punk. Though age disparity was generally not a concern amongst punk's newcomers, background was an issue. A majority of those who staffed the punk revolution of 1977 had neither had the working class upbringing nor the squatting experience of British punk's initiators. Many were suburban kids simply eager to "change their whole way of life," in McLaren's words.¹⁹⁵ Media attention and radio airplay presented punk as a means to do so. The defiant attitude of punk was irresistible to thousands of youth chafing under societal prescriptions and eager to resist their parents in much the same way the hippies had a generation before. To many of these new participants, the desire for creative license was minimal. The anti-authority nature of punk politics was what appealed. Leather jackets and three-chord songs came along with, in Marcus' words, "the medium," and many seized on these externalities to create a gang culture not unlike the Teds or Mods of the past.¹⁹⁶ To be sure, the chance for individual, creative expression was attractive for some. The more imaginative, avant-

¹⁹⁵ Miller, "Who Are These Punks?"

¹⁹⁶ Marcus, 1989, 123.

garde (and generally middle class) listeners co-opted the artistic tenets of punk, recontextualized these aspects to suit their own experiences, and created post-punk. Either way, punk's artistic and political synthesis of the previous few years was permanently unsettled.

In the histories of both folk and punk, the market removed the subculture from its original artistic-political environment and made it accessible and malleable to an inexperienced mass audience. By allowing consumers to make aesthetic connections rather than social ones, the commodity form facilitated the separation of artistic and political values. The unraveling of the artistic and political strands from the subcultural fabric was in some ways inevitable. Idealistic movements engaged in the worldliness of the market are destined for disappointment. Amid the gales of mass culture, authenticity lost its grip over the subcultures' tillers, and soon the movements found themselves adrift.

Conclusion

The image of a young Bob Dylan with his corduroy hat and khaki work-shirt alongside a young Johnny Rotten with his leather pants and safety-pinned coat is bizarre. The two make an unusual pairing. They came from disparate classes, eras, and nations, participated in aesthetically dissimilar movements, and assumed very different positions in the rock pantheon.

The goal of this project has been to reconsider this initial impression and elicit the valuable comparisons that can be drawn between the artists and their subcultures. Folk and punk were indeed far apart stylistically, musically, and politically, but on the stages of Newport and Winterland that distance faded. As those concerts demonstrate and as this discussion has expounded, folk and punk artists and adherents faced many of the same issues regarding authenticity, art, and politics and, as a result, found themselves in similar predicaments.

The tumultuous histories of these movements and the equally turbulent careers of Dylan and Lydon illustrate the myriad of complications surrounding commodity-based movements. The folk and punk subcultures created commodities with the futile hope that their products would escape the distorting powers of the market, remain authentic to their professed values, and engage the unlettered public. But the nature of commerce is the transaction of goods, and alteration frequently accompanies that transaction. In the music industry, production requirements, mass marketing techniques, and media dissection invariably weaken the influence an artist has over the interpretation of his or her art. For communities obsessed with maintaining authentic aesthetic and political standards, participation in these commercial processes invariably created conflict. Authenticity

could not be successfully dictated or enforced in market economies where commodities were consumed on the consumer's terms, not the creator's. Thus despite the most heartfelt wishes of folk and punk stalwarts to impart their cherished ideals to a larger audience, participation in mass culture led almost immediately to a jeopardizing of authenticity.

Folkies and punks initially either ignored this reality or were oblivious to it. Authenticity was, after all, their prized creation—the moral compass they had fashioned to lead them away from stark social realities and toward their political goals, the analytical tool they had created to assist them in aesthetic discernment. The faithful of the subcultures never doubted the accuracy of their esteemed ideals and paradigms. On the contrary, members of these movements, particularly those in the substance strain, often misplaced authenticity for absolute truth, forgetting that labels of “authentic” were in fact synthetic judgments. To its devotees, authenticity was no longer a product of the original community's creation contoured to suit their relatively homogenous life experiences and worldviews, it was dogma. Thus when those within the subcultures reminded their communities of authenticity's ersatz nature and boldly asserted their own self-determinations as equally valid, there was uproar. Folk and punk were too stubborn structurally, or perhaps too oblivious mentally, to cope with challenges to their own authenticities, either from their members or from the market.

It is easy to look back and be disappointed by the seemingly inevitable breakdowns that occurred as a result of folk and punk's dogged pursuit authenticity. But ultimately, celebrating the achievements and legacy of these groups seems far more productive than bemoaning their lost potential. Folk and punk were truly extraordinary

movements whose influences on subsequent generations of artists and musicians cannot be overstated. Their sounds, attitudes, and approaches set lofty precedents for the scores of artists and groups that followed in their wakes.

Perhaps the greatest contribution that each made was its commitment to honesty. Admittedly, universal agreement among each subculture as to what constituted honest artistic and musical performance (an artifice in itself) was infrequent, particularly as the movements began to grow. Nevertheless, a sense of integrity undergirded the histories of folk and punk. At every important juncture in their timelines, conscientious effort was made by participants to evaluate the truthfulness of their movement. Whether the evaluations of these authenticators were constructive or simply cantankerous is a matter of perspective, but there is no questioning their sincerity. Earnest folkies and punks approached their music with conviction, as though it was not simply a hobby but an emotional and moral investment, a matter of conscience. The solemnity with which they pursued music and artistic expression is to be commended. Though obstinate and at times naïve, folk and punk always tried to be honest, and no one can fault them for that.

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